

Tagalog-English Code Switching as a Mode of Discourse

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The alternation of Tagalog and English in informal discourse is a feature of the linguistic repertoire of educated, middle- and upper-class Filipinos. This paper describes the linguistic structure and sociolinguistic functions of Tagalog-English code switching (Taglish) as provided by various researchers through the years. It shows that the analysis of Taglish began with a linguistic focus, segmenting individual utterances into sentences and studying the switch points within the sentence. Other studies were more sociolinguistic in nature and investigated the functions of code switching. Recently, Taglish has been viewed as a mode of discourse and a linguistic resource in the bilingual's repertoire. New theoreticians working within a Critical Discourse Analysis framework are seeing Taglish as a reaction to the hegemonizing tendencies of Philippine society and modern life.

Key Words: code switching, code mixing, discourse analysis, Tagalog, English in the Philippines

Foreigners who visit Manila or other urban areas in the Philippines for the first time are struck by the phenomenon of hearing snatches of conversation that they can understand because part of the conversation is recognizably in English, but at the same time feel completely lost when listening to the other parts of the conversation. The experience is repeated when they open an English newspaper and see an advertisement in English but with a long stretch of Tagalog thrown in, or a news item with English and Tagalog quotations from government officials, or a feature interview with both the interviewer and the interviewee switching between English and Tagalog. When they turn on the TV set, they hear interviews, panel discussions, and sportscasts in the same code switching variety. If they drop in on a classroom or a church, it is possible that they will hear a lecture or a homily delivered in the same way.

This is Taglish, or Tagalog-English code switching or Tagalog-English mix-mix, the alternation of Tagalog and

English in the same discourse or conversation (Gumperz, 1982); it is the use of Tagalog words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in English discourse, or vice-versa. The term is also occasionally used generically for the switching that takes place between a Philippine language (not necessarily Tagalog) and English.

Taglish is not the Japanese *gairaigo* "foreign loan words", which is a case of borrowing English words and adapting them to Japanese morphophonemic structure, e.g. *sararii man* "salary man" for office worker, *hai tek* for "high tech", *infure* for "inflation", *gooruden wiiku* "golden week" for the week with many holidays, April 29 through May 5). Taglish goes beyond the borrowing of words or ready-made phrases; it involves switching between languages. It is not Singlish or Colloquial Singapore English, which is the basilectal form of Standard Singapore English. Unlike Singlish, which uses English structure heavily modified by substrate influences from Hokkien or Malay, Taglish is standard English placed side by side with standard Tagalog. It is more like the Spanish-English code switching found in Puerto Rican or Mexican neighborhoods in the United States. Taglish is the language of informality among middle-class, college-educated, urbanized Filipinos. It was initially looked down upon and viewed as a corruption of Tagalog or English, but it is now a lingua franca in Philippine cities.

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The purpose of this paper is to describe how Taglish is being used and how, as a subject of linguistic inquiry, it has been studied and analyzed over the years. The description seems to have begun with tentative efforts to segment code-switched utterances into words, phrases, and clauses to identify the switch points between Tagalog and English; it has progressed to the stage where Taglish is appreciated as a mode of discourse that might even serve as a form of linguistic resistance.

It should be noted that from the very beginning, observers of the local scene were aware that there were two kinds of Taglish. The two types can be contrasted through examples. One kind is the case of a five-year old boy trying to answer his mother's question in English: "Francis, why don't you play the piano for your godmother?" And the boy's answer: "Mommy, I don't want. It's so *hirap eh*. [Because it's so difficult.]" (Note that in the examples, Tagalog elements will be italicized followed by their glosses in square brackets. In many cases, the glosses are not literal, but a free translation that tries to capture the essence of the original.)

The other variety is seen in an interview of Jessica Soho (JS), a multi-awarded television journalist, by Ricky Lo (RL) as follows ("Conversations with", 2001, p. 38):

RL: Has anybody ever tried to, you know, bribe you into silence?

JS: Bribery is such a ticklish subject. *Pag nagsalita ka* [when you talk about it], they'd say "*Ay naku* [Oh gosh], she's trying to be holier than thou." But the network is very strict about it.

RL: What about partiality, you know...?

JS: *Sa GMA 'yung objectivity has become part na of the culture* [At GMA, objectivity has already become part of the culture]. I can tell you with a straight face *na wala kaming age-agenda* [that we have nothing like an agenda] – you know, make this person look good and that person look bad. It's really plain and simple journalism. *Kung mayroon kang binira, kunin mo 'yung kabilang side* [If you attack somebody, then get the other side] so that both sides are fairly presented. It has become like second nature to our organization and you can see it in our coverage, like the EDSA II and the EDSA III. People were telling us, "*Okay ang coverage n'yo kasi fair kayo* [Your coverage is okay because you're fair]". I'm not saying that we are the pioneer in objectivity; it's just that *ang reputation ng Siete (GMA) ay doon lang talaga siya sa gitna, walang pinapanigan* [it's just that the reputation of Seven (GMA) is to really stay in the middle, without siding with anybody].

Here, then, are contrasting types of code switching. Bautista (1999), labeled the first type of code switching as deficiency-driven code switching, that is, the person is not fully competent in the use of one language and therefore has to go back to the other language. In the second type of code switching, labeled proficiency-driven code switching, the person is competent in the two languages and can easily switch from one to the other, for maximum efficiency or effect.

Analysis of Code-Switching Structures

As far as can be determined, the first study of code switching was done in 1967, in a thesis by Azores, who tried to count the number of English and Tagalog elements in a corpus from *The Sun*, a biweekly newspaper that has the distinction of being the first periodical to record Tagalog-English code switching in print. Several theses and dissertations in linguistics followed (Bautista, 1980 [1974], summarized in 1975; Marfil & Pasigna, 1970; Palines, 1981; Pimentel, 1972; Sadicon, 1978; Sobolewski, 1980, summarized in 1982; see Bautista (1989) for details of these and other early code switching studies). In the main, these studies were attempts to describe the linguistic structure of code switching found in corpora from print and broadcast media. Some of the data contained mostly borrowings of English words into utterances in the Philippine language, with few instances of code switching, and thus yielded few insights into the nature of code switching. Other data were richer, for instance, Bautista's dissertation (1980 [1974]) used interviews from radio broadcasts and thus she was able to describe switches at the word, phrase, clause, and sentence level. The study found that whenever there was a point in the utterance where the structures of the two languages converged, it was possible to code-switch. Thus, the similarity between the Tagalog *ng*-genitive phrase and the English prepositional phrase, between the Tagalog *sa*-oblique phrase and the English prepositional phrase, between Tagalog and English prepositional phrases made it easy to code-switch. The study claimed that the sentential unit (= lower S or an S in the right-hand side of a rewriting rule) underlay the code switch to participial, infinitive, relative phrases, and noun, relative, adverbial, main, independent clauses in Tagalog and English. It further stated that to make some sense of the apparently random mixture of the two languages, it was necessary to identify a base language from which the switch was made. The base language, whether Tagalog or English, could be

determined by looking at Tagalog vs. English word order and major vs. minor constituents.

Several years later, parts of the analysis tentatively offered in that dissertation were given concrete labels by Myers-Scotton (1998) and Poplack and Sankoff (1988). Thus, Poplack and Sankoff labeled the switching where the structures of the two languages showed convergence as “switching at equivalence points” or “smooth switching”. An example from the Soho interview is the following: *Pag nagsalita ka* [when you talk about it], they’d say “*Ay naku* [Oh gosh], she’s trying to be holier than thou.” – where the switch is from a Tagalog adverbial clause to an English main clause + English noun clause with an inserted Tagalog interjection. Another example is: I can tell you with a straight face *na wala kaming age-agenda* [that we have nothing like an agenda] – where the switch is from an English main clause to a Tagalog noun clause, with *agenda* as a borrowing (what Poplack and Sankoff labeled as the mechanism of “nonce borrowing”). One more example of switching at equivalence points is: *Kung mayroon kang binira, kunin mo ’yung kabilang* side [If you attack somebody, get the other side] so that both sides are fairly presented” – where the switch is from a Tagalog adverbial clause + Tagalog main clause (containing the English nonce borrowing *side*) to an English adverbial clause.

Another mechanism described by Poplack and Sankoff is “constituent insertion”, the insertion of a grammatical constituent in one language at an appropriate point, for that type of constituent, in a sentence of the other language (p. 1176). This is seen in the insertion of the interjection *Ay naku* in the noun clause “*Ay naku* [Oh gosh], she’s trying to be holier than thou.” Constituent insertion is also in evidence in the sentence: *Sa GMA ’yung* objectivity has become part *na* of the culture [At GMA, such objectivity has already become part of the culture] – where the Tagalog preposition *sa* “in”, the determiner *’yung* “that”, and the adverbial enclitic *na* “already” are all Tagalog constituents inserted into the English sentence.

Myers-Scotton (1998) has proposed the Matrix Language Frame Model, where the Matrix Language sets the grammatical frame for the constituents to be mixed. The grammatical frame is defined as morpheme order and system morphemes, i.e. inflections, most function words (p. 220). What Bautista’s dissertation had called “base language”, it seems, is Myers-Scotton’s Matrix Language. That study had also advanced the idea that word order and major vs. minor constituents determined the base language; however, it seems now that Myers-Scotton’s use of system morphemes is a more

valid criterion than Bautista’s major vs. minor constituents.

Another model for Taglish has been suggested by Lorente (2000), who found Sebba’s congruence approach to bilingualism (1998) able to account for linguistic structures in her Taglish e-mail data. According to Sebba (p. 8), congruence is

... not just a function of the syntax of the languages involved. The locus of congruence is the mind of the speaker, but community norms determine, by and large, the behavior of individual speakers. Bilinguals “create” congruent categories by finding common ground between the languages concerned (as cited by Lorente, p. 26).

Sebba identified four possibilities with regard to switching between categories within the congruence approach: harmonization, neutralization, compromise, and blocking; Lorente applied these alternatives to her data and explained the reasons for the use or non-use of each alternative.

Analysis of Code-Switching Functions

In a sense, the Philippine studies reviewed above described *how* Filipinos code-switched within a sentence and between sentences. The unit of analysis was the sentence. However, after those studies on the linguistics of code switching, another question was left begging for an answer: Why do we code-switch? Why do we switch in this utterance and not in the other? What is it in the situation, or the topic, or the interlocutors that prompted a code-switch? In other words, what was the sociolinguistics of code switching?

Goulet (1971) initially used the notion of interference as the framework of her monograph, but in the final major chapter she gave up on that notion and stated: “Among educated Tagalogs, mixing is considered the normal acceptable conversational style of speaking and writing. The bilingual uses borrowings generously, shifts from one language to another easily and does not resist the adoption of loans” (p. 83). She enumerated reasons, with examples, for code switching: for precision, for transition, for comic effect, for atmosphere, for bridging or creating social distance, for snob appeal, and for secrecy.

A study of short stories in the Tagalog magazine *Liwayway* [“Dawn”] by Pan (1975) indicated that peers employed code switching at random especially during friendly discussions of informal topics, and code switching was employed primarily for the following reasons: for ease in

understanding, for brevity, for lack of indigenous terms, for precision, for emphasis and clarity. Analyzing Ilocano-English code switching in magazines, pamphlets, and radio programs, Raquel (1979) showed that English borrowings were due to certain variables such as the educational background of the interlocutors, the interlocutors' awareness of each other's level of understanding, the purposes of the speakers/writers, the topics of verbal interaction (e.g. English for science and technology; Ilocano for personal and social affairs), the translatability of English terms to Ilocano, the specificity of meanings of English loan words, and the medium of interaction, whether written or spoken.

Pascasio (1978) addressed the sociolinguistics of code switching using natural conversations in business offices in Metro Manila by drawing from the conversational functions described by Gumperz (1977). She found examples of switching from Tagalog to English and vice-versa for the purposes of making a direct quotation, directing a message to a specific addressee, giving an interjection or an utterance filler, repeating the message either literally or in modified form, qualifying a previous statement, distinguishing between opinion and fact, making inquiries vs. giving information, and expressing politeness. Her method, then, was to work backwards from the utterance to try to infer the reason for the switch using the various functions provided by Gumperz.

In a later study, using a corpus consisting of 90 e-mails written by seven siblings, all highly educated and working in business corporations or academe, Bautista (1999) adopted Gumperz's framework, and following Pascasio's lead, identified specific instances of code switching using Gumperz's conversational functions. But at the same time, a macro-analysis was attempted to provide an over-arching framework for the code switching of bilinguals. Gumperz proposed one such framework using the "we-they" dichotomy. He said (1982, p. 66):

The tendency is for the ethnically specific, minority language to be regarded as the 'we code' and become associated with in-group and informal activities, and for the majority language to serve as the 'they code' associated with the more formal, stiffer and less personal out-group relations.

In the next breath, however, he maintained:

But it must be emphasized that, in [certain] situations ..., this association between communicative style and group-identity is a symbolic one: it does not directly predict actual usage. There is no necessary direct relationship between the occurrence of a

particular set of linguistic forms and extralinguistic context. (p. 66)

In the e-mails written in Taglish by the seven siblings, talking about common interests and concerns, the "we-they" framework obviously was inapplicable. It should be noted, however, that in the case of Filipino students living in Sendai, Japan and using Taglish in their interactions with each other, the "we-they" dichotomy operated quite well: English and Japanese were considered as "they codes" as opposed to Tagalog or Taglish as "we codes" (Cuadra, 1998).

A more suitable framework for the e-mail data of the siblings seemed to be the one proffered by Myers-Scotton (1990), called the Negotiation Principle and Markedness Model. In her view, code switching involves a negotiation of position, and people switch codes because of personal motivations. The choices can be arranged along a continuum of markedness, and the choices are indexical of the interlocutors' understanding of the rights and obligations in the exchange. According to Myers-Scotton (pp. 93-100), three options are possible: (1) switching as an unmarked choice, meaning that the speaker wishes to operate within a context of unmarked rights and obligations, (2) switching as a marked choice, meaning that the speaker has departed from the unmarked choice to signal a desire to negotiate a new set of rights and obligations, and (3) switching as a strategy of multiple identities, meaning that an unmarked choice is not apparent and switching is an exploratory strategy to arrive at an unmarked choice.

The code switching in these e-mails belongs to the category of switching as an unmarked choice. Myers-Scotton distinguishes between two kinds of unmarked code switching: (a) sequential unmarked choices, that is, interlocutors change codes (and all the codes are unmarked) because something happens to change the situation, either in terms of participants or topic, or (b) over-all switching, that is, interlocutors use code switching throughout even without any changes in the situation because they have dual identities and dual languages at their disposal. In this case, the unmarked code switching is of the second type, over-all switching.

She points out that over-all switching as the unmarked choice differs from other types of code switching in the way it conveys social meaning. Each switch need not have a special significance; rather it is the over-all pattern of using two codes which carries meaning (p. 96). This echoes an observation made by Poplack (1980, p. 614) that code switching is an over-all discourse mode and it is "the choice (or not) of this mode which is of significance to participants rather than the

choice of switch points”.

Bautista (1999) suggests that within this discourse mode, a reason can sometimes be found for why a particular switch occurs, and has called this reason “communicative efficiency” – that is, switching to the other code provides the fastest, easiest, most convenient way of saying something with the least waste of time, effort, and resources. This claim of communicative efficiency was backed up with four pieces of evidence from the data:

1. *Function words* – especially in terms of what Filipino linguists call Tagalog enclitic particles, adverbials that occur only in certain fixed word-order relations to other sentence elements and whose meanings constitute a rather heterogeneous grouping (Schachter & Otones, 1972). For example:

- a. After my meeting, I’ll go home *na* [“already”].
- b. We attended *pa* [“still”] a children’s party at 5 p.m.
- c. That night, we had a Cantonese dinner *naman* [“on the other hand”] in a restaurant near the hotel.
- d. I called up Ate Marife *nga* [confirmation or emphasis] to arrange for the sticker.
- e. Her boss *daw* [indirect quotation] and her boss’ boss tried to convince her to accept the offer.
- f. I went to the Japanese grocery in BF Homes *pala* [expressing an afterthought] yesterday afternoon.
- g. ...there are seven people reporting to her, with 13 products *yata* [expressing uncertainty].

The enclitics are a short-cut for the more circumlocutious English phrase. It would be difficult for Filipinos to convey the meaning of *daw* “according to someone”, *pala* “it turns out, by the way”, *naman* “on the other hand”, *nga* “affirmation or confirmation”, in terse English. Not present in the corpus but very commonly used in oral language are the respect marker *po/ho*, as in *May I be excused po?* and the question marker *ba*, as in *You came late ba?* (See Bautista (1998) for more examples.)

2. *Content words* – local words for local realities such as food words, kinship terms, culture-specific lexical items. Food words would include items like *lechon* “roast suckling pig”, *adobo* “pork and chicken stew”, *sawsawan* “dipping sauce”. An example of a kinship term is *Ate* “elder sister” above or *Ninang* “godmother”. Culture-specific lexical items would include terms like *kundiman* “haunting love song”, *despedida* “going away party”, *merienda* “mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack”. For English, consider the borrowings in the excerpt from the Soho interview: *objectivity, agenda,*

side, okay, coverage, fair, reputation.

3. *Idioms* – metaphorical expressions that are available in one language but not available in the other. In the e-mail data, several English idioms appeared: *famous last words; let ’em weep; if it’s too good to be true, it probably is; wanna bet?* The Tagalog idioms included *nagpapalapad ka pa ng papel* “trying to get on my good side”, *patay na si XXX* “XXX is dead meat” or “he’s toast”, *buti nga sa kanila* “they had it coming to them”.

4. *Linguistic play* – achieving a humorous effect by playing on the Tagalog or English word. Examples from the e-mail data: *Baka ako marakatak* “I might have a **heart attack**”, *tapos dibay-dibay ang bill* “and then you **divide** the bill”.

In short, within the macro-view that Taglish is used for rapport, solidarity, informality, it is possible to look at certain instances of code switching and explain them within the micro-view of communicative efficiency. What this indicates is that the bilingual has the strategic competence to “calculate” (in a manner of speaking) what language would provide the most expressive, most concise way of saying something. This kind of strategic competence is currently very evident in texting, typing out messages via mobile phones (and the Philippines has been called the texting capital of the world) – the texter can choose between English, Tagalog, or Taglish to state the message in the fastest, easiest way possible.

Consider the following actual text messages between a friend and myself. I was flying from Manila to a place in Mindanao where cases of kidnapping were rampant. A friend texted me:

Don’t get kidnapped. (The Tagalog alternative is: *Huwag kang magpapakidnap.* – much longer to type out using a phone’s number pad.)

And I replied:

Walang magra-ransom. (The alternative in English is: No one will pay ransom [for me] – again, much longer to type out.)

This example highlights the flexibility afforded by bilingualism. Many Filipinos are bilingual in a mother tongue (e.g. Bikol) and a regional lingua franca (e.g. Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano). If they have had at least a high school education, they are also bilingual in English and Filipino (the national language based on Tagalog). Such bilingualism is a resource, and the switching between languages is an

additional resource, as a few more examples can illustrate. Consider the ambiguity in the relationship between two interlocutors: A is older than B by ten years and was B's teacher in graduate school but they are now colleagues and attend professional meetings and social gatherings together. Tagalog would require B to make a choice between the second person familiar pronoun *ikaw* or respectful pronoun *kayo* and would also require a decision on whether or not to use the respect marker *po/ho*. B would find it more convenient to use English because she would not need to have to make those choices. However, pure English would sound very formal; in this case, B can use English as the base language and switch to a Tagalog phrase or clause from time to time. Thus, Taglish becomes a very comfortable and useful variety to use. On the other hand, Tagalog does not distinguish between masculine and feminine in the third person pronoun (*siya* in the nominative case, *niya* in the objective case), unlike English which makes that distinction (*she/he, her/him*). Thus, confronted with an infant or toddler whose sex is indeterminate, and not wanting to embarrass the parents, the bilingual can say, *Ano ang pangalan niya?* "What is his/her name?" without divulging the fact that the sex of the child is not clear from its appearance.

Another instance of code switching as a resource appeared in Bautista's study of Tagalog radio drama scripts (1979). It was found that when characters apologized for minor offenses (e.g. arriving late for an appointment), they used the English *sorry*. But when they were apologizing for serious offenses (e.g., being unfaithful), they used a variant of the Tagalog *patawarin mo ako* "please forgive me". In a similar vein, it has been said that *dear, honey, or sweetheart* seem to be less self-conscious and more natural (i.e. unmarked) than the native terms of endearment *mahal, giliw, or irog* "beloved, darling", which are reserved for more special occasions (i.e. marked). Some married couples take care to quarrel using the base language of English rather than Tagalog because English allows for more distancing. Finally, the code switching variety enables the language user to instantly change the tenor of the speech situation from a relatively formal one to a more informal one, as when a teacher shifts from English to Taglish to signal that the class should be more relaxed, to ask questions, during the lecture.

A major layer in the analysis of code switching, adding a sociopolitical dimension to the linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis, has been provided by Tupas (1998). Using Critical Discourse Analysis as a framework, he sees Taglish as a reaction to the homogenizing tendencies of Philippine society.

He says that Filipinos code-switch because living in a post-colonial society and having a multiplicity of identities, we struggle against such hegemonizing forces as monolingualism and globalization.

In a later paper (Tupas, 1999), he gave forceful expression to this view of Filipino code switching as resistance:

In the Philippines, the forces of globalism, nationalism, and ethnicity attempt to construct a reductive and simplistic view of reality, where reality is neat, one-sided, static, and/or easily compartmentalized. Arguments for English are arguments for globalism as well, thus the discourse of language as a pragmatic tool. ... Nationalist sentiments are single-handedly pro-Filipino language, thus the discourse of language as a symbol of national identity and pride. ... Ethnic concerns call for the use of vernacular languages, thus the discourse of language as a repository of culture and tradition. ... These discourses are 'true' but homogenizing indeed. Specific statements adhere only to one particular language, and a language adheres only to a particular aspect of reality. Discourses on language and politics in the Philippines largely do not account for the pressure each of these discourses exerts on each other, thus ignoring the conflicting set of experiences in which Filipinos negotiate their daily lives. It is within this set of conflicting and intersecting experiences where we can locate code switching as resistance (p. 2).

Conclusion

The analysis of Tagalog-English code-switching has traversed a long distance. It began with assigning small segments of Tagalog-English code switching to one language or the other and formulating rules for such mixing. It then advanced to describing the uses of Taglish in Philippine society and its importance as a mode of discourse and a linguistic resource. It has now reached the point where code switching is viewed as a form of resistance to monolingualism and globalization. The hope is that educators become aware of such analyses so that they do not dismiss out-of-hand Tagalog-English code switching as an instance of random, irregular mixing of languages that results from imperfect control of either language. Code switching is bilingual performance on display and merits continuing study.

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