Review
Reviewed Work(s): Social Motivations for Codeswitching. Evidence from Africa by Carol Myers-Scotton
Review by: Walter F. Edwards
Source: *Language in Society*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Jun., 1995), pp. 302-305
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4168617
Accessed: 16-02-2020 16:25 UTC

CAROL MYERS-SCOTTON, *Social motivations for codeswitching. Evidence from Africa.* (Oxford studies in language contact.) Oxford: Clarendon, 1993. Pp. xii, 177. Hb $35.00.

Reviewed by WALTER F. EDWARDS
Dept. of English
Wayne State University
Detroit, MI 48202

SMFC is a welcome addition to the literature on code-switching (CS). The subject is not new, of course. Many books and articles have been written on the topic, including such recent efforts as those of Eastman 1992, Gardner-Chloros 1991, and Heller 1988. These scholars, among others, have attempted to characterize the principles that bilingual and multilingual speakers intuitively use in switching from one language to another within sentences, across sentences, and across discourse units. A related but much less prolific strand of research has attempted to characterize the principles that bidialectal speakers use in switching from one dialect to another. Myers-Scotton has herself written copiously on the subject of code-switching; the reference section of *SMFC* lists 29 articles and books on the topic authored or co-authored by her. However, *SMFC* is a unique book in that it offers a coherent theoretical framework for the analysis of various kinds of CS behavior. The analytical framework that Myers-Scotton proposes is *markedness theory*: in bilingual and multilingual communities where conversational participants are competent in the community languages, speakers' choice of language is determined by their desire to index – i.e. assess or point to, in the sense of C. S. Peirce (see Tursman 1987:47) a set of Rights and Obligations (an RO set) entailed by the choice of that language. The theory assumes that native speakers intuitively know the unmarked (expected) and marked (unexpected) linguistic options that index each RO set, and the social benefits and costs, respectively, of indexing these RO sets.

The theory thus assumes that, in each conversational encounter among community members, there is an expected, *unmarked* language choice for each participant, and that this choice indexes the appropriate RO set in that social context. As part of their socialization into the community's sociolinguistic culture, speakers learn the social meanings associated with the choice of each language in every social context with every combination of possible conversational partners. They learn these associations because each person is born with what Myers-Scotton calls a *markedness metric*: "This metric is part of the innate cognitive faculty of all humans. It enables speakers to assess all code choices as more or less marked or unmarked for the exchange type in which they occur" (79–80). This metric is part of a member's communicative competence. A speaker might choose to use marked code for a variety of social reasons, such as showing deference, anger, solidarity, eloquence, or distance.

The central tenet of Myer-Scotton's markedness model of codeswitching is her *negotiation principle* (NP): "Choose the form of your conversation contribution such that it indexes the set of rights and obligations which you wish to be in force between speaker and addressee for the current exchange" (113). This principle is operationalized by three primary maxims. The *unmarked-choice maxim* says: "Make your code choice the unmarked index of the unmarked RO set in talk exchanges when you wish to establish or affirm that RO set" (114). The *marked-choice maxim* says: "Make a marked code choice which is not the unmarked index of the unmarked RO set in an interaction when you wish to establish a new RO set as unmarked for the current exchange" (131). The *exploratory-choice maxim* says: "When an unmarked choice is not clear, use CS to make alternate exploratory choices as candidates for an unmarked choice and thereby as an index of an RO set which you favour" (142). The unmarked-choice maxim is expanded by sub-maxims of *deference* ("Switch to a code which expresses deference to others when special respect is called for by circumstances," 147) and of *virtuosity* ("Switch to whatever code is necessary in order to carry on the conversation/accommodate the participation of all speakers present," 148).

Readers will note that key elements of the markedness model have been borrowed from other formulations. One obvious example is that the formal statement of the markedness model is patterned on that of the Cooperative Principle (CP) that underlies the logic of conversation proposed by Grice 1975. In an important sense, Grice and Myers-Scotton are engaged in the same enterprise: attempting to explain the rational bases for norms of speaking, and for variation from these norms. Grice's characterization of the CP has been very influential in pragmatics and sociolinguistics because of the power of its insights into the nature of social talk, and because of its applicability to almost every kind of conversation encounter. Myers-Scotton was therefore wise to cast her formulation in the mold of the CP, but there is also good theoretical motivation to do so. Just as the CP captures the essential collaborative impulse of competent conversationalists, the NP characterizes the central strategic motivations of bilinguals and multilinguals engaged in conversational exchanges.

The notion of markedness is also not new. Formal linguists have been using it for many years; and it is a central principle in Bailey's theory of developmental linguistics (1981, 1982), where it serves to distinguish between connatural and abnatural language changes. Note also that the idea that socially known RO sets are associated with the choice of languages in linguistically pluralistic communities has been proposed by other sociolinguists, including Blom & Gumperz 1972; and the principle of linguistic indexing, as employed in the markedness model, has been used by semanticists and philosophers for many years. The notion that speakers' language choices are driven by their own social intentions, not by those of their audience, is cen-

tral to the markedness model, but it resembles remarkably the ideas on linguistic acts of identity developed by LePage & Tabouret-Keller 1985.

Despite the fact that some of the central components of the markedness model of CS are derived from other descriptive and theoretical formulations, Myers-Scotton's model is a unique theoretical synthesis that organizes and explains – in one coherent, albeit eclectic framework – most of the behaviors that CS scholars have been discussing and theorizing about for decades. Thus I see the model as a good example of the notion that the whole may be more powerful than the sum of its parts.

Myers-Scotton proposes the markedness model to account for CS behavior in the African communities she has studied for many years, but the model is generalizable beyond the African data she presents. Some of the tenets of the model have been employed by DeBose (1992:160) to explain codeswitching among African-American speakers. Quoting from an earlier presentation of the markedness model by Myers-Scotton 1988, DeBose suggests that, for African-Americans, "the seemingly unrestricted kind of codeswitching ... might be considered *codeswitching as an unmarked choice*, whereas instances in which speakers appear to switch languages in order to 'change the balance of rights and obligations between participants' ... are accounted for by the notion of *codeswitching as a marked choice.*" This explanation of African-American codeswitching is akin to a position espoused by Morgan (1994:138): in explaining why African-Americans move between African-American English and American English, she claims that "choosing AAE or AE invokes alternative cultural, social, and linguistic home environments." Elements of the markedness model, specifically the notion that CS is sometimes a safe-choice alternative, have also been invoked by Edwards 1990, in explaining the speech behavior of English creole speakers in Guyana.

This is a well-organized volume. Chap. 1 is an introduction which outlines the goals and topics of the book and defines key terms. Chap. 2 provides a valuable and richly illustrated description of language families and CS patterns in parts of Africa, particularly Zimbabwe and Kenya. Chap. 3 reviews and evaluates the extant sociolinguistic literature on code-switching. This prepares readers for the presentation of the rationale for the markedness model in Chap. 4, and the model is articulated and explicated in Chap. 5. The book ends with a brief concluding chapter. The presentation of the theory in Chap. 5 is less detailed than one would have expected, but this flaw is ameliorated somewhat by the fact that aspects of the theory are presented throughout the book.

SMFC is an important work, written engagingly by a notable sociolinguist who has been researching and writing on code-switching for more than 20 years. She presents and justifies her theoretical model in an economical way and develops parts of it further in another book (Myers-Scotton 1993). I recommend the volume as required reading for teachers and students who

research code-switching phenomena, and for all sociolingists and discourse analysts.

REFERENCES

Bailey, Charles-James (1981). Theory, description and differences among linguists. *Language and Communication* 1:39–66.

_____ (1982). *On the Yin and Yang nature of language.* Ann Arbor: Karoma.

Blom, Jan-Petter, & Gumperz, John (1972). The social meaning in linguistic structure: Code-switching in Norway. In John Gumperz & Dell Hymes (eds.), *Directions in sociolinguistics*, 407–34. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

DeBose, Charles (1992). Codeswitching: Black English and standard English in the African-American linguistic repertoire. In Carol Eastman (ed.), *Codeswitching*, 157–68. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Eastman, Carol (1992), ed. *Codeswitching.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Edwards, Walter (1990). Morphosyntactic acculturation at the rural/urban interface in Guyana. *American Speech* 65:99–113.

Gardner-Chloros, Penelope (1991). *Language selection and switching in Strasbourg.* Oxford: Clarendon.

Grice, H. Paul (1975). Logic and conversation. In Peter Cole & Jerry Morgan (eds.), *Speech acts* (Syntax & semantics, 3), 41–78. New York: Academic.

Heller, Monica (1988), ed. *Codeswitching: Anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

LePage, Robert, & Tabouret-Keller, Andrée (1985). *Acts of identity: Creole-based approaches to language and ethnicity.* Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Morgan, Marcyliena (1994). The African-American speech community: Reality and sociolinguists. In Marcyliena Morgan (ed.), *Language and the social construction of identity in creole situations*, 121–50. Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

Myers-Scotton, Carol (1988). Codeswitching and types of multilingual communities. In Peter Lowenberg (ed.), *Language spread and language policy* (GURT 1987), 61–82. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

_____ (1993). *Duelling languages: Grammatical structure in codeswitching.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Tursman, Richard (1987). *Peirce's theory of scientific discovery.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

(Received 7 July 1994)

GREG SARRIS, *Keeping Slug Woman alive: A holistic approach to American Indian texts.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Pp. vi, 214.

Reviewed by CHAD THOMPSON
Dept. of English and Linguistics
Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne
Fort Wayne, IN 46805-1499

KSWA is a collection of eight loosely connected essays calling for a holistic approach to the study of Native Americans and Native American texts. All but one have been previously published. Sarris makes a call for marrying literary theory and social science, and for incorporating multiple voices in one's analysis, including the researcher's personal voice. He is part Kashaya Pomo