Code-switching

It is quite commonplace for bilingual speakers to use two or more languages, dialects or varieties in the same conversation, without any apparent effort. This phenomenon, known as code-switching, has become a major focus of attention in linguistics. This concise and original study explores how, when and where code-switching occurs. Drawing on a diverse range of examples from medieval manuscripts to rap music, novels to advertisements, emails to political speeches, and above all everyday conversation, it argues that code-switching can only be properly understood if we study it from a variety of perspectives. It shows how sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, grammatical and developmental aspects of code-switching are all interdependent, and findings in each area are crucial to others. Breaking down barriers across the discipline of linguistics, this pioneering book confronts fundamental questions about what a "native language" is, and whether languages can be meaningfully studied independently from individuals who use them.

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To Alexander, Nicholas, Zoe and Philip

John Godfrey Saxe's (1816–1887) version of the famous Indian legend

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined
Who went to see the elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind

The First approached the Elephant
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk
Cried "Ho! What have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp
To me tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands
Thus boldly up he spake:
"I see" quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand
And felt about the knee
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man

Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long
Each in his opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right
And all were in the wrong!

This rendition of Saxe's poem is compiled from two sources: Don Fabun (1968), *Communications, the Transfer of Meaning*, New York: Macmillan, p. 13 and John Godfrey Saxe (1963), *The Blind Men and the Elephant; John Godfrey Saxe's version of the famous Indian legend. Pictures by Paul Galdone*, New York: Whittlesey House; a letter to me from McGraw-Hill (dated 15 August 1998) states that the text for this edition appears to be in the public domain, but the illustrations are not. Note that the text from each of these two sources differs from my version with respect to one line, and they are different lines. I have not seen the original first edition, but this is my best guess of it. Incidentally, the original parable originated in China sometime during the Han dynasty (202 BC–220 AD) as:"Three Blind Men and an Elephant".

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Acknowledgements

Transcription conventions

(1) Making the examples easy for English-speaking readers to follow has been given priority over consistency of presentation in different instances, and the use of non-Latin alphabets has been avoided. Extracts from data discussed by others have been presented as they originally presented them, e.g. examples from Auer, Li Wei and Sebba follow the Atkinson and Heritage (1984) conventions.

(2) A word-for-word (or morpheme-for-morpheme) gloss is sometimes given below the examples, as well as a free translation below that; at other times there is a free translation only. This depends partly on what type of point is being made about the switch, and partly, where the example is taken from someone else's work, on whether a gloss was provided in the original source.

(3) CS has been picked out by the use of bold script for one of the languages involved (and corresponding use of fonts in the translation below). Where there is a third language involved this appears in bold italics. The implied decisions about which words belong to which language are often somewhat arbitrary and should be taken only as a general indication.

(4) In the examples from data collected in Strasbourg, the spelling of Alsatian is based on a system derived from German spelling (Matzen, 1980), the purpose of which is to provide a standardized spelling system for the Strasbourg dialect.

(5) In Greek/GCD examples, Greek has been transcribed into a semi-phonetic Roman script, retaining the Greek letters /χ/, /δ/ and /γ/ which sound the same as those in the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). Other sounds follow English spelling: /θ/ is represented as 'th' and /ʃ/ as sh. The phonetic symbol /**j**/ is left as an i (e.g. [ja] = ia) so as to avoid confusion with the English letter j.

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