Abstract

Code-switched utterances make up ~20% of bilingual speech (Gollan & Ferreira, 2009). Over decades, sociolinguists have uncovered a slew of converging motivations for code-switching. Nevertheless, the psycholinguistic study of CS has mostly used artificial CS paradigms, which revealed that code-switching is difficult to produce and comprehend (e.g. Meuter & Allport, 1999). Why do bilinguals code-switch so often if it is difficult? We use the Visual World Paradigm method and Growth Curve Analysis to test the hypothesis that CS could facilitate the online processing of subsequent speech by helping bilinguals anticipate lower-frequency words. We find that bilinguals use L1-L2 code-switches in real-time language processing as a cue that a less frequent word is coming up. This finding could steer the psycholinguistics study of CS from its processing costs to how it benefits processing down-stream.

**The covering letter. Articles for submission should be accompanied by a covering letter which should include a short paragraph to explain what is the main, novel contribution of the paper given current knowledge and why the paper is of particular interest for the BLC readership.**

Cover Letter

Code-switched utterances make up ~20% of bilingual speech (Gollan & Ferreira, 2009). Sociolinguists have been studying code-switching for decades, which resulted in a myriad of converging motivations for CS. Nevertheless, the psycholinguistic study of CS has mostly used artificial CS paradigms, which revealed that code-switching is difficult to produce and comprehend (Meuter & Allport, 1999). This robust empirical finding begs the question: why do bilinguals code-switch so often if it is difficult? Work conducted in our research group suggests that rather than focusing on the code-switch itself, it is necessary to look at the effect that a CS has on subsequent language processing. Our team is the first to start looking for the experimental confirmation of the benefits code-switching provides to bilinguals, stemming from the way it is used in everyday social interaction. In the first-of-its-kind experimental study of the effect of code-switching on subsequent language processing, we use eye-tracking to show that bilinguals use L1-L2 code-switches in real-time language processing as a cue that a less frequent word is coming up. When listening to language, we are biased to expect more frequent, familiar words to follow. The presence of a code-switch can steer bilinguals in the opposite direction and help them adjust their predictions to the lower frequency word even prior to hearing the word itself, thus helping them comprehend language more efficiently. This finding has the potential to steer the study of code-switching from the CS processing costs to the benefits that CS provides to bilinguals in online processing, including prediction adjustment and, potentially, emotionality reduction ()…. Other than being worthy of research on their own, these benefits and their underlying mechanisms represent important insights into the nature of code-switching and could inform current theories of code-switching…..