



**Codeswitching as a power and solidarity strategy
 in the foreign language classroom
 An analysis of language alternation strategies utilised in a
 Portuguese-English higher education class.**

Victoria Walker

Introduction

Codeswitching has long been a focus of bilingual sociolinguistic studies, defined as the investigation of an individual's use of two or more language varieties in the same speech event or exchange' (Woolard 2004:73-74). These studies have investigated how the manipulation of two or more languages is related to social situations in a given community. Research has not, however, to a great extent examined how such switches are utilised within institutional environments, such as education. This paper will attempt to offer a case study on the use of codeswitching in the classroom environment, which will then be used to reflect on the utility of existing codeswitching theories in helping us to understand the role of social strategies in higher education teaching.

Background

Although codeswitching (CS) in the foreign language classroom is a growing area of research, studies generally utilise the well-established theories and models from wider CS research to aid understanding of learning in the classroom. Flymann-Mattsson and Burenhult (1999) investigated foreign language teaching of French in Sweden and suggested the following explanations for the occurrence of CS in the classroom: linguistic insecurity; topic switch; affective functions; socialising functions; repetitive functions, all of which are closely related to those outlined by Gumperz (1982: 75-84). Although this study will focus only on the socialising and affective functions of CS, these categories demonstrate the similarities that classroom discourse shares with other bilingual environments. Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2005) have also observed how behaviour in the classroom is very similar to that in non-classroom bilingual settings, as students used discourse-related CS functions to interact with their peers.

Wider research into CS has been largely divided in its approach to the data. Early research until the mid 1980s focussed principally on knowledge of a social structure and what this can tell us about language use; what Auer (1992) calls a 'brought along' approach to CS data. This suggests that languages have 'distinctive social, symbolic values, which merely have to be indexed in the interaction in order to become, or to remain, relevant' (Wei 1999:170). Auer, however, argues that such an approach imposes a 'p priori schema [...] on code alternation data from outside' (1991:333). He alternatively proposes a 'brought about' approach to the phenomenon through conversation analysis, which 'limits the external analysts interpretational leeway' (Auer, 1984: 6), and forces the researcher to look beyond pre-imposed frameworks.

The maxims based on the negotiation principle are the ‘unmarked-choice’ maxim to establish or affirm the R&O set, the ‘marked-choice’ maxim to establish a new RO set, and the ‘exploratory-choice’ maxim to make alternate exploratory code choices as a way of indexing the R&D set. The ability to evaluate which code is marked, N Myers-Scotton claims, is a skill which all speakers possess as part of our innate ‘communicative competence’ (See Hymes 1972). The ‘markedness evaluator’ is therefore innate, yet the markedness continuum is established through extended exposure to the different linguistic choices in a given community.

Research on monolingual style switches have also contributed to the field. Giles and Powesland devised the theory of accommodation to account for changes in monolingual speech style. The theory proposes that an individual can induce another to evaluate him more favourably by reducing dissimilarities between them’ (1975:157); a process they call speech convergence. Equally a speaker can perform speech divergence by performing a different style to the hearer, thus decreasing communicative distance.

The speech accommodation theory was further extended by Allan Bell (1984, 2001), who claims that speakers principally adapt their speech style to respond to the listeners present (1984:159). He further adds that style ‘derives its meaning from the association of linguistic features with particular social groups’ (2001:142), suggesting that styles inherently ‘bring along’ meaning relating to social organisation.

Speech accommodation can be viewed as an attempt by the speaker to ‘modify or disguise his persona in order to make it more acceptable to the person addressed’ (Giles and Powesland 1975:159). This is a reference to a speaker’s ‘face’ as originally introduced by Goffman. He defines face as ‘the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes’ (1967:5). The concept of face was extended by Brown and Levinson (1987) for use in their politeness model. The framework references ‘face’ when addressing issues of power and solidarity and defines it as the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself’ (1987:66). A speaker has a positive face (the desire to gain the approval of others) and negative face (the desire to be unimpeded by others’ actions). During conversation, a speaker’s face is put at risk through Face Threatening Acts (PTAs) and requires politeness super strategies to allow speakers to maintain harmony. These super strategies have also been inversed by Culpeper (1996) to account for impoliteness in conversation. For a detailed investigation of how (im)politeness manifests itself through CS, see Cashman (2008).

In this paper I will study the above issues in relation to the use of CS in one Portuguese language class at a British higher education institution and investigate how the strategies utilised aid negotiation of the power and solidarity status quo in the classroom.

Methodology

The class, ‘Lingua Portuguesa Nivel Avancado’, included 15 final year students, including myself, and aimed to improve reading and writing skills. It was instructed by one male tutor, aged in his early 30s who is a native Portuguese speaker from Portugal. The recorded class offered a useful sample of language alternation as the teacher worked with individual students in turn.

I approached this qualitative study as a participant observer in the class community, using an ethnographic methodology. This is understood as ‘the study of people in naturally occurring settings [...] involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without being imposed on them externally’ (Brewer 2000:10).

My methodology was successful in its purpose, providing naturally occurring data. My role as participant observer meant the observer's paradox was largely avoided. The data was unaffected by my presence since I have been a member of the class for the past academic year.

The session was recorded using an Alba ET-889 digital Dictaphone with a microphone attached to the teacher, and I was also able to make field notes to support the recording. All participants signed a consent form prior to the session and I clarified any questions regarding the study, in line with current research ethics. It must, therefore, be considered possible that the teacher and students were aware of the recording equipment being used and the purpose of my study, yet I believe the class ran in a similar manner to previous and subsequent classes.

The method of recording offered a mostly clear and efficient manner of collection. Video recording equipment would have been far more intrusive and quite unnecessary based on the data I intended to collect.

Analysis and discussion of data

Although my data provides interesting examples of CS used to translate and clarify, this limits on the paper only allow development of the key issue of social strategies in the classroom.¹ I will utilise Myers-Scotten's markedness model in an interactional analysis and will support my inferences through close textual observations. I observe the alternation of languages as a sequence of actions and contextualisation cues and establish how a social situation is brought about through language. I aim to show how conversation analysis is itself not sufficient to fully understand CS as a social strategy and demonstrate how an in-depth understanding of a community illuminates otherwise unnoticed functions.

Overarching the communication in the classroom is a comprehensive R&O set; the frame in which foreign language teaching at the advanced stage is determined. Due to the purpose of the sessions, classes are expected to be conducted in the target language as the sessions would generally be perceived as unsuccessful and purposeless were the class conducted in English. I will henceforth refer to this as the guideline R&O set. This set is indexed to a greater extent at the beginning of the session when addressing the class as a whole, with little interaction with the students:

TEA: **Tá bem? Eu quero que vejam as correções (.) e depois que os corrigam.** Okay?

See section 2

The whole of the turn here is performed in Portuguese, with the exception of 'okay' which is now considered to be integrated into the Portuguese vocabulary, having been borrowed from English...

The teacher, however, chooses to refer to grammatical terms in English:

¹ In this analysis, I use the term 'strategy' to refer to the choice of code as an interactional strategy, without judging it to be conscious or unconscious

TEA: **se vocês verem o que eram os vossos erros** (.) gender agreement urm verb tenses

See section 3

In both of these examples, the teacher is talking to the class and this style can be very impersonal, since there is no back channelling from other interlocutors and the teacher must manage the topic by himself, using discourse markers ('okay?') to mark boundaries in his address. The use of English in this discourse may be used to attract and maintain the students' attention. This contextualisation cue would be inferred correctly by most of the class as a reference to grammar text books, and the use of the terminology in the past.

The teacher also negotiates the guideline R&O set to appeal to the positive face of his students and increase solidarity. He changes his footing regularly and breaks the formal frame of the class to make it more informal. To demonstrate this we can view the foreign language classroom as a diglossic community. Portuguese is the teacher's native tongue differing from the other students in the class. For the students, Portuguese is the 'they-code', that of the teachers and lecturers who command authority and power. English is the 'we-code', the language of choice when talking to each other socially in and out of class. The teacher attempts to integrate himself in the group through conversing in the 'we-code', English, when outside the frame of the class:

TEA: I feel important. I'm on a secret mission (.) Is there it's recording already isn't it?

SVW: yeah

TEA: yeah I'll just () – I'll show up saying this sort of stuff

See section 1

This data was collected before the official start of the class when I had just begun recording. The teacher makes a joke and interacts socially with the few students who have already arrived. He does not feel obliged to communicate under the established R&O set for the class, and attempts to increase solidarity with the students.

Such attempts to increase solidarity were also demonstrated at the end of the class when the students were leaving. SJNI is one of very few male students in the group, and he has previously discussed sports injuries and football games with the teacher after classes. In section 5, he approaches the teacher to ask a grammar question:

SJM: **tenho uma perguntinha**

TEA: **sim** ((laughs)) **tern uma perguntinha é muito [é muito]**

SJM: **[sobre sobre] o**

sujeito cia precisar

TEA: **eso é complexo precisar**

See section 5

The conversation is initiated in Portuguese by the student. ‘Perguntinha’ is the diminutive form of ‘pergunta’, meaning question, and is a typical form in Portugal. The teacher attempts to make reference to this issue, following the code choice made by the student. He is, however, interrupted in this attempt as the student takes the floor, changing the frame and realigning the topic in his favour. This negotiation is successful and the interaction continues in Portuguese.

However, following the conversation and a 15 second pause, the teacher reinitiates the conversation about the ‘perguntinha’ in English:

TEA: **I like the perguntinha**
SJM: **sim** ((laughs))
TEA: very wi (.) [savvy]
SJM: **[eu pass] eu passei o mesmo tempo no Brasil e
tambem no [Portugal]**
TEA: **[em Portugal]** (1.0) very typical (.) **uma perguntinha**
(.) I I use that a lot actually (.) **I** think its makes things =
SJM: **sim sim**
Yes yes
TEA: = It’s quite nice (.) **uma perguntinha um cafezinho** (6.0) **onde é
que estiveste em Portugal James?**

See section 5

The student backchannels in Portuguese and establishes his code preference. He interrupts the teacher in the language of his choice and performs his turn accordingly. The teacher, however, also persists in English. SJM then backchannels again in English (‘sim sim’), but his contrast in code choice suggests that he is being dismissive of the teacher rather than encouraging him. This almost blunt response urges the teacher to code switch to Portuguese, and he asks an encouraging question in SiNfs code of choice, to attempt to allow the conversation to continue harmoniously. This realignment of footing as a negative politeness strategy prevents SJM from feeling impeded.

The teacher uses English as a contextualisation cue under the presupposition that using the ‘we-code’ of the class increases solidarity. The teacher uses the code to this purpose to a great extent with his English colleagues in the university. SIM, however, has not accurately inferred this contextualisation cue, and the conversation is conducted inharmoniously until the teacher realigns his footing accordingly.

Since the student has, however, conducted many informal conversations in English with the teacher, we may also interpret SIM’s persistence to use Portuguese as a FTA against the teacher, impeding his use of the ‘we-code’ of the class. This would be a distancing strategy and a positive impoliteness superstrategy to damage the teacher’s positive face wants and defy the solidarity he seeks. It could also be interpreted, however, as a strategy to demonstrate respect. The student may view Portuguese as the language of power; the ‘they-code’, and maintains the communicative distance in agreement with the status quo. Such possible conclusions could not be drawn using a conversation analysis of the data illuminating how possible interpretations of the data, which would otherwise be missed, are gained through ethnographic knowledge of a community.

The teacher allows students to establish a more informal frame in the classroom, as they establish the R&O set according to their preferences. In this sense, the teacher accommodates his speech to allow for the design of the students. To illustrate this point, I wish to analyse an exchange which takes place between a female student, SEB, as she discusses a piece of work with the teacher. SEB is not a confident student and does not speak aloud to a great extent in the class. She prefers to speak in English to the teacher, even though she understands Portuguese well and can converse in the language:

TEA: **embora pede (1.0) subjuntivo pede subjuntivo por tanto acredito que embora ofreça e ajude (2.0) okay?**
 SEB: yep
 TEA: okay **aqui há algumas ideias que podrias dizer** more to do with content justify a bit more - cos sometimes it makes more (3.0) ((reading SEB's work))
 SEB: it reads better
 TEA: yeah yeah **faz mais sentido em termos de conteudo (.) sim** and here yeah if you mention these then you have [to sort] of →
 SEB: [yeah]
 TEA: ← make it explicit **mas o resto bom trabalho**

See section 4

The teacher begins the conversation according to the R&O guideline set, and following a pause of two seconds, closes the turn and seeks a back channel from SEB. She gives this in English. The teacher then begins the following turn in Portuguese but intra-sententially code switches to English, seemingly changing his mind. SEB then gives encouragement for his change of code by constructing a collaborative floor and finishing the teacher's turn. The teacher continues this collaboration by repeating what the student said in Portuguese, increasing the solidarity they share. He then returns to English, the student's code preference. This exchange demonstrates how the negotiation principle functions in action. The teacher breaks the formal frame of the class and aligns his footing respecting the wishes of his students.

Since neither the students nor the teacher communicate within the formal frame of the class, the use of neither code is strongly marked on the markedness continuum. The data collected suggests that such a continuum is not universal, as Myers-Scotten suggest, but is instead dependent on the power dynamic of a given society. The markedness evaluator may be innate, but it can only be utilised by speakers if the continuum has been established within a community. In order for the continuum to be a part of the classroom discourse, the teacher would need to be stricter on code alteration. If a teacher refused the use of English, for example, the power and solidarity dynamic between the teacher and students would be very different. The use of English would be more strongly marked, and the negotiation principle would not be explored to such a great extent, meaning the teacher would have more authority.

The teacher, however, knows the class well and chooses to adapt his language to the preferences of the student; a clear example of speech accommodation through CS. This in turn prevents the student losing face as the negative politeness techniques prevent the student becoming impeded in their learning and losing confidence. This demonstrates an emphasis on pastoral care and social relations between teacher and student, as opposed to commanding authority by prohibiting the negotiation of codes.

Conclusion

This paper has provided evidence of classroom CS and its socially motivated properties. Rather than a metaphor for a community, I hope to have been able to demonstrate how power and solidarity are established through interaction in foreign language classroom discourse, as illuminated by my ethnographic study of the community. Accordingly, I have demonstrated how the 'brought along' and 'brought about' approaches to CS data are not binary, but can in fact complement and support each other.

The data I have collected is small and so precludes the ability to make universal statements based solely on these results. I have, however, been able to provide a detailed analysis of one example of CS and its social role in the classroom. It would also be interesting to study the same class in the presence of another teacher with a different teaching style to analyse how CS strategies are employed. A subsequent comparison of the data, alongside students' opinions and exam results, could provide a greater insight into the utility of my findings in relation to teaching strategies. This paper can also be used alongside other studies to establish a greater understanding of classroom CS at the advanced stage of foreign language education.

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Appendix

Transcription of data

A note on transcription

The data has been transcribed using standard transcript conventions, observing turns, interruptions, indecipherable words and pauses allowing a close textual analysis. The transcription will also utilise the traditional transcription conventions for bilingual exchanges, with a literal, and free translation where helpful, when the language is not English. Such transcription allows both bilingual and standard transcription to function side by side. The languages used are Portuguese and English. English is given in plain typeface, Portuguese in bold typeface.

Section 1 - Omins Osecs

Participants: TEA teacher, SVW student

TEA: yeah (3.0)

SVW: Its not very er - it doesn’t pick up much noise so

TEA: I feel important. I’m on a secret mission (.) Is there its recording already isn’t it?

SVW: yeah

TEA: yeah I’ll just () - I’ll show up saying this sort of stuff

SVW: ((checks to see if Dictaphone is recording)) yeah

Section 2 - 3mins 4secs

Participants: TEA teacher

TEA: **Ta bem? Eu quero que vejamos as correcoes (.) e depois que os**

Is it well? I want that you see the corrections (.) and after that them

corrigam. Okay? () T Okay eu **you entregar as correckies j as**

you correct. Okay? ()T Okay I am going to bring the corrections .1 the **corregoes / as composigoes e as analises (.) e queria eu** corrections T the compositions and the analyses (.) and wanted I (.)

ha muitas nit) marcados e corregidas - e uns outros simplesmente

there are many not marked and corrected - and some others simply

er asinalei - o que quero é que %races corrigam okay? **Queria**

er I marked - the thing that I want is that you *correct* okay? I wanted

sobretudo que yams identifiquem cos erros - ta? above all that you identify the errors - is it?

‘Alright? I want you to look at the corrections (.) and then to correct them. Okay? Okay I am going to hand out the corrections the corrections the compositions and the analyses and I would like there are many that are not marked or corrected and some other I simply pointed out. I want you all to correct okay? I would like you above all to identify the errors alright?’

Section 3 - 8mins 45secs

Participants: TEA teacher

TEA: Okay no final vases podem assina la r (1.5) gender (2.0) se vases Okay in the end you can mark (1.5) gender (2.0) if you

verem o que cram os vossos erros (.) gender agreement **urm verb** see what were your errors (.) gender agreement urm verb

tenses (.) okay **isto dava-se uma ideia de aquilo que devem**

tenses (.) okay this was giving yourself an idea of that which you should

focar-se nos proximos urm nas proximas nas proximas semanas focus yourself in the near urm in the near in the near weeks (.)

okay? (2.0) portanto o que eu assinalei as vezes E agreement **outras**

okay? (2.0) therefore what I marked as times it is agreement other

vezes a substantivos - pode ser o verbo tempo errado ou times it is nouns - it can be the verb time wrong or

simplesmente o verbo significado minima niio a exactamente simply the verb meaning minimum no is exactly

aquilo - okay? that - okay?

‘Okay ultimately you can mark gender if you see what your errors were gender agreement urm verb tenses okay this gives you an idea of what you should be focussing on in the following urm in the following in the following weeks okay? So what I marked sometimes is agreement other times is nouns it could be the wrong verb tense or that the minimum verb meaning isn’t exactly that - okay?’

Section 4 - 27mins 28secs

Participants: SEB female student, **TEA** teacher

SEB: I think they were more agreement problems than anything

TEA: hmm

SEB: I’ve got that little bit (1.0) there’s a massive introduction so

TEA: os **turistas** the tourists

5E5: mmm (1.0) I don’t know why acredito Vim m (1.0) I don’t know why I believe

TEA: okay acredito que Okay I believe that

5E5: yeah

TEA: acredito que (4.0) no its not the acredito que (.) embora (1.0) I believe that (3.0) no its not I believe that (.) even though (1.0)

embora pede (1.0) subjuntivo pede subjuntivo

even though it requests (1.D) subjunctive it requests subjunctive

por tanto acredito que embora after.] e ajude (2.0) okay?

therefore I believe that even though it offers and it helps (2.0) okay?

SEB: yep

TEA: okay aqui ha a Igurnas ideias que podrias dizer more to do with

here there are some ideas that you could say more to do with

content justify a bit more - **cos** sometimes it **makes more (3.0)**

content justify a bit more - **cos** sometimes it makes more (3.0)

((reading SEB's work)) SEB: it reads better

TEA: yeah yeah **fax mais sentido em termos de conteudo (.) sim and** Yeah yeah it makes more sense in terms of content (.)yes? And

here yeah if you mention these then you have [to sort] of here yeah if you mention these then you have [to sort] of ,

SEB:

[yeah]

TEA: 4- make it explicit **mas o resto born trabalho.**

¹⁻ make it explicit but the rest good work.

Section 5 - 47 mi ns 42secs

Participants: SIM male student, TEA teacher

SJM: tenho urna perguntinha I have a little question

TEA: sim ((laughs)) tern uma perguntinha é muito [é muito] Yes ((laughs)) He has a little question it is very [it is very]

TEA:

[sabre sabre] o

[about about] the

sujeito da precisar subject of the to need

TEA: eso 6 complexo precisar That it is corn plex to need

SJM: precisar mais () precisar mais de mais nome to need plus () to need plus of plus noun

TEA: sim [urm]

Yes [urm]

SJM: [porque] aqui no texto precisa de saber

[because] here in the texto it needs of to know

TEA: hmm

SJM: precisa do (1.0)

It needs of the (1.0)

TEA: *de uma ideia* Of an idea

SJM: dessa empresa ou 6 (.) variant& corn urn verbo? Of that business or it is (.) variable with a verb?

TEA: okay (.) corn verbo 6 varifivel okay (.) with verb it is variable

SJM: ah okay

TEA: okay é variavel e eu digo porque Okay it is variable and I say why

SJM: mas sempre corn nome But always with noun

TEA: corn nome sim With noun yes

SJM: okay

TEA: er (1.0) corn verbo 6 variavel e tem a ver corn Portugal ou Brasil

Er (1.0) with verb it is variable and it has to to see with Portugal or Brazil

SJM: ah okay

TEA: por isto durante o () quando to disseste nfo precisa eu nfo For this during the () when you said no it needs I no

corrigi nada obviarnente neo foste para o Brasil portanto no

I corrected nothing obviously no you went to the Brazil therefore in the

Brasil 6 precisar mais verbo precisar de mais nome ern Portugal Brazil it is to need plus verb to need of plus noun in Portugal

precisar mais de sempre

to need plus of always

SJM: ah okay

TEA: okay a into Okay it is this

SJM: obrigado

Thank you

TEA: nada

nothing

(15.0) ((James packs away his things))

I like the perguntinha

I like the little question

SJM: sim ((laughs)) Yes ((laughs))

TEA: very oil (.) [savvy]

SJM: [eu pass) eu passei o mesmo tempo no Brasil etambem no

[I spen] I spent the same time in the Brazil and also in the

[Portugal]

[Portugal]

TEA: [em Portugal] (1.0) very typical (.) uma perguntinha (.) I I use that a

[in Portugal] (1.0) very typical (.) a little questions (.) I I use that a

lot actually (.) I think its makes things

lot actually (.) I think its makes things

SJM: sirn sim

Yes yes

TEA: Its quite nice (.) uma perguntinha um cafezinho (6.0) onde é que

It's quite nice (.) a little question a little coffee (6.0) where it is that

estiveste em Portugal James? you were in Portugal James?

SJM: urm ern Lisboa Urm in Lisbon

TEA: Lisboa boa gosbiste? Lisbon good you liked?

SJM: sirn sim

Yes Yes

TEA: é uma boa cidade It is a good city

SJM: mas eu preferi Brasil e a gents

But I prefered Brazil and the people

TEA: mas sorte as duas But luck the two

SJM: Lisboa foi muito (.) sorprendente

Lisbon was very (.) surprising

TEA: mmm

SJM: Muito born gostei muito da cidade

Very good i liked very of the city

TEA: ((to other student)) ciao ciao ((to SJM)) oh é urn boa cidade

((to other student)) bye bye ((to SJM)) oh it is a good city