

Code-switching in the formation of conceptual pacts

Dialogue studies show that speakers conventionalise referring expressions through *lexical entrainment* and *grounding* where they implicitly agree to use the same expression to describe an object (Brennan & Clark, 1996; Mills, 2014; Nölle et al., 2020). However, there are no studies on how using multiple languages in the same conversation (i.e., *code-switching*) affects the formation of *conceptual pacts* even though psycholinguistic studies have noted that bilinguals can have shared conceptual representations despite lexical resources being separate among languages (Gollan et al., 2005; De Bot, 2020). In this study, we investigate how referring expressions become established in bilingual chat-based interactions, and if speakers code-switch when invoking an established conceptual pact. We hypothesise that, if the formation of pacts requires lexical entrainment, bilingual speakers are unlikely to code-switch when producing an established referring expression.

We conducted an experiment in which 10 Swedish-English bilingual participants interacted via a chat tool (Mills & Healey, 2013) as illustrated in figures 1 and 2. The experiment involved a tangram task consisting of two language conditions –English (*non-mixed*), and Swedish-English (*mixed*). The critical trials of the non-mixed condition involved 8 target tangram figures used to elicit the formation of conceptual pacts. In the mixed condition, we reused the target figures from the non-mixed condition to test whether the participants maintained the language in which the pact was established or if they code-switched.

We qualitatively analysed the data by categorising the responses in the mixed condition as either code-switched or non-code-switched. Results show that the type of response depends on whether or not the conceptual pact was established. Considering the participants' everyday language experience, participants who are used to code-switching in general, code-switched in the experiment when their partner had failed to identify the correct target tangram. On the other hand, bilingual speakers who did not code-switch often in everyday life used English in the non-mixed condition and Swedish in the mixed condition. We conclude that language environment and experience of bilingual speakers equally determine code-switching behaviour when referring to objects in interaction. More importantly, we observe that code-switching affords grounding even in the absence of lexical entrainment.

References:

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Figures:



Figure 1. Example of the director's perspective from the English condition



Figure 2. Example of the matcher's perspective from the English condition