Frequency and intentionality in (un)marked choices in codeswitching: "This is a 24-hour country"

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Abstract

This paper has three, related goals. Its main goal is to provide quantitative evidence supporting the claim that in bilingual conversation the unmarked choice can be identified via a frequency-based criterion (cf. Myers-Scotton,1993b). Accordingly, frequency also identifies the marked choice. Second, it shows that not all participants in the same conversation necessarily have the same unmarked choice. Data come from a Malawian family temporarily living in the United States. Both parents and the children engage in codeswitching, but how the two languages are employed and their frequency within the overall codeswitching pattern shows that for the parents, English is marked, while for the children Chichewa is marked. Finally, the paper reinforces the argument that people are rational actors in the sense that they perceive selecting one way of speaking over another as a means to optimize their outcomes in interpersonal relationships (cf. Myers-Scotton, 1998; Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai, 2001). When speakers are bilingual and codeswitching is a component of the community, the types of code choices they make in codeswitching conversations become a means of achieving such goals. Specifically, marked choices become self-presentations.

Key words

codeswitching

marked choices

markedness model

rationality

1 Introduction

A thesis behind this paper is that speakers engaging in codeswitching (CS) choose as individuals, but simultaneously behave as group members because they know that how their choices are interpreted depend on the values their listeners subscribe to or accept. Further, the expected pattern of CS itself carries a social message so that stretches of speech in one language are considered either as unmarked or marked choices compared with stretches in the other language (cf. Myers-Scotton, 1993b). Still, speakers themselves, not group expectations about choices, actually make choices. This means that speakers' personal goals are paramount and this is especially evident when speakers make what can be identified as marked choices.

In general, speakers seek to enhance rewards and minimize costs in terms of the provisions of a Rational Choice model (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai, 2001). Marked choices inherently are potential sources of costs (in comparison with unmarked choices that largely validate the status quo). However, these marked choices also are the means for speakers to "step outside the box" of one set of values and embrace another set. Therefore, marked

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simple sentence summarizes the theory of rational choice." As such, rationality provides the explanation for choices and at the same time is the mechanism by which choices are made. It is explanatory in its role as a deductive premise: to act rationally means that a choice reflects a goal to enhance rewards and minimize costs, given the prevailing circumstances. In addition, rationality is a mechanism in the sense that it gives the speaker a set of steps to follow in making a decision. These are discussed under the third filter below.

3 How rational choice works

In the revised Markedness Model presented here, speaker options pass through three filters, resulting in speaker choice.

3.1 *The first filter: External constraints*

The first filter consists of external constraints. These include what Elster refers to as "structural constraints." These are "All the physical, economic, legal, and psychological constraints that an individual faces" (Elster, 1989, p. 14). Such constraints include all the situational factors that are usually discussed within either models in the tradition of the sociology of language (e.g., Fishman, 1972) or the Labovian tradition of variationist methodologies (e.g., Labov, 1982). These include most prominently socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and age. I interpret structural constraints also to include the organizational aspects of the ongoing conversation in question. I include here those micro-aspects of conversation that conversation analysts argue are critical to understanding any conversation (e.g., see Auer, 1998).

These structural constraints give rise to what Elster calls "an opportunity set." In linguistic terms, I interpret the opportunity set as the speaker's linguistic repertoire, the speaker's arsenal of choices. This repertoire includes the various styles, dialects, and languages that the speaker is able to use. It also includes a set of discourse strategies (e.g., turn-taking, overlaps, minimal responses) and culture-specific views about their appropriate use in different types of interactions. This is how a Rational Choice model gives a role to macro-level societal factors, as well as micro-aspects of conversational structure. That is, these factors determine the opportunity set, what individual speakers have at their disposal, but they do not directly determine the choices those speakers make. As indicated above, selection of choices is located with the individual, not outside forces.

3.2 *The second filter: Internal constraints*

The second filter refers to two innately available architectures that probably overlap. First, the somatic markers of Damasio (1996) that influence the types of responses an organism has to stimuli may be involved in linguistic choices. Damasio argues that these markers are features present in all organisms that help limit the "space" necessary for decision making and therefore allow organisms to call up experience and make decisions quickly. They are survival mechanisms, but they may well be connected with human responses to social situations. Second, the Markedness Model's markedness evaluator is a similar structure, but with a more specialized role. The assumption is that all humans have an innate

This principle remains as it was originally intended: it states a premise about the goals of conversation. It recognizes what speakers have to gain by making different linguistic choices. In contrast, the proposed filters offer an explanation for the particular choices speakers, in fact, do make. Also, the maxims of the Markedness Model are undisturbed (e.g., Myers-Scotton, 1993b, p. 113ff). Specifically, speakers take account of these maxims as part of their calculations under the third filter. The maxims apply as they always have: they limit speakers as to how they can expect their linguistic choices to be understood and they provide clues to listeners as to what they can infer from choices. They follow from the Negotiation Principle as more specific statements of what participants know about conversation: that speaking in an unmarked or marked way can have social consequences.

4 The data studied

Everyday conversations in the bilingual Banda family comprise the data discussed in this paper. The Bandas come from Malawi in South-Central Africa, but were living in the United States at the time the conversations take place. The family expected to return to Malawi and was only in the United States for the father to pursue his graduate studies at an American university. The mother held a clerical job during this period. The family consists of father and mother (both in their early thirties), and the three sons, Peter (age 10), Thengo (age 7), and a baby boy, Chimkono, who is too young to speak. (All names are fictitious.) At the time of the recording, the family had been in the United States for three years. Everyone except the baby boy had previous experience speaking both Chichewa and English in Malawi. English and Chichewa are both official languages there, and they are media of instruction in schools. Eight different conversations, but all on everyday family topics, were audio-recorded and transcribed. They amount to about five hours of talk[1].

Like many temporary residents in a foreign country, the husband and wife try to maintain their indigenous language as the language of family interactions. (They expressed this view in a follow-up interview.) Except for the baby, all family members are very fluent in Chichewa, their home language, but also in English, the language they all speak outside the home everyday, either at school or at their jobs. The parents do not forbid the use of English at home. Among other reasons, they know that English, as one of the official languages in Malawi, will be necessary for the boys to speak when they return to Africa. But they do not encourage its use in the home by their own example.

As this paper shows, the result is that the parents' usual conversational contributions are in Chichewa, not English. Given their attitude and in the parlance of the Markedness Model, full CPs in English are predicted to occur for the parents only as a marked choice. The quantitative analysis of the conversations supports this prediction. Only 6% (18/288)

1 I thank S.R. Simango for having recorded and transcribed these conversations. He was not aware of the hypotheses being tested with these data. The transcriptions are broad, but they serve the purposes for which they were intended—to study language choice and the degree and nature of codeswitching. Information as to the addressee is clear because the recorder, who is the father, indicated this in his transcriptions. Overlaps and the multiparty nature of conversation were not studied because they are not critical to the objective, obtaining a record of language choice. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 7th International Pragmatics Conference in 2000 in Budapest.

3 Peter *Munalibe.* NOT EVEN A SINGLE PAPER
'It was not there. [There was] not even a single paper.'

(Chichewa / English corpus #1)

When there is codeswitching within a CP, English forms occur in a morphosyntactic frame supplied by Chichewa. This means that Chichewa supplies the word order and also any required inflections. In the terms of the Matrix Language Frame Model of Myers-Scotton (1993a) Chichewa is the Matrix Language and English is the Embedded Language of these bilingual CPs. This distinction means that the two languages do not participate equally; only the Matrix Language supplies certain inflections in the CP. However, this distinction (Matrix Language or Embedded Language) is only relevant in constituents with morphemes from both participating languages. As the quantitative analysis demonstrates, the majority of the data does not consists of such constituents. Thus, this distinction has little importance in this data set beyond the fact that when there are bilingual CPs, only one language supplies the grammatical frame. Chichewa is always this language in this corpus. That is, there are no bilingual CPs framed by English grammar, but with Chichewa words.

Overall, monolingual CPs in either Chichewa or English are more frequent than intra-CP codeswitching in this corpus. Thus, while one can refer to the Banda family's conversations as bilingual, there is more inter-CP switching than codeswitching within a CP.[2] When there are switches, they typically consist of singly-occurring English words (generally nouns). If the Chichewa grammar calls for inflections, these English insertions are inflected with Chichewa affixes, the indication that Chichewa is providing the grammatical frame for the utterance. For example, in this example, Peter says *mu-folder*, using the prefix *mu-* for the locative noun class that indicates "withinness."

In example (1) there is one CP in Peter's first turn; it shows intra-CP CS because there are morphemes from both Chichewa and English in the CP. This is also the case with the mother's turn in line 2. In line 3, Peter produces two different CPs, one monolingual in Chichewa, and the second monolingual in English. The quantitative analysis is based on the number of CPs, not the number of turns.

CPs come in all lengths and can include null elements in Complementizer position or other positions. Some CPs are very short (e.g., *what?* is counted as a (CP) clause). In other cases, CPs are very long, or one CP is embedded in another. For example, the mother produces several CPs in one turn in Example (2). Lines 2 and 3 contain two CP clauses (*mukoza kutsekano ma-*WINDOW 'You can close the windows now' and *chifukwa usiku*

2 As noted, from a grammatical point of view, the type of codeswitching exhibited here is largely across CPs, not within CPs. The motivation for this switching is largely to produce a marked choice. Such choices are negotiations to change the Rights and Obligations set in effect to another one. Another type of codeswitching, switching that itself is the unmarked choice has both a different structure and a different motivation. This type of switching typically consists of CPs that show a good deal of internal switching; not only are there many singly-occurring forms from the Embedded Language within a Matrix Language grammatical frame, but there are also Embedded Language islands (constituents within the larger CP, but well-formed in the Embedded Language). In Myers-Scotton (1993b, p. 177ff) I argue that the overall pattern is what is most socially significant about this type of switching–even though individual switches may have their own specific import. That is, such extensive codeswitching is indexical of the dual identities that speaking two languages—more or less simultaneously—implies.

Table 2

Language use patterns of the father: Chichewa, English or bilingual CPs

Speaker Father		*Chichewa-only CPs*	*English-only CPs*	*CS: Bilingual CPs*
to mother	(*n*=120)	68 (57%)	15 (12%)	37 (31%)
to Peter	(*n*=107)	74 (69%)	0	33 (31%)
to Thengo	(*n*=31)	23 (74%)	2 (6.5%)	6 (19.5%)
to both boys	(*n*=30)	19 (63%)	1 (3.5%)	10 (33.5%)
Total	(*n*=288)	184 (64%)	18 (6%)	86 (30%)

In sharp contrast to how the parents employ their two languages, Table 3 shows that Peter, the oldest boy, speaks English much of the time. With his mother, 73% of his CPs to her are English-only (56/77). His speech to his father is similar: 72% of his CPs to him are English only (73/101). Similarly, 75% of his CPs to his brother are English only (12/16).

Peter produces Chichewa-only CPs more than he switches to English within a CP, but the percentages are very similar. His CPs show some intra-CP switching (i.e., singly-occurring English forms). Of all CPs to his mother, 14% of the time (11/101) they show codeswitching; 10% (10/101) of CPs to his father show codeswitching, with only 6% (1/101) of CPs to his brother. To his mother, 13% (10/77) are Chichewa-only; to his father, 18% (19/101) are Chichewa-only; and to his brother, 3% (3/16) are Chichewa-only.

Altogether, out of the 194 CPs that Peter produces, 73% (141) are English-only. His Chichewa-only CP constitute only 16% of the total (31/194) and his bilingual CPs make up 11% (22/194) of the total.

Table 3

Language use patterns: "Peter" (the oldest son): Chichewa, English, or bilingual CPs

Speaker Peter: 10 years old		*Chichewa-only CPs*	*English-only CPs*	*CS: Bilingual CPs*
to mother	(*n*=77)	10 (13%)	56 (73%)	11 (14%)
to father	(*n*=101)	18 (18%)	73 (72%)	10 (10%)
to Thengo	(*n*=16)	3 (19%)	12 (75%)	1 (6%)
Total	(*n*=194)	31 (16%)	141 (73%)	22 (11%)

Peter's brother, Thengo, employs almost as much English in his conversations even though he is centrally involved in fewer conversations. Of his CPs to his mother, 68% (20/29) are English-only CPs; to his father, 68.5% (24/35) of his CPs fall in this group. Of CPs to his brother, the percentage is 64% (7/29). With his mother, he uses Chichewa-only CPs 4% of the time (14/29) and to his father 8% (23/35). He uses more CPs showing intra-CP codeswitching with his father (23% or 8/35) than with his mother (14% or 4/29). To his brother, he uses only three monolingual Chichewa CPs (27% or 3/11) and only one CP with intra-CP switching (9% or 1/11).

6 P I'M NOT GOING TO CHANGE HIM.

7 F *Chifukwa chiyani? Sumamukonda?*
'Because of what? Don't you love him?'

8 P NO, BECAUSE IT SMELLS!

9 F *Ndi cha?*
'What is it?'

10 P HE COUGHED IN MY FACE.

(Chichewa / English #8)

4.4 *Marked choices*

Example (4) shows how Peter and his brother both use English extensively to each other, even when they are quarreling in front of their parents. Peter begins this example by speaking directly to his father about Thengo's behavior at school. He speaks Chichewa because it is important to him that his father listen. Against the quantitative backdrop of his typical language choice (English), his use of Chichewa is marked—signaling deference. He continues in Chichewa because he continues speaking to his father, ignoring Thengo's self-defenses in English. Finally, after ignoring Thengo's imperative in line 7 by continuing to speak to his father in Chichewa in line 8, Peter switches to English in line 10 to respond to Thengo's challenges ("Get out of my face!"). After two exchanges in English with Thengo, Peter switches in line 13 to speak to his mother. His two CPs to her are in Chichewa (except for the English word *ruler*). For Peter, speaking Chichewa is a marked choice. His use of Chichewa for this turn, especially in the context of several turns in English to his brother, can be seen as an attempt to garner support from his mother. Recall that his earlier turns to his father (line 1, 4, 6, and 8) also are entirely or largely in Chichewa.

Thus, there is a quantitative basis to argue that his use of Chichewa in this particular interaction is marked. It is strategic. Because he knows that his parents prefer Chichewa for family interactions, employing Chichewa can be seen as a calculation (not necessarily conscious) to get them on his side in his quarrel with Thengo. Based on the context and the referential message of what he says, Peter's linguistic choices to his parents can be viewed as deferential. But cannot one argue that children are simply often deferential to their parents? An argument based on numbers rules out the ambiguity surrounding Peter's choice—that Peter is just doing what comes naturally. Recall that if all of Peter's CPs across the eight conversations are considered, then 72% of his CPs directed to his father are in English-only and 73% of those to his mother are in English-only. The conclusion that for him to speak Chichewa now is a marked choice is inescapable. Once the hard fact that he is making a marked choice is coupled with the obvious associations of Chichewa (tradition, linked with family preference), a stronger argument can now be made: the intention behind Peter's making this marked choice is to win the parents to his side.

(4) Peter and Thengo quarrel

1 P *Atata, mufuna mudziwe ... Thengo,* ALL HE THINKS ABOUT IN CLASS ...
'Daddy, do you want to know ... Thengo, all he thinks about in class ...

4 *Kunoku anthu amagwira ntchito usiku, masana.*
'Here people work at night [and during the] day.'
(Chichewa / English #1)

In Example (6) it is the mother who leaves the home. She is leaving to go to work, literally stepping out of her "mother" role. By switching to English—and using a common casual expression in English (*I'm out of here*)—she signals her "second" identity. Note that it is her nontraditional identity that receives what is a marked choice for her (English). At the same time, note Peter's unmarked choice (*what color?*) in line 2. It would be hard to argue that in this very ordinary domestic exchange, English has the same meaning for him as it does for his mother. For him, speaking English is simply his means to express what he sees as his unmarked identity. For her, speaking English is as if she is putting on a new garment as she goes out the door.

(6) Mother leaves for work.

1 M [to Peter] OK, *ukangoyang'ana ma*-DRINK *amene ali mu*-FRIDGE-*mo*.
'Ok, just go and look at [the] drinks that are in [the] fridge.'

2 P WHAT COLOR?

3 M *Upange kaye* CHECK DRINK *usanathile*...
'You should first check [the] drink before you pour [it].'

4 M ... [now on her way out]
Ukachape uyu, AND THEN I'M OUT OF HERE.
'Go and wash this one, and then I'm out of here'.
(Chichewa / English #6)

Finally, in Example (7) the mother uses English again as a marked choice, but this time it signals her authority. She begins her comments largely in Chichewa, but then switches to full English CPs. Note that Peter produces English only clauses, once more demonstrating his unmarked choice.

(7) Mother gives advice.

1 M [speaking to Peter and Thengo]
Ma-FOLDER *aja wandipatsa alipati*?
'Where are those folders you just gave me?'

2 P COME HERE, JOHN [John is Thengo's "school name"]

3 M *Ma*-BALL POINT *aja ali kuti*?...
'Where are those ball point [pens]?'

4 M ... *Nthawi zonse pa dziko la pansi pano kuti ti-gwere m'mavuto*
'... All the time, for [us] people of this world to get into trouble

5 IT IS BECAUSE WE DON'T FOLLOW WHAT?

6 P DIRECTIONS

7 M *Eetu. Nthawi zambiri*, IF YOU DON'T FOLLOW DIRECTIONS, *umachita* GET LOST.

marked choices are made because extraordinary value is expected—make an attractive basis for interpreting variation in code choice.

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