

Naila Ibadova

Karabakh University

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0053-2618>

naila.ibadova@karabakh.edu.az

The Role of Code-Switching in Bilingual Communication

Introduction

Bilingualism and multilingualism are being famous phenomena in today's world. As a result of navigating between the languages by these speakers, a term known as code switching appears. Code-switching is a process that happens when using some words from different language, while using another one. It can include not only words, but also phrases and sentences. For some people it can be known as language deficiency but researchers see this process as a complex communicative strategy in discourse. This paper focuses on social and cognitive role of code-switching in bilingual and multi-lingual society.

Understanding the term Code-Switching

Process of code-switching can have some forms. They include inter-sentential, intra-sentential, tag-switching and so on. If the switching happens between sentences, we call it inter-sentential. If it occurs in only a single sentence, it is called intra-sentential switching. Tag-switching process is about using tags from one language to another. These all show that code-switching process also follows social and grammatical rules.

There are some linguists like Shana Poplack and John Gumperz who have already shown that speakers from bilingual and multilingual society are switching languages systematically, but the way they switch the code depends on the context, intention and their audience. It means the process of code-switching is not a confusion, but is a linguistic competence in its high level.

Social Functions of Code-Switching

One of the main roles of code-switching is to state social identity of the speaker. Speakers may change the languages to indicate the membership, cultural association, or even unity. We can take using one language with family, another language in formal situations, another one with friends as examples. This switching language process can also help create a sense of closeness and belonging.

Furthermore, code-switching process can also help create social boundaries with other people. For example, the speaker may want to switch the language on purpose in order to set limitation to others and make sure that they do not understand their language. On the other hand, they can do the same actions to develop the conversation with the ones they want.

Cognitive and Linguistic Benefits

According to the earlier assumptions, code-switching was known as cognitive weakness. However, according to the recent studies, it shows that speakers who switch the code frequently they may have improved their cognitive flexibility. The reason for it is that controlling more than one linguistic system requires lots of attention, adaptation, and also management.

The process of code-switching helps the speakers to have an access to a wider scope of vocabulary. Occasionally, a word, phrase, or even idea may be expressed easily in another language. By switching the languages, the speakers can have smoother communication with others.

Pragmatic and Communicative Functions

The role of code-switching is significant in communication strategies. Bilingual or multi-lingual speakers usually change the codes to elucidate the meaning, convey their feelings, or highlight their point. For example, speaker may change their code to their native language to express their emotions and experiences in a very strong way.

Moreover, code-switching process is also used as a linguistic resource in discourse. It often helps quote other people, indicate topic changes, or arrange conversations. This process is also helpful in educational context. Teachers frequently use it for facilitating their students' understanding and knowledge.

Conclusion

The code-switching process is a very natural and advanced feature of both bilingual and multi-lingual context. It shows the ability of speakers to navigate between more than one language in either social, or linguistic environments. It also supports the flexibility, not linguistic deficiency. Code-switching assists a lot of functions, like strengthen communication, expressing social identity, and encouraging cognitive adaptability. As multi-lingual speakers are getting more and more in the society, the importance of code-switching becomes more significant. Future studies should keep exploring the implications of code-switching process in education and discourse, and recognize it as a very precious linguistic resource.

References

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