

ROMANIAN-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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This paper takes a new look at syntactic constraints on code-switching by analyzing code-switches between Romanian (a Romance language never before included in a code-switching study) and English. Romanian-English code-switching provides evidence against the universality of Poplack's (1980) syntactic constraints on code-switching. Moreover, it reveals that code-switches that would be impossible from a minimalist point of view (MacSwan, 1999) do not actually crash at LF. Thus, recent minimalist claims such as MacSwan's (1999) should integrate Sridhar and Sridhar's (1980) hypothesis that a guest language adjusts to syntactic and semantic prerogatives of the host language.

INTRODUCTION

Romanian-English and/or English-Romanian code-switching have not been the object of any substantial study. The purpose of this paper is to initiate a more focused type of research involving the Romanian language as a potential source of new findings about syntactic constraints on code-switching. An additional goal is to further test the universality of proposed syntactic constraints on code-switching.

Generally speaking, Romanian, like English, is a SVO language although alternative word orders can be used in Romanian for stylistic purposes. However, all the examples used in the present paper conform to the most commonly used SVO word order, as other alternatives are exceptional. Other characteristics of Romanian will become evident in the morphological translations provided below the examples used in this paper.

Terminology and classification

Simply put, code-switching refers to the use of two languages by an individual or a speech community (Ellis, 1994, p. 694). Code-switching is also a context-dependent process in which a bilingual individual or group may or may not engage. While some communities disapprove of code-switching as a deterioration of languages, others engage in it on regular basis and even produce a new norm out of code-switching (e.g., Spanglish). Language fluency and/or dominance also influence the type of code-switching bilinguals will engage in, as well as the degree to which they will use code-switching to communicate. Thus, the language that will "host" the code-switch will tend to be the dominant language, and less fluent bilinguals will tend to engage in less syntactically sophisticated code-switching.

In essence, code-switching is the alternate use of different languages (Haugen, 1956). However, this early definition holds a couple of weaknesses that surfaced in subsequent theoretical discussions. Its general character does not speak to the difference between code-switching and borrowing (which is also an instance of "alternate use of different languages"). Similarly, such a definition says nothing about the nature of alternate uses of different languages: it seems to imply that such linguistic behavior may be unsystematic and ungoverned by rules. Hence, the pursuit of linguists to clarify the difference between code-switching and borrowing yielded an answer about not only the formal manifestations of these processes but also about their underlying mechanisms.

Various criteria have been used to distinguish between code-switching and borrowing instances, and little agreement has been reached about their general validity. The most obvious criteria used are the degree of formal adaptation of an item into one or the other language, its length of utterance, and its stability in the code-switching community or an individual's lexicon.

In his monograph *From Code-Switching to Borrowing: Foreign and Diglossic Mixing in Moroccan Arabic*, Jeffrey Heath (1989) opens his discussion of code-switching vs. borrowing with the admittedly "idealized binary distinction" in which code-switching means "a pattern of textual production in which a speaker alternates between continuous utterance segments in one language (L_x) and another language (L_y) with abrupt and clear-cut switching points, often at phrasal or clausal boundaries" (p. 23). Heath (1989) defines borrowing as "the adaptation of a lexical item P_y from L_y into L_x, becoming P_x (that is, a regular lexical item in L_x satisfying phonological, canonical-shape and morphological rules for this language)" (p. 23). Generally speaking, the above definitions remain operational today, as long as those who use formal adaptation as a distinguishing feature of borrowing are aware of the interdependence among the proposed criteria. For instance, the formal adaptation criterion proves insufficiently finely-tuned to the difference between code-switching and borrowing when a switch is made in writing rather than in speaking due to the absence of phonetic realization, or from a richly inflected language into an uninflected one or between languages with similar or identical phonetic characteristics. The adequacy of phonological criteria has been contested because the phonology of switches may spill across lexemes (Shaffer, 1978; Grosjean & Soares, 1986). Anna de Fina (1989) also argues that syntactic and morphological adaptations are not necessarily an indication of borrowing in themselves. Finally, the only reliable criterion in distinguishing between borrowing and code-switching remains the stability of the particular word or chunk in the lexicon used by a code-switching community or individual. As de Fina (1989) argues, the concept of borrowing is fundamentally diachronic and can be solved only through examination from a historical point of view. At a synchronic level, inventories at a community level are necessary to find the most stable forms by comparison, while at an individual level, longitudinal case studies are necessary to observe the stability of a lexical item.

The distinction between speech borrowings and language borrowings, proposed by Grosjean (1982), helped accommodate some of the exceptions previously left uncovered by traditional definitions. Thus, language borrowings are assimilated words or phrases, while unassimilated loanwords that exhibit some adaptation to the host language are speech borrowings and constitute an integral part of code-switching phenomena. Along with some clarification on the issue of code-switching vs. borrowing, the most revolutionary acknowledgement in this area was that code-switching is a rule-governed, cognitively and socially driven process, even when it is observable at the word internal morpheme level.

Today, the literature generally distinguishes among the following:

- a) Intrasentential code-switching (at constituent or clause level);
- b) Intersentential code-switching (at sentence level);
- c) Emblematic code-switching (at the level of tags, such as *You know, I mean, etc.*, and simple nouns). (Poplack, 1980)

Intrasentential code-switching can take the following forms:

- a) Code-changing (the complete shift to another language system at major constituent boundaries) (McClure, 1977), or alternation (Muysken, 1997);

Ex.: Andale pues *and do come again*.

That's all right then and do come again.

b) Code-mixing (the use of opposite language elements which cannot be considered to be borrowed by the community, oftentimes used by a speaker to compensate for competence gaps);

Ex: . . . porque el *Health-Service* es gratuito

. . . because the Health-Service is free (McClure, 1977)

c) Insertion or embedding of constituents of L2 into an L1 pattern where categorical equivalence/congruence exists (Muysken, 1997);

Ex: Yo anduve *in a state of shock* pa dos dias.

I walked in a state of shock for two days.

d) Congruent lexicalization when the two languages share a grammatical structure and a slot can be filled by either (L1 and L2 can alternate in a L1-L2-L1-L2 pattern).

Ex: Bueno, *in other words*, el *flight* que sale de Chicago *around three o'clock*.

Good, in other words, the flight that leaves from Chicago around three o'clock.

(Muysken, 1997)

A special place is occupied by word internal morpheme level code-switching due to its complexity:

Ex: I'm LAVing PANDELCAgEs.

I'm making pancakes.

(Danish-English, Petersen, 1988)

Proposed syntactic constraints on code-switching

A point of reference in the literature are Poplack's (1980) proposed universal restrictions on code-switching:

1. The free-morpheme constraint: "Codes may be switched after any constituent in discourse provided that constituent is not a bound morpheme." (p. 585)
2. The equivalence constraint: "Codes may be switched at points in discourse where juxtaposition of L1 and L2 elements do not violate a syntactic rule of either language." (p. 586)

Many studies, especially some focusing on English-Spanish, Swedish-English, and Italian-French code-switching, have brought evidence in support of the above-mentioned constraints. Others, however, have found counterevidence and suggested different constraints on code-switching. Thus, Bentahila and Davies (1983), who studied Arabic-French code-switching, proposed that switching is possible when there is no violation of the subcategorization rules of either language. Sridhar and Sridhar (1980) suggested a Dual Structure Principle and a host/guest quality of the languages involved in a switch. According to this principle, the structure of a code-switch follows the structure of the host language, and the switched segment, which can retain the structure of the guest language, is embedded in it. Nishimura (1986), studying Japanese-English code-switching, reached a similar conclusion, noticing that a code-switched sentence will preserve the constituent order of the matrix/host language except inside the switch. Park, Park and Troike (1993), in a study on Korean-English code-switching, drew conclusions that confirm both Sridhar and Sridhar (1980) and Nishimura (1986).

More recently, MacSwan (1999) suggested a Minimalist approach to code-switching aiming to better capture the universal rules governing this phenomenon. At the end of a thorough synthesis and analysis of examples from a large variety of languages, MacSwan

proposes that “Nothing constrains code switching apart from the requirements of the mixed grammars” (p. 38). In other words, when features of the host language do not match with features of the code switched segment, the code-switch will crash at LF. I will try to test a number of these proposed syntactic restrictions on code-switching against empirical data from Romanian-English code-switching.

DATA COLLECTION

Most of the data analyzed in this study comes from a one-hour tape-recorded conversation between three Romanians in America (husband, wife, and a common male friend), as well as from notes taken during conversations between two Romanians (the same husband and wife) in America but in the absence of a tape-recorder- which is usually intrusive and difficult to have ready at all times. The conversations took place in a relaxed atmosphere in the home of the married couple. The subjects’ duration of stay in the U. S. varies between 5-6 years (the married couple) and 10 years (the male friend). All speakers have native fluency in Romanian and native-like fluency in English, which is their second language.

A valuable set of examples is also provided by a preliminary study by Domnița Dumitrescu (1993), which is for the most part a general, descriptive study of a variety of linguistic phenomena encountered among Romanian Americans. Her study deserves a lot of credit for its attempt to look at linguistic phenomena previously unanalyzed in Romanian communities, and for initiating an inventory of examples collected in one of the largest communities of Romanian Americans in Los Angeles. Some examples from Dumitrescu’s study are used here in order to strengthen the reader’s confidence in the discussion built upon the data I collected.

DATA ANALYSIS

Intersentential code-switching is the easiest to recognize because it occurs at the sentence level, where syntactic boundaries are clearly not interfering. It has become a consecrated assumption that this type of code-switching is encountered most often in the speech of less fluent bilinguals, as it involves the least syntactic difficulty. Hence, the value of intersentential code-switching resides in its capacity to mirror social and processing rather than linguistic constraints on code-switching. In her study, Dumitrescu (1993) claims that intersentential code-switching was less frequent than emblematic code-switching (with which it can sometimes overlap, as some sentences can be automatized emblems whose production can be independent from one’s linguistic proficiency; for instance: *OK. All right. That’s it. I’ll be right back.*), but probably more frequent than intrasentential code-switching. Unfortunately, she does not provide statistical data to show how these categories compare. In my data, there were 57 instances of intersentential code-switching (emblematic switches counted where they occurred as independent sentences) in a total of 104 code-switches. Here are some examples:

- (1) A: “*Zice să nu pui zahăr.*”
 (say-3 sg. to not put-2 sg. sugar)
 It says you shouldn’t put sugar.

B: “Really? Why?”

A: “Ca să nu se lipească.”
(so to not refl.-3 sg. Stick-3 sg.)
So that it doesn’t stick.

B: “That’s possible.”

(2) A: “De unde știi?”
(from where know-2 sg.)
How do you know?

B: “I know because I’m smart.”

(3) A: “Trebuia să aștepti să se înfierbânte uleiul.
(must-Past to wait-2 sg. to refl. 3 sg. get hot oil-the)
You should have waited for the oil to get hot.

B: “I thought I did.”

So far, in my data, intersentential code-switching seems to be in a close tie with intrasentential code-switching (fitting the description of alternations/embeddings), and more frequent than code-changing. Eventually, future studies on larger pools of subjects will show that there is a reasonably high incidence of intersentential code-switching among balanced Romanian-English bilinguals. From a sociolinguistic point of view, it should be noted that my data was collected in a circle of family and friends. The familiarity among interlocutors might have been, therefore, the reason why there was a higher incidence of a type of code-switching otherwise treated with reserve in larger American Romanian communities (Dumitrescu, 1993). It is possible that the degree of intimacy and the social context in which bilinguals find themselves may override fluency as a factor influencing the type and frequency of code switches. However, I should also mention that the function of a large proportion of the recorded intersentential code switches was to relate speech that had already occurred in other conversations in English.

Emblematic code-switching, defined as switching at the level of tags, covers at least two types of tags. As in an example provided by Dumitrescu (1993), the tags involved in Romanian-English emblematic code-switching can be single nouns (for instance, high frequency and culture-specific terms, such as *honey*), or, most often, short sentential formulas (for instance, *are you kidding, give me a break, you know, I mean* etc.).

(4) “Știi, *honey*, când am auzit ce-a spus, am crezut ca înebunesc,
(know 2 sg., *honey*, when have-1 sg. heard what have-3 sg. said, have-1 sg. thought that go mad-1 sg.)
You know, *honey*, when I heard what he said, I thought I was going to go mad,

you know? I mean, așa ceva nu se poate. Așa că i-am spus: Uite ce,
(*you know? I mean, such something no refl.-3 sg. can-3 sg. So that he-D have-1 sg. told:*
Look what)

you know? I mean, that's impossible. So I told him: Look,

m-am săturat, that's it! All right? S-a uitat la mine de parcă nu-i venea să
creadă.

(*refl.-1 sg. have-1 sg. had enough, that's it! All right? Refl.-3 sg. have-3 sg. looked at*
me as though no he-D come-3 sg. Past to believe-3 sg.)

I've had enough, that's it! All right? He looked at me in disbelief.

Cică, are you kidding? Not at all, da ce crede el? Cât o sa ii meargă?

(*Says, are you kidding? Not at all, but what think-3 sg. he? How much will he-D go-3*
sg.?)

He says, are you kidding? Not at all, what does he think? How far can he go?

Give me a break, you know." (Dumitrescu, 1993, p. 178)

- (5) *Speaking of parasută, aia-i parasută.*
Speaking of parachute, that's a parachute.
- (6) *La noi, everything went.*
(*at us, everything went*)
At our place, everything went.

Sometimes, emblematic code-switching can take the form of intrasentential switching where categorical equivalence exists between the two languages involved:

- (7) "Cred că *that's the way to go.*"
(*think-1 sg. that that's the way to go.*)
I think that's the way to go.

In the example above, *that's the way to go* can be considered a tag, most probably perceived as a high frequency cliché in American English and a rhetorically effective way of expressing an idea. At the same time, it is an embedded sentence fitting perfectly in both the English and Romanian syntax.

I think / (that) /that's the way to go. [Eu] cred / că / asta este calea de urmat.
IP / (Comp) / CP IP / Comp / CP

Such intrasentential code-switching, more interesting from a syntactic point of view than emblematic code-switching, will be discussed in more detail in another section. From a sociolinguistic point of view, it can be hypothesized that bilinguals can resort to emblematic code-switching when they think that one language will be more concise and rhetorically successful than the other language they possess.

Intrasentential code-switching

This category includes **Code-changing**, or complete shifts to another language system at major constituent boundaries, such as:

- (8) Cred că *that's the way to go*.
(Think-1 sg. that that's the way to go.)
I think that's the way the go.
- (9) Am aflat că *the best way to do money laundering is through a lab*.
(Have-1 sg. found that the best way to do money laundering is through a lab.)
I found out that the best way to do money laundering is through a lab.
- (10) Îi dăm secretarei *and she takes care of it*.
(She-D give-1 pl. secretary-D and she takes care of it.)
We give it to the secretary and she takes care of it.
- (11) Pot tăia fondurile *because one person abused it*.
(Can-3 pl. cut funds-the because one person abused it.)
They can cut the funds because one person abused it. (it=the system)

In the examples above, no obvious preference is displayed for Comp in a certain language, as Comp appears both in English and in Romanian. In other studies, preference was manifested by speakers for code-switches in which a functional element was in one language and its complement in the other. This phenomenon, known as “the functional element effect” (Muysken, 1997; confirmed experimentally by Dussias, 2000), is not clearly observable in the examples we have so far from Romanian-English code-switching.

However, it is fairly obvious that most of the examples so far are in accordance with Poplack's (1980) equivalence constraint, as all of the above code-switches occur at points where juxtaposition of L1 and L2 does not violate the syntactic rules of either language and where the surface structures of the two languages map onto each other. However, Romanian-English code-switching does not always conform to the proposed equivalence constraint. Let's consider the following examples:

- (12) Pentru că *it's an internal account, you can*.
where the surface structures of Romanian and English are as follows:

Pentru că / este / un cont intern / , (tu) poți.

Because / it is / an internal account / , you can.

- (13) A primit un *big fund* de la NSF.
A primit / un fond mare de la NSF.
He received / a big fund from NSF.

- (14) Angajează o secretară care să facă ea the actual call.
 Angajează / o secretară / care / să dea ea telefonul propriu-zis.
 They hire / a secretary / [who] / to make the actual call herself.
- (15) Asta e not washed.
 Asta / nu e spălată.
 This / is not washed.

In (12)-(14), the Romanian and English syntax regarding the occurrence of adjectives relative to nouns do not coincide. While in Romanian, the adjective usually follows the noun it modifies, it is the other way around in English. Similarly, in (15) the position of Neg is obviously different between the two languages. In addition, in (14) it can be noted that the Romanian segment of the code-switching sentence manifests not only a code-switch at a definite point, but also traces of semantic transfer from English into Romanian. While the speaker should have said *sa dea telefonul* (to give the call), he says *sa faca the call* (to make the call).

While intersentential and emblematic code-switches were sometimes preferred for rhetorical purposes, the same cannot be said about intrasentential code switches, which appear to have no special sociolinguistic motivation. Rather, the simultaneous activation of both languages seems to facilitate intrasentential code-switching.

Word-internal code-switching

All code-switches are speech borrowings to a certain extent. Classically, examples such as

- (16) ...porque el *Health Service* es gratuito (McClure, 1977)
 or
 (17) am o cameră cu un *view* extraordinar (Dumitrescu, 1993, p.179)
 (have-1 sg. a room with a view extraordinary)
 I have a room with an extraordinary view.

are considered instances of speech borrowings, where the speaker borrows an English word which is not a stable borrowing within the community, in order to compensate for a lack in linguistic knowledge or in processing capacity, or for the lack of adequate equivalence between concepts in the two languages involved. In both of the above-mentioned examples, the English nouns used are indeed adapted to the Spanish and Romanian morphology respectively, as reflected by the accompanying masculine definite articles and the agreeing adjectives. Similarly, in both examples the formal adaptation of the English nouns to Spanish and Romanian respectively happens at the level of free morphemes that are not attached to the borrowed nouns.

In other cases, however, the code-switch can happen at the level of a bound morpheme as in the following examples:

- 18) OVERHEADul e modul fundamental de a face bani.
 (overhead-the is way-the fundamental of to make money)
 The overhead is the fundamental way to make money.

- (19) Nici nu poate să intre in CUBICLEul ei.
(even not can-3 sg. to enter-3 sg. in cubicle-the her)
She/he can't even enter her cubicle.
- (20) ...când se CHOKEăneste cineva.
...when refl-3 sg. choke-3 sg. someone
...when someone is choking
- (21) S-a FLUFFănit.
Refl-3 sg. have-3 sg. fluff-3 sg. Past
It's fluffy./It became fluffy.

Such examples are usually acknowledged in the literature as word internal, morpheme-level code-switching (for examples from Danish-English code-switching, see Petersen, 1988; from Spanish-Italian, see de Fina, 1989). In contrast with examples in which the code-switching intervenes at the level of unattached morphemes, the so-called word-internal morpheme-level code-switching is incorrectly made to seem, by the current terminology, less of a borrowing situation, and vice-versa. In fact, all code-switches are instances of speech borrowing, and all code-switching affects one or another morpheme or constituent. The distinction that we should make should be one of free morpheme-level code-switching as opposed to bound morpheme-level code-switching.

More importantly, it is to be noted that examples such as (18)-(21) are clear violations of the free morpheme constraint postulated by Poplack (1980). Based on examples such as these (see also de Fina, 1989), it appears more than possible that when code-switching occurs between a richly inflected base language and a less richly inflected language, the free morpheme constraint is likely to be violated. In examples (18)-(21), the most interesting fact is that the pronunciation of the English and Romanian morphemes involved in the code-switch did not display features of phonetic adaptation to the base language, which weakens even more the possibility for the English code-switches to be borrowings into Romanian. Eventually, more research on code-switching between richly inflected and related languages (such as the Romance languages) will reveal more violations of the free-morpheme constraint (for more examples, see de Fina, 1989).

The minimalist touch

According to the minimalist approach to code-switching proposed by Jeff MacSwan (1999), only the intersentential and emblematic code-switches among all of the above-mentioned examples would not crash at LF, since the features of the constituents involved in the code-switch are equivalent in both Romanian and English. However, intrasentential and word-internal code-switches are profoundly affected by MacSwan's hypothesis that

“Nothing constrains code switching apart from the requirements of the mixed grammars.” (p.38)

If we adopt the minimalist position, we will soon realize that most, if not all, of the above intrasentential and word-internal code-switches should crash at LF because certain features that

come along with the lexical entries involved in the code-switch would not merge. For instance, even though the English morpheme maintained English pronunciation and the Romanian morpheme maintained its Romanian phonological characteristics during the phonological realization of (18)-(21), the respective examples would not be acceptable as code-switches from a minimalist perspective (just as they would not be from Poplack's perspective) because adjoining the respective morphemes causes the two grammars to collide and the switch should crash. Thus, in (18) and (19), the {0 gender} feature of the English nouns conflicts with the {+gender} feature of Romanian nouns brought into play through the masculine definite article "ul". Similarly, in (20) and (21), while the non-past and, respectively, past features coincide, the {± reflexive} feature encoded in the Romanian corresponding verbs, clashes.

To all appearances, we are dealing with a dichotomy between production and comprehension of code-switches that has been investigated from a psycholinguistic perspective, but not from a syntactic one. Although, as mentioned above, some code-switches should crash at LF and appear unacceptable or even incomprehensible when submitted to grammaticality judgments (also see MacSwan, 1999), such code-switches do nevertheless happen, and are therefore perceived as acceptable upon production.

On the other hand, it is possible that, as proposed by Sridhar and Sridhar (1980), one of the languages involved in code-switching acts as a host/matrix to the guest/embedded language; while the former establishes the constituent order, the latter can preserve its features within the embedded constituents. Extending this position to MacSwan's minimalist view on code-switching, it appears that, even though originally they might not possess a feature, embedded constituents will accept a feature projected by the host language in order for the code-switch not to crash. This is especially the case of example (21), in which *fluff* accepts the {+reflexive} feature in order to fit in the Romanian host structure.

CONCLUSIONS

In retrospective, Romanian-English code-switching provides evidence against the universality of Poplack's (1980) syntactic constraints on code-switching, and can add significant revisions to MacSwan's (1999) minimalist claims. More exactly, MacSwan's claim would benefit from integrating Sridhar and Sridhar's (1980) hypothesis that a guest language adjusts to syntactic and semantic prerogatives of the host language.

Limitations of this study

The lack of sufficient sources documenting instances of Romanian-English and English-Romanian code-switching has been an impediment in the completion of this study. All referenced authors indicate the scarcity of research on English-Romanian code-switching as a reason why emerging studies have to be spread thin, sometimes discussing code-switching only as a subcategory of other linguistic phenomena present in American- or Canadian-Romanian communities. We can only hope that more studies will emerge in the near future so as to confirm or deny the universality of certain syntactic constraints on code-switching. For now, the present paper remains a preliminary study whose scope I hope to broaden in the future through inclusion of a larger pool of subjects and examples of code-switching. A larger study will eventually confirm the acceptability and validity of the code switches collected on a very small and intimate scale so far. Thus, a larger-scale study will help test the tentative conclusions presented here.

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