A postscript: code-switching and social identity

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Abstract

In this postscript, various ways to link conversational code-switching and code-mixing to questions of social identity are discussed. It is argued that bilingual speech is usually construed by members as an index of some extralinguistic social category. This category is not only ethnic but also social: bilingual speakers are portrayed and portray themselves in semiotic constellations such as local versus regional versus national, urban versus rural, autochthonous versus colonial, minority versus majority, etc. However, these constellations may be enacted under different circumstances in different ways. My postscript also warns of a rash equation of 'hybrid' language use with 'hybrid' social identity; such an equation may be as essentialist as that of nation and language which underlies traditional European language ideologies.
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There will be no one singular or undisputed answer to the question of what is new in sociolinguistics these days. Yet a good candidate answer would be the recent acute interest in social identity (or, more fashionably in the plural: 'social identities'). Although concern with social identity is not entirely without precedent,[1] it has only recently taken on a central role in sociolinguistic thinking. One reason for this may be the enormous success of the 'reconstructivist turn' (outdating earlier 'essentialist' approaches) in the debate about

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[1] Cf. in sociology the seminal work of Thomas Luckmann (1979, etc.), in sociolinguistics Robert Le Page's trend-setting "acts of identity" (1978, etc.) as well the contributions of Gumperz (Ed.) (1982), in research on bilingualism Sebba/Wootton's early 1984 paper on the topic only published in 1998, as well as Di Luzio and Auer (1986).

collective (for instance, national) *identities* in the social and historical sciences, which has now reached linguistics (cf. Mendoza-Denton, 2002). Another reason may be a certain dissatisfaction with variationist sociolinguistic models in which linguistic heterogeneity is 'explained' through correlations with pre-established social categories such as socio-economic status or ethnicity (cf. Cameron, 1990). Social identity is clearly a useful mediating concept between language and social structure. On the one hand, it allows one to see interactants as being involved in linguistic 'acts of identity' through which they claim or ascribe group membership, or more precisely, through certain speaking styles (which usually incorporate certain linguistic 'variables'). On the other hand, membership categories can be regarded as constituting members' knowledge and perception of social structures (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). Thus, instead of correlating social structures (say: 'gender') with linguistic variables (say: 'fronting of (aw) in Canadian cities'), linguists begin to focus on interactional exchanges in which a sociolinguistic style (which may include fronting of (aw)) is employed to claim/ascribe membership in a particular group (e.g., the female pole of the Membership Categorization Device (MCD) 'gender').[2]

It comes as no surprise then that interaction-oriented research on code-switching such as that featured in this special issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics* has come to draw heavily on social identity as an explanatory concept as well. In this postscript, I would like to add some thoughts on code-switching and the indexing of social identities in conversation by posing two questions: first, what kind of identity predicates (membership categories) can the alternating use of two languages be an index *of* in conversation? And second, how, exactly, can such an index be shown to be interpretively relevant?

The most straightforward link between identities and the alternating use of more than one language in discourse would be to treat the distinction between 'being bilingual' and 'being monolingual' in itself as a duplicatively organized MCD. This is rarely adequate, however, because as a rule, 'bilingual/monolingual' is not a membership category (cf. Wei Zhang, this issue). Bilingual speakers do not group themselves together by claiming co-membership simply because they speak more than one language. Usually, code-switching stands for something else. It symbolizes identities beyond the linguistic fact.

Consequently, when Gafaranga (this volume) argues that language itself is a social structure, he has something else in mind: he thinks of cases in which a given language (such as Kinyarwanda) is the only means by which a social group is identified. In this sense, speaking Kinyarwanda is used to construe Rwandese identity, and therefore, it constitutes (one particular facet of) social structure. In Gafaranga's case, language plays the dominant (and even exclusive) role in such 'ethnic' categorizations. This is certainly true for some sociolinguistic contexts in Africa, and it may also hold true elsewhere. Remnants of this idea can be detected, for instance, in the German government's recent decision to accept only those immigrants from Russia who can speak German as 'Germans'.[3] Yet in many other social contexts, folk ideologies do not see language as creating, but rather as

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[2] On the concept of the MCD, see Sacks (1972).

[3] In this decision, a prior position which exclusively made use of the *jus sanguinis*—descent—was overthrown. Note, however, the current practice still reflects a mixture of language and ethnicity (descent) as two criteria for Germanness.

reflecting, social (e.g. ethnic) structures. Speaking a particular language is seen as an index of membership in a particular social (including ethnic) group, which is, according to these ideologies, essentially based on something else (ancestry, culture, place of origin, race, etc., but not language; see the following).

Obviously, the monolingual use of a given language would suffice for indexing membership of this kind. How then does code-switching enter the picture? Here, particular semiotic constellations come into play which are sometimes referred to by distinctions between local versus regional languages, indigenous versus colonial languages, *lingue franche* versus national languages, or minority versus majority languages. In all such cases, the ethnically 'rich' language is used in addition to (alternating with) another language, which in itself cannot achieve the relevant kind of ethnic positioning of the speaker since it is neutralized by virtue of being used 'by everybody' (or at least by too many) in a given social field. This is what we typically find in immigrant situations in Europe or in the Americas, where the 'majority language' is neutral with respect to ethnic belonging[4] and the 'minority language' is a potential symbolic carrier of ethnic (or other) self-identification. Where language alternation is the mere consequence of an attempt to add some ethnic flavor to one's everyday language (i.e. the language of the majority, or of the receiving society in the case of immigration), this may suffice to explain 'acts of identity' achieved through switching. In many cases, however, we need more detailed models of language and social identity, models which tell us, for instance, what it means to be a 'dominant speaker of Spanish in Detroit' (Cashman, this volume) or a 'dominant speaker of German dialect in Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil' (Auer et al., 2002).

One such stronger model is implied in Myers-Scotton's (1993) contention that the languages used in code-switching carry certain sets of rights and obligations into the conversation which are activated whenever they are used. This model is alluded to in William's analysis of a Chinese American family dispute (this volume) in which the daughter takes over the role of the mother through her (sometimes mimicking) use of Chinese (which, in this role-reversal, is sometimes responded to by the mother's speaking English). Here, the underlying assumption is that there is some kind of link between Chinese language and belonging to the older generation, which in turn may be related to matters of authority and respect. Yet one of the main arguments convincingly made not only by Williams but also by the other authors in this collection, is that category-bound activities, evaluations, scenarios, and beliefs which may be associated with a membership category indexed by a language in a given community never directly enter the interactants' interpretations of the code-switching at hand; neither is there, as William's discussion shows (and as Li Wei argues more theoretically in his paper), an algorithm available by which participants can calculate the meaning of code-switching on the basis of markedness relations and rights-and-obligation sets. The burden rests on the analyst to demonstrate "how such things as identity, attitude, and relationship are presented, understood, accepted or rejected and changed in the process of interaction" (Li Wei, this volume) from case to case. This has to be done against the 'zero hypothesis' that the alternating use of the two languages has no or only a discourse-related meaning as a contextualization cue. The latter

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[4] But see below for qualifications to this statement.

holds, for instance, for Cromdal's data from a multilingual school in Sweden in which a 'division of discourse labor' is observed with English and Swedish serving different functions (Cromdal, this volume).

No doubt, discourse-related uses of code-switching may be overlaid by identity displays, and many contributions in this volume make clear that disentangling the two layers can be a complex matter. In addition, transported or transportable identities (Zimmerman, 1998) may compete with and may be combined with constructed locally relevant ones. (Cashman in this volume gives an example in her discussion of a speaker named Yesenia, who makes relevant her identity as a 'facilitator' for the Anglo/Latino mixed group, through code-switching between Spanish and English.)

Finally, there is another quite different way of looking at code-switching as an index of social identity. This perspective considers mixing/switching itself a style which indexes different types of social membership beyond the memberships indexed by the monolingual varieties involved. Hybrid ways of speaking (not the individual acts of alternation) symbolize social identities which can be considered (by the analyst) to be equally hybrid (multiple, flexible, changing, malleable). In order to understand this approach to language and identity, we need some background.

As is well known, discourse about national languages and national identities is a key feature of European modernity underlying the formation of the European nation states. This discourse is deeply rooted in, and makes use of, a *monolingual* language ideology. Each collectivity (particularly a nation) expresses its own character (*Volksgeist*) in and through its language. With some justification, we can call this ideology essentialist since it assumes a 'natural' (or perhaps God-given, *weltgeist*-derived) link between a nation and its language. Seen from this perspective, migration unavoidably threatens identity. Migrants may switch (national) identity and become members of the receiving society, giving up their language of origin in the melting pot. Or they may maintain their identity by forming a 'language island' which is not only geographically but also socially and ideologically separated from the 'main land'. This involves a constant struggle to withstand the surrounding society which threatens to break down the walls of this endangered collectivity. For the migrant, any solution between these two extremes would mean a loss of one identity without gaining another—social schizophrenia.

The demise of national discourse and the constructivist turn in the social sciences has rendered this view obsolete, at least in public and certainly in academic discourse. However, in what terms can the link between language and social identity be described if bilingual (ex-)migrant communities are no longer considered collections of social schizophrenics?

Here, we can turn to sociolinguist research which has shown that migration often leads to the emergence of new but systematic ways of speaking which do not fit into nationalist language ideology since they are neither standard varieties nor monolingual. Three of them can be distinguished today in Europe:

- *Code-switching and code-mixing styles.* It is necessary to speak of bilingual styles in the plural here since different groups of migrants and different generations have developed different ways of mixing and switching. A typology of these styles is still a desideratum of research. What is undoubtedly true though is that for many second and third-

generation bilinguals from migrant backgrounds, the usual way of interacting among each other is not monolingual but bilingual.

- *Ethnolects.* Studies in the Netherlands (e.g. Appel, 1999), Sweden (Kotsinas, 1998), France (centering around the discussion of the *verlan* spoken in the suburbs), and Germany (Kallmeyer and Keim, 2003; Auer, 2002) have shown that second and third generation speakers with migrant backgrounds no longer use fossilized learner varieties of the majority language. Instead, *ethnolects* associated with these groups of speakers have emerged that are sometimes used by speakers from monolingual, non-migrant backgrounds as well (see the following).

- *New varieties of the languages of origin* (divergence). We have relatively little reliable knowledge about this type of divergence; however, there are indications that the way in which the language of origin (say: Turkish) is spoken by second/third generation speakers from migrant backgrounds (in Middle and Northern Europe) differs from the standard and also non-standard forms of this language in the country of origin.

For their users, these new styles (including the bilingual ones) that have come into being as a consequence of immigration are resources for construing their social identity in the diaspora. What could be more natural, we might say, for bilinguals living in or between two worlds (their home society and the receiving society) than to express this unstable status through a bilingual speech style? At this point, however, it is essential to avoid the pitfalls of the old essentialist view. We cannot simply replace the notion of monolingual national standard varieties inherent in traditional nationalist discourse about language and society with the notion of 'new styles' that 'naturally' express migrants' identity. Despite the temptation to see an iconic relationship between 'mixed identities' and 'mixed languages', the emergence of such new speaking styles is not naturally determined in any sense by inherent characteristics of the groups to which they are attributed.

Here are two Turkish/German examples from Germany which make this clear. In each case, two adolescent girls are involved.

(1)   (Afsoon 3, A, 06.9; data from Hamburg)
((Afsoon and her Cousin Mona are watching TV and commenting on the looks and the dresses of the actresses. Turkish in italics))

Afsoon: <<surprised> welche so [nja>
                       which Sonja?
Mona: [ja:: im fernsehen da=
                                       well in TV,   here
              (*ona da*) <<acc> *BOKtan gelmiş* MANCHmal>
              (*even on her*)   it (the dress) looks sometimes *like shit*
              (2.0)
((. . .))
Mona: <<acc> ich find das eigentlich gar auch nicht mehr so schwer>
                       actually I don't think it is that difficult any longer
              (–) nur das' (–) hm::<<acc> diejenige die es AN hat>
                   only that   she who wears it

        macht das so:' *bO:K gibi*
        it makes her look   *like shit*
Afsoon: <<all,p> die hat aber=ne> gute figur-
                but she has a good figure

(2)   (courtesy of I. Keim, IDS Mannheim; data from Mannheim)

((Hatice [HA] and her sister Gülcan [GL] are having an argument about who has to bring their little sister wer *Şükrüye* to the doctor; Turkish in italics))

HA   MANN wegn der dumm KUH soll ich meine HAUSaufgabn net machen
       shit because of this stupid cow I cannot do my homework
       [langer
         man
GL: [*ya: niye* versprechen *yaptın o zaman?*
          so why did it you promise *it to her then?*
HA: isch HAB ihr net versproechen. *hasan amca* [*dedi*
       I didn't promise it to her. *Uncle Hasan did*
GL: [ja: du sollst dann ve.
       SAgen dass [du nicht kannst]
       well then you must say that you cannot do it
HA: [isch HAB gesagt] isch hab HAUSaufgaben *dedim*
                 I did say that I have homework to do   *that's what I said*
GL: GAR net (−) lüg nischt
       not at all (−) don't lie

    Although the grammar of the language alternation in these two extracts differs somewhat in detail, both Mona in the first extract and Gülcan and Hatice in the second extract produce mixed Turkish/German utterances (*BOKtan gelmiş MANCHmal, niye versprechen yaptın o zaman?, isch HAB gesagt isch hab HAUSaufgaben dedim*). Given the fact that young Turks in Germany usually do not use monolingual Turkish (or German) in informal conversations among themselves, but rather speak in a 'mixed' way, the straightforward interpretation of this code-switching would seem to constitute a claim to membership in the group of (young) Turkish speakers in Germany. Hatice and her sisters, the participants in the second example, are indeed of Turkish family background. However, Afsoon and her cousin in the first example are from a Persian background; their family languages are Farsi and Aseri. Thus, an essentialist explanation is bound to fail here: Turkish/German code-switching is not only used by speakers of Turkish background living in Germany, i.e. by those with a 'mixed Turkish/German identity'.
    From a more constructivist point of view, Afsoon's and Mona's use of a language which one would perhaps not expect them to use could be considered a case of what Rampton (1995) calls *crossing*: the act of speaking a variety which is not 'owned' by the speaker but rather 'belongs' to a group which they cannot legitimately claim to be part of (also cf. Quist, 2000; Auer, 2003). If such a wide definition crossing is chosen, a variety of cases of code-switching can be subsumed under this heading. One type, which one might call 'in-group crossing' since it takes place within in a close-knit network, occurs among

Cashman's (this issue) speakers in a senior citizen's day program, who "construct, maintain and cross ethnic boundaries" in a multiethnic environment through the use of Spanish. Here, the transgression of an Anglo participant into Spanish in Cashman's extract (2) is rejected by the Spanish participants who claim Latino identity and Spanish language competence exclusively for themselves. A quite different kind of crossing, perhaps closer to Rampton's own examples from the London area, is discussed by Jørgensen (this issue), who points out that Turkish–Danish grade school students use not only Turkish and Danish but also (mock varieties of) German and English in order to playfully invoke school roles.

In his own study, Rampton found crossing into London Jamaican Creole or Punjabi to involve a "distinct sense of movement across social or ethnic boundaries, [which] raises issues of social legitimacy that participants need to negotiate." (1995: 280) He found this to be the case in what he calls 'liminal situations', and noted that crossing of this type requires more complex inferencing than 'usual' code-switching.

This description does not apply to speakers like Afsoon and her cousin in example (1). They have integrated Turkish into their everyday life, and use it both among themselves and with Turkish friends without such a sense of interpretive richness and certainly not as trespassers into foreign linguistic territory. In particular, the alternating use of Turkish and German for them does not constitute a claim to membership in the Turkish community in Hamburg. For them, using Turkish in everyday life has shifted from an index of ethnic belonging (Turkish) to an index of Muslim belonging (a religious-cultural category) through a type of metonymic extension.

Simple and seemingly straightforward links between language and ethnicity (speaking Turkish—being Turkish) may fail, as shown in example (1). Language alternation can be void of identity-relevant meaning in some contexts, and yet in others extremely rich in the identity-work it accomplishes. To take the constructivist approach seriously into account then, would imply finding out for each and every case exactly what identity claims are occasioned by language alternation.

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