

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

A Minimalist Approach to Intrasentential Code Switching:

Spanish-Nahuatl Bilingualism in Central Mexico

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Jeffrey MacSwan

1997

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The dissertation of Jeffrey MacSwan is approved.

Alfredo J. Artiles

Susan Curtiss

Reynaldo F. Macías

Edward P. Stabler, Jr.

Concepción M. Valadez, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

1997

This Dissertation is Warmly Dedicated

to my wife, Kellie,

for encouraging me, helping me,

and making it possible;

to my son, Sander,

for playing with me during my breaks;

to my mother, Marian,

for early influence on seminal ideas;

and to the memory

of my father, Joseph,

for his love, spirit, and hard work.

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VITA

March 4, 1961	Born, UCLA Medical Center Los Angeles, California
1985	B.A., English Language and Composition California State University, Long Beach
1987	M.A., Linguistics California State University, Long Beach
1989-1992	Teacher, Los Angeles High School
1994-1997	Graduate Student Researcher for Susan Curtiss UCLA Linguistics Department
Winter and Spring, 1995	Teaching Assistant for Robert Stockwell and Nina Hyams UCLA Linguistics Department
Summer and Fall, 1995	Special Reader for Concepción M. Valadez UCLA Education Department
Summer and Fall, 1996	Fieldwork, Tehuacán Valley, Puebla, Mexico

SELECT PUBLICATIONS

- 1997 (with John Grinstead, Susan Curtiss, and Rochel Gelman) (forthcoming). "The Autonomy of Number and Grammar in Development." Paper to be presented at the Boston University Conference on Language Development, November 7-9, Boston.
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Minimalist Approach to Intrasentential Code Switching:

Spanish-Nahuatl Bilingualism in Central Mexico

by

Jeffrey MacSwan

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Concepción M. Valadez, Chair

This dissertation addresses grammatical aspects of intrasentential code switching and their relevance to education and schooling, focusing on ways in which a misunderstanding of code switching may lead to tacit tracking effects for language-minority children. It is argued that a better understanding of code switching in particular, and of bilingualism in general, will have a positive impact upon educational policy, teaching and curriculum.

Several findings from original experimental and naturalistic Spanish-Nahuatl code switching corpora, collected in Southeast Puebla, are presented and analyzed in terms of Chomsky's Minimalist Program. The approach taken in the analysis is minimalist in two respects: First, it is hypothesized that nothing constrains code switching apart from the

requirements of the mixed grammars, an assumption which makes use of minimal theoretical apparatus (corresponding to “virtual conceptual necessity”); second, the particular analyses developed for data presented in the dissertation are restricted as much as possible to mechanisms made available in the Minimalist Program. Other recent theories of code switching are also reviewed in terms of the Spanish-Nahuatl corpus, and each one is disconfirmed. Attention is then given to extending the approach developed here to an analysis of other corpora; in many cases, apparent conflicts in basic findings are reconciled.

Finally, an exploration of the impact of the particular linguistic conclusions on educational issues is pursued, with special attention to the education of language-minority children. In particular, it is concluded that fluent bilinguals who code switch are exquisitely sensitive to the subtle requirements of the languages they use, just as non-code switchers are. This conclusion, it is argued, indicts negative attitudes among educators and policy makers which function as tacit tracking mechanisms for language-minority children. In addition to policy issues, some attention is given to other ways in which new understandings of bilingualism might affect teaching, assessment, and curriculum. In this context, there are proposed revisions of the Threshold Hypothesis and the Linguistic Interdependence Principle, and some specific criticisms of the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) are made.

PREFACE

Some time in 1990, when I was teaching ESL at Los Angeles High School, one of my students brought Mellow Man Ace's *Escape from Havana* to class. Jesús especially wanted the rest of us to hear "Mentirosa," a hip-hop tune in which the singer bemoans his lover's cheating and deceitful life in a mixture of Spanish and English:¹

Check this out, baby
Tenemos tremendo lío
Last night you didn't go
A la casa de tu tío

Resulta a ser, ay,
You were at a party
Higher than the sky
Y emborachada de Bacardi ...

Now I really want to ask ya
Que si es verdad
And please, *por favor*
Tell me *la verdad ...*

'Cause right now you're just a liar
A straight *mentirosa*
Today you tell me something
Y mañana es otra cosa

I remember the day
Que tú me decías
Time and time again
Que tú me querías

¹Sergio Reyes and Antonio González, "Mentirosa," performed by Mellow Man Ace [Sergio Reyes] on *Escape from Havana* (Capitol Records, 1989). Lyrics provided by Delicious Vinyl Music, Hollywood, California. Spanish spellings have been conventionalized. The ellipses (...) are mine and indicate omissions of text.

And at the time
Hey, *yo te creía*
Porque no sabía
That you were a *relambía*

You're with *fulanito y menganito*
Joseíto y Fernandito
Larry and Joey
Even his brother Chico ...

Now get some *él-que-quiera*
Get some *cualquiera*
Hey yo, she don't care man
She's a *tremenda fiera* ...

'Cause you're just a *mentirosa*
Con tu lengua venenosa
Today you tell me something
Y mañana es otra cosa

The song was a delight to hear. Growing up in Los Angeles, I had naturally heard plenty of code switching² before, especially between Spanish and English. However, I had never thought carefully about the interesting linguistic questions it raises. While enrolled in a seminar on language development, in winter of 1995, I was exposed to the linguistic study of code switching for the first time. Concepción M. Valadez, who conducted the seminar, and Edward P. Stabler, Jr. independently encouraged me to take up the topic in a dissertation. Following another suggestion by Claudia Parodi, I decided

²Unless otherwise stated, "code switching" in this dissertation refers to a speech style in which fluent bilinguals move in and out of two (or conceivably more) languages. A more detailed definition is given in section 2.2 along with some examples. The term is spelled variously in the literature as "code switching" (Gumperz, 1967), "code-switching" (Milroy and Muysken, 1995), and "codeswitching" (Myers-Scotton, 1993a, 1993b). I will use the first of these spellings throughout, except where quoted material differs.

to work within a Spanish-Nahuatl bilingual community in Central Mexico where I thought I would be able to study the interaction of typologically very different languages.

Code switching struck me as a particularly interesting topic, one which might allow me to bring together my interests in education and linguistics into a single thesis. Pursuing this aim, chapter 1 addresses the relevance of the study of code switching for education and schooling, focusing on ways in which a misunderstanding of code switching may lead to tacit tracking effects for language-minority children. I conclude that a better understanding of code switching in particular, and of bilingualism in general, will have a positive impact upon educational policy, teaching and curriculum.

The unifying thesis of the work is also developed in chapter 1: If the underlying linguistic competence of code switchers is the same as that of monolinguals for the languages they use, then the stigma of code switching, together with its associated tracking effects, should be indicted. Chapter 5 confirms the antecedent, and chapter 6 discusses the consequent.

The other chapters, which I hope will be of interest in themselves, essentially set the stage for chapter 5. In chapter 2, I undertake a review of relevant literature, specifically addressing bilingualism, social and grammatical aspects of code switching, recent work in syntactic theory, grammatical studies of Nahuatl and Spanish, and the historical and contemporary language situation of Nahuatl speakers in Central Mexico. Chapter 3 addresses the research design, detailing my consultants' profiles, the experimental procedures, and the conventions used in the presentation of the data. Chapter 4 is an annotated catalogue of my findings.

Chapter 5, then, may be seen as the core of the study. Here I present an analysis of my findings in terms of a specific research program that is *minimalist* in two respects. First, in assuming that nothing constrains code switching apart from the requirements of the mixed grammars, I provide a framework which makes use of minimal theoretical apparatus (corresponding to “virtual conceptual necessity”), the core supposition of the minimalist program. Second, the analyses developed in chapter 5 are restricted to the minimalist framework, developed in Chomsky (1995a) and elsewhere, in which lexically encoded parametric variation drives overt and covert movements under the direction of an invariant computational system (C_{HL}). On this approach, differences between languages relate to differences in the lexicon, mapped by C_{HL} into various surface forms. As in Chomsky (1995a), these parametric differences have been restricted to the functional categories of the lexicon. In this chapter I also review other theories of code switching in terms of my data, disconfirming them in each case, and I spend a little time extending my approach to an analysis of other code switching corpora.

Finally, in chapter 6, I revisit the themes of chapter 1, focusing on specific ways in which research on code switching informs our understanding of educational policy, curriculum, and teaching, particularly for language-minority children in bilingual education programs.

Although my dissertation is officially complete, in many respects I view it as a draft. I hope that further study, both my own and that of others interested in these topics, will lead to refinements, new insights, and expanded inquiry.