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Code-switching

A Case Study of Kurdish-German
Pre-school Bilingual Children

0. Introduction

0.1. Aim of the project

This book addresses the phenomenon of code-switching within the field of child bilingualism from both linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. Based on collected data from Kurdish-German pre-school bilingual children in Austria, this book aims at giving an analysis of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors that constrain code-switching.

Researchers have found that code-switches are not distributed randomly in sentences but rather occur at specific points. The main questions which this study addresses are the following:

How do bilingual children combine elements from two languages when processing mixed sentences? In other words, how do sections of grammars of two languages overlap in code-switching processes?

What kinds of elements do bilingual children switch?

How do extra-linguistic aspects of bilingualism such as sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors influence code-switching?

Why do bilingual children switch at all?

0.2. Motives

The subject of code-switching is of personal relevance to me insofar as I am a foreign student at Salzburg university and a member of an immigrant community in Austria, and the subject is of general relevance since today a high percentage of the world's population is bilingual; bilingualism has become and will continue to be part of most people's lives.

0.3. Approach

This book will be divided into a theoretical part and an empirical part. While the first part outlines a theoretical background on bilingualism and code-switching, the second part is devoted to the application of the theory to the data of the study, namely Kurdish-German child code-switching data.

Chapter 1 and 2 will introduce the key terms of the study, namely language acquisition, bilingualism and code-switching. Different definitions and interpretations of these terms that have been put forward in research will be discussed and compared so as to clearly state which definition of each of these terms are being used in this book. However, since each of these terms offers a vast field of investigation and the terms are too broad, this study will concentrate on one very specific phenomenon observed in connection with bilinguals, namely code-switching.

In chapter 3, which forms the main section of the theoretical part of the book, a discussion of linguistic constraints on code-switching will be presented. Several linguistic constraints and theoretical models of code-switching will be presented and opposed to each other. However, particular focus in this chapter will be put on one specific theoretical model of code-switching, which is the Matrix Language Frame Model (MLF) by Myers-Scotton.

Chapter 4 will present a discussion of functional factors in code-switching. This chapter will address some of the social and psychological factors that involve and influence the occurrence of code-switching. Furthermore some social norms that constrain the choice of languages by bilingual speakers will be discussed.

Chapter 5 deals with the concept of speech community; a brief discussion of the concept from both linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives will be presented. Further, definitions and the use of the term 'speech community' by the scholars will be introduced.

In chapter 6 and the following chapters a new study on child code-switching will be presented. Information about the two languages involved will be given at the beginning. Furthermore in chapter 7 the subjects, their immigrant community and methodological aspects will be presented before the actual corpus of intrasentential code-switching data will be introduced (in chapter 8). It will be followed by testing different grammatical constraints on the data. Furthermore theoretical constructs and hypotheses of the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model will be applied to the data of the study (in chapter 9).

The final chapter of the book (chapter 10) will be devoted to analyse functional factors in the collected data. The collected data will be classified in order to give an analysis on functional factors of code-switching to find out when, how and why children code-switch.