

Peter Auer
On the Meaning of Conversational
Code-switching

In: Auer, P., & Di Luzio, A. (1984). *Interpretive sociolinguistics: migrants, children, migrant children*. Ergebnisse und Methoden moderner Sprachwissenschaft, Bd. 20. Tübingen: G. Narr.

PETER AUER / ALDO DI LUZIO
(eds.)

Interpretive Sociolinguistics

Migrants – Children – Migrant Children



Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen

ON THE MEANING OF CONVERSATIONAL CODE-SWITCHING

J.C.P. Auer, Konstanz (Germany)

1. Introduction

Bilinguals in many speech communities use their linguistic repertoire as an interactional resource by code-switching between (i.e., juxtaposing) its elements during an interactive episode. In this paper, I will be concerned with the question as to how such code-switching is, and can be seen to be, interactionally meaningful. In particular, I will argue for a rigorous conversation analytic treatment of intra-episodic occurrences of code-switching. The first part of the paper is a critique of that approach to code-switching which has been of greatest relevance for sociolinguistics, i.e. the approach proposed by John Gumperz. In the second part of the paper, one of the many functional uses of code-switching is presented in some detail. By analysing this example of code-switching on 'non-first firsts' I hope to clarify some of the more theoretical issues discussed in the first part.

The data used in the second part are taken from a much larger corpus of materials collected in Konstanz among Italian migrant 'guestworkers' children¹.

2. A critique of Gumperz' "semantic" approach to code-switching

Gumperz first outlined his approach in several studies in English-Spanish and Ranamål-Bokmål code-switching in the U.S.A. and in Norway, respectively (cf. Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Gumperz & Hernández-Chavez, 1968/1975; Gumperz & Herasimchuk, 1972/1975). The most recent and most comprehensive version is given in Gumperz, 1982 (Chp. IV; a revised version of Gumperz, 1976), based on data from German-Slovenian, Hindi-English and Spanish-English bilinguals.

Gumperz (1982) calls his approach "semantic" - as opposed to 'merely' functional analyses. This label seems to have been chosen because - according to his model - each language of the bilingual speaker has a meaning (potential), just as a lexical entry has a core meaning that can be stated independently of its actual usage on a particular occasion. Gumperz proposes that the semantic value attached to the two languages of a bilingual speaker is - in most communities - that of the "we code" and the "they code": "the tendency is for the ethnically specific minority language to be regarded as the 'we code' and become associated with in-group and informal activities, while the majority language serves as the 'they code' associated with the more formal, stiff and less personal out-group relations" (Gumperz, 1982). This meaning potential is part of the cultural/linguistic knowledge of any member of the bilingual community and is 'retrieved' on the specific occasion of code-switching.

Of course, the ascription of meaning (potentials) to each of the languages has to be justified, that is, it has to be shown how they come to be associated with certain values. In the "semantic" model, this problem is solved by the important distinction between *metaphorical and situational code-switching*.

At the heart of this distinction lies the assumption that there are situational parameters such as participant constellation, topic, mode of interaction, etc., that allow one to predict language choice; there is a "simple almost one-to-one relationship" (Gumperz, 1982:61) between extra-linguistic parameters and the appropriate language for this situation.

In contrast to situational language choice, metaphorical language alternation during an episode is not predictable but open to the individual speaker's decision. As the language of interaction has already been established on the basis of the situational parameters, digression from this language is seen by members as the violation of a Gricean maxim (the maxim of manner). It therefore initiates an implicature involving the categories "we code" and "they code" and makes them relevant for the local interpretation of the metaphorical code-switching.

The "almost one-to-one-relationship" between language choice and situational parameters in the case of situational code-switching serves as the normative point of reference for the interpretation of metaphorical switching in the semantic model. Although, in this latter case, the situation remains unchanged, the speaker behaves 'as if' those parameters that prescribe the use of the other language were relevant, and thereby alludes to these parameters. Metaphorical

code-switching thus invokes the meaning potentials of both languages². Although the "semantic" model, as I have presented it up to now, can explain how metaphorical code-switching comes to have a meaning by referring to the notion of situational code-switching, the contextually specific impact the meaning potential has in any individual case of language alternation is not given by this distinction. Just as the 'meaning' (core meaning) of a word may contribute to the interpretation of an utterance in numerous ways, the semantic values "we code" and "they code" may influence the interpretation of code-switching in various ways, depending on the sequential and other context in which it becomes relevant. For instance, it may turn the repetition of a command into a warning or threat, but it may also turn the repetition of a question into a request for a general impersonal account of what went on, etc.. In order to grasp these local interpretations as carried out by co-participants, the "semantic" approach to code-switching resorts to interviewing or testing co-participants or other members of the community who presumably share the actual participants' cultural and linguistic background.

The central components of the semantic model then are:

- 1) the distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching,
- 2) meaning potentials associated with the two languages ("we code" and "they code", perhaps others),
- 3) methodologically, the necessity of tapping informants' knowledge of 'what went on' by means of interviewing/testing.

This seems highly plausible. However, a second (and closer) look leaves the reader with quite a few questions. Gumperz' writings are vague enough for differing individual interpretations³; my own interpretation, and my attempts to use Gumperz' proposals for the analysis of Italian/German code-switching data, led me to the conclusion that three questionable assumptions underlie the three central components of Gumperz' approach.

These are

- 1) the assumption that only some types of functional code-switching are related to the definition of the 'situation',
- 2) the assumption that the 'semantic values' of the languages of a bilingual speaker are not affected by conversational ("metaphorical") code-switching,
- 3) the assumption that informants' evaluations and accounts of participants' code-switching behaviour can be used in a straightforward way to elucidate its meaning.

Let us look at them in turn.

2.1. Situational vs. metaphorical code-switching

The distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching amounts to a distinction between "extralinguistic" defining components of the speech situation, and the "linguistic" ones, each of which may be related to conversational code-switching (cf. note 1)⁴. Accordingly, parameters such as participant constellation, time, place, topic are supposed to define the situation, whereas others, such as shifts between different sequential units (story/ comment, ongoing sequence/ side sequence, etc.), different "keys" (Hymes) ('joking' vs 'serious') or shifts in 'intimacy' or 'cooperativeness' allegedly leave the situation unchanged.

There are at least two problems with such a view. First, and perhaps most important, it is based on an odd, too confining conception of 'the situation' - something like a cage, chosen by the co-participants themselves, but inescapable as soon as the cage door is locked (i.e., the situation defined). This is certainly not an adequate image: 'the social situation' is something which is accomplished by co-participants. They do not define it and afterwards go on to interact in this framework; instead, through their interacting, they continuously produce frames for subsequent activities, which in turn create new frames. Thus, every turn, every utterance, changes some features of the situation and maintains or re-establishes others.

Second, I do not see how it should be possible to find a criterion by which to separate the two types of parameters. Gumperz himself shows convincingly that all those parameters which he regards as "stylistic", and as a consequence of an speaker's individual decision, have an important influence on the situation. We can describe "metaphorical" code-switching conversationally, that is, we can give an account of the way in which this "contextualization strategy" contributes to how we and participants 'hear' a given utterance. It seems highly implausible that the situation should be redefined by a change of topic, however gradual, but be left unchanged by sometimes much more dramatic interactional events, for instance on the level of sequentiality. Instead, whenever language alternation is functional, it contributes to the definition of the situation, and is influenced by it⁵.

There is no reason then to draw a line between two categories of code-switching. The only difference is not a categorial one but one of degrees: some parameters may be harder to re-negotiate than others, and may be related to

language choice in a more binding way. (Above all, ritual situations such as church services or courtroom proceedings are hard to 'subvert', including on the linguistic level.) In the case of the Italian children in Germany, for example, changes of participant constellation coincide more frequently with a change of language than for instance a change of topic. However, it should be clear that in the types of bilingual communities where code-switching has been shown to play an important role (work migrants in the highly industrialized Western cities, or western-oriented elites in countries or regions that are in the process of industrialization), examples of rigid relationships between language choice and situative parameters are hard to find.

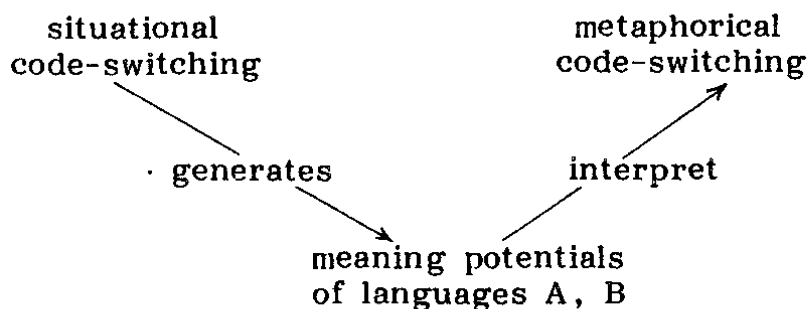
The point to be made here is that the distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching must be criticized from both ends; at the "situational code-switching" end, the relationship between language choice and situational features is less rigid, more open to re-negotiation, than a one-to-one relationship, at the "metaphorical code-switching" end, things are less individualistic, less independent of the situation. The distinction collapses and should be replaced by a continuum.

2.2. Languages and their meanings

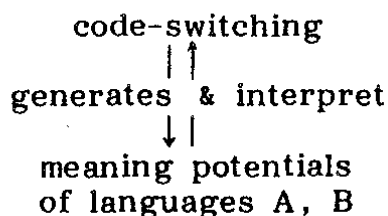
As soon as one gives up the distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching, there is no logical necessity to attach semantic values (meaning potentials) to the two languages. It now becomes an empirical question whether bilinguals who use the juxtaposition of two languages for the sake of a contrastive effect which has an influence on the definition of the situation, additionally build up a context-independent categorization scheme such as "we code"/"they code" applicable to the two languages. In the semantic model, the meaning potentials assigned to the bilingual member's two codes bridge the gap between situationally induced (and therefore predictable) and individualistic but situation-independent code-switching. Metaphorical code-switching can be meaningful only because the juxtaposed languages themselves have meanings which in turn are built up by situational code-switching. The two types of code-switching and the assumption of meaning potentials are inseparable and support each other.

The way in which meaning is attributed to the two languages here is mono-directional: meaning is generated by situational code-switching, becomes as-

sociated with the two codes, and is then used in those case of language alternation that cannot be interpreted situationally:



It seems to me that this model is at odds with the reflexive approach otherwise suggested in Gumperz' work, i.e. that linguistic activities are not only meaningful because they comply with some given 'rule', but also, by following this 'rule', make it relevant, confirm its validity, and even construe it. According to such a view, the proper (although not necessarily the only) *locus* at which semantic values may be assigned to the codes are the very same situations in which language juxtaposition is used for communicative purposes. The languages of a bilingual community acquire, maintain, or change their meanings in and by usage. Consequently, the monodirectional routes by which meaning is processed according to the semantic model have to be replaced by bidirectional ones:



It would be absurd to deny that the interpretation of particular conversational activities is or can be influenced by comparing them with 'similar cases' or 'precedents'⁶. Thus, the use of one language in a given situation may refer to other situations in the past in which the same language was used. Without determining the interpretation of the newly encountered occurrence, these precedents may be inspected by co-participants for common features, and brought to bear on the present case. What is important, however, is the fact that the 'new case' itself becomes a 'precedent' for future occurrences, and therefore actively contributes to the construction of the 'meaning of the language'.

This is particularly true for the functional uses of conversational code-switching, which - in many communities - have already reached a certain degree of sedimentation, i.e. can be considered a regular phenomenon. Thus, to give just one example, many writers have noticed that code-switching is systematically used for emphasizing repetitions. Suppose that language A is used for the repetition and language B for the repeated passage; then the patterned and regular transition from B to A carrying the conversational function of emphasis may be one of the ways in which the meaning potential of language A is construed. Language A may be displayed in this way as the language in which the speakers 'can say what they can't express properly in language B', for instance.

2.3. The use of informants' reports

Finally, some critical remarks on Gumperz' methodology are in order. The use of informants' reports is central to the "semantic" approach.

The aim in using members' reports is to capture the actual co-participants' point of view. However, although Gumperz emphasizes that the implicatures initiated by code-switching depend heavily on shared background knowledge available to speaker and hearer in the situation, he takes for granted that such a shared background knowledge exists both between informant and speaker-participant and informant and hearer-participant(s). The relationship between informants' and participants' culture is treated as a trivial problem at best.

Now suppose we want to analyze the meaning of code-switching among Italian migrant (guestworkers') children brought up in Germany. It is hard to imagine how we should be able to use these same children (especially the younger ones) as informants who are asked their opinion of the recordings in which they participate. Who should be chosen then as informants? How can we make sure that eg., students who have been brought up in similar circumstances in the migrant (guestworker) community but now are at the university will do? Evidently, their background knowledge cannot be identical with that of the children: there is the difference of age, of education, etc. We would first have to establish whether the comments of our students on the children's behaviour are any more valid than the analyses of eg., a sociolinguist who is not a native member of the community but has done ethnographic fieldwork in the particular network his tape-recordings come from, and has been listening to a wealth of

other tape-recordings from exactly the same speakers (both of which are not available to the informant-student). It seems to be a rash conclusion to prefer informants' comments on co-participants' behaviour to the analyst's reconstructive work⁷.

Of course I do not want to deny that every sociolinguist can learn much by interviewing members of the speech community he or she is about to investigate (at least at a certain stage of the work). If, however, it is true that there are degrees of membership in a given culture, and that cultural knowledge is not distributed evenly among the members of a given community, then it is necessary to take into account what the 'position' of the informant(s) in the community is. (This, of course, is almost a truism: even the grammarian has to select informants carefully in order to avoid describing the idiosyncrasies of a marginal group or individual as 'the rule'.)

A second problem with members' reports as used in the "semantic" approach is that these are treated as decontextualized pieces of information. Many investigations of interviewing and of similar data eliciting techniques in the social sciences have made it quite clear that members' reports are dependent on how they are produced, that is, on the context in which they were given. No data can be elicited in a social vacuum; rather, they are social activities that cannot be evaluated properly without the situational context in and for which they were being organized. This context is jointly achieved by informants *and* interviewers; it is therefore crucial to know how the analyst (or interviewer) contributed to the definition of the social situation in which the informant felt it appropriate to give the report which is later cited *in abstracto*.

This problem is aggravated by the fact that - according to Gumperz⁸ - informants cannot be asked 'open' questions about their interpretation of the recording the sociolinguist played to him, but have to be confronted with categories provided by the analyst. Thus, the predicates used for the description of the code-switches are not given by the informants spontaneously but are only agreed to by them.

The dangers of such a procedure are apparent. Imagine a case in which an informant is 'actually' quite unable to interpret the code-switching on the tape. Although s/he can understand what is being said linguistically, s/he has no idea how the switching may influence what is going on. Being asked explicitly by the interviewer to give an opinion, the informant may confess to being at a loss. However, it is much more likely that something different will happen.

Someone who has been asked to give an interview, or to comment on a problem construed by a scientist, is ascribed a certain expertise on a matter which the interviewer himself is lacking. Confessing not to know how to interpret the tape amounts to confessing not to be an expert on the issue. There are thus situationally induced reasons for an informant not to confess an actual lack of knowledge, and to make the interviewer believe that his or her expertise is of value in the interpretation of the tape. S/He will therefore answer the question put and, guessing the interviewer's intentions, will construe an answer which seems likely to be the one the interviewer wants to hear⁹.

Let me stress again that this is not an in-principle argument against the use of informants in sociolinguistics, or in the analysis of code-switching. It is, however, an argument against the uncontrolled and uncontrollable use of such data. My methodological proposal is to put the burden of analysis not on the informant, but on the linguist. Skipping conversational analysis for the sake of informants' interpretations of the data is only a seemingly easier way to the investigation of code-switching. There is no way to know that the informants' interpretations are shared by the co-participants unless we can show a coincidence by a detailed analysis of their conversational behaviour¹⁰.

3. An example: code-switching on non-first firsts

I hope to have given some reasons why the "semantic" approach to code-switching is not satisfactory. Its most fundamental assumptions must be questioned on theoretical and methodological grounds. Any viable alternative approach must replace these assumptions by more defensible ones. I suggest the following:

- 1) No difference is made between situational and metaphorical code-switching; all types of discourse-related alternation (help to) produce changes in the definition of the situation, i.e. can be characterized conversationally, and are interactionally meaningful. Differences are only a matter of degree, that is, one type of language alternation may be more likely than another.
- 2) The meaning potentials attached to the two language are not only treated by participants as a resource which can be used for interpretive purposes, but at the same time construed and maintained by every instance of directionally stable code-switching.
- 3) Informants' reports may only be used in a controlled way; they do not replace but only (where necessary and possible) supplement a thorough conversational analysis of the data.

In this second part of the paper, I want to discuss some German-Italian materials in order to exemplify this approach a little. The phenomenon is one which has also been observed in other bilingual communities¹¹; for reasons which will become apparent below, it is called 'code-switching on non-first firsts' here. Some exemplary extracts¹²:

(1) (THEATER 1)

((Adult mo. and Niccolo have been speaking Italian with each other on the way; they have now arrived at Rocco's place. Rocco and Niccolo are friends. Rocco is at the window on the second floor or the building.))

→07 Nc.: ROkkO:? pO:j vjeni:re;
 08 (4.0)
 *09 derfst kommen?
 10 Ro.: ich weiß nicht muß noch fragen;
 11 Nc.-mo: domanda

→07 Nc.: *Rocco? can you come down;*
 08 (4.0)
 *09 are you allowed to come?
 10 Rc.: I don't know I have to ask;
 11 Nc.: *he ((is going to)) ask*

(2) (BETREUUNG 1900, 50)

((interaction during a play-group))

→01 Nc.: kO:za fai - - Innoc'entsa;
 ((ff))
 →02 ke koza fa:i ^ju:: - sac'c'ë -
 *03 Innoc'entsa mit dir sprecht jemand -
 *04 ge kO:za fai.
 05 Li.: u: njEnte c'aO
 06 (3.0)
((Innocenza doesn't respond))

→01 Nc.: *what are you doing - - Innocenza;*
 →02 *what are you doing ju:: - (know) -*
 *03 *Innocenza somebody is talking to you -*
 *04 *what are you doing.*
 05 Li.: *u: nothing good bye*

(3) (BILDERKLEBEN A-9, 1)

((interaction during a play-group; the children are about to glue collages))

→01 Fr.: was isch des,
 02 (1.25)
 *03 k=kosa E kwello;
 04 Sr.: la guonna/ - (p) fac'o i go::nnë (....)
 < >

→01 Fr.: what is this,
 02 (1.25)
 *03 w=*what is this*;
 04 *the skirt - I do the skirts (...)*

(4) (THEATER 7)

((*fds - Niccolo's mother - and mo. speaking Italian; co-present Niccolo and a little German boy from the neighborhood, Berndt*))

→11 Nc.: schau an [die Füße?
 12 fds: [E tEdEsko;
 13 mo: e tedesko;
 14 fds: E tedEskë nOn E italjanë - [eh Berndt;
 *15 Nc.: mama gwa:rda kwEsti [pjEdi [të të pŃ pŃ pŃam
 16 mo?: [(allOrë) - ah komm:

→11 Nc.: look these [feet?
 12 fds: [he is German;
 13 mo: he is German;
 14 fds: he is German he isn't Italian - eh Berndt;
 *15 Nc.: mamma look these [feet të të pŃ pŃ pŃam
 16 mo?: [(well then) - ah come:

Let us first look at the turns marked by the arrows. Intuitively, we would call these turns initiative, as opposed to responsive: Niccolo's *ROkkO: ? pO: j vjeni: re*; ('Rocco, can you come down') calls for Rocco's answer; in example (2), Niccolo's question *kO: za fai* ('what are you doing') can be expected to be followed by Innocenza's answer; in the same way, Fiorella - in extract (3) - addresses Serafina by her *was isch des* ('what is this'); finally, in extract (4), Niccolo wants to draw his mother's or mo.'s attention to the little boy's tiny feet (*schau an die Füße?* 'look these feet'), an activity which should be responded to, at least by an acknowledgement token such as 'yes'.

More technically speaking, the arrowed turns can be described as first pair parts of an interactional structure called "adjacency pair" in conversation analysis. Schegloff & Sacks (1973) characterize this structure as follows:

- 1) it comprises two participants;
- 2) it comprises two interactional activities;
- 3) it assigns the two activities to the two participants;
- 4) it assigns an order to the parts of activities and participants: the structurally provided position for the second one is adjacent to the first one;
- 5) it organize two activity-types into one format (such as: question/answer, first greeting/ second greeting, etc.).

It follows from the third and fourth feature of adjacency pairs as given by Schegloff & Sacks that as soon as a first participant has completed the construction of a recognizable first activity, s/he is required to give up the floor. Indeed, this is obviously the case in our extracts (1) to (3) as is demonstrated by the silence occurring in the conversational position *post* first activity. This silence (among other things) can be seen as a first speaker's signal of his willingness to give up the turn. However, it also follows from the third, fourth and fifth feature that immediately after the first participant has finished, the second speaker should take up the turn and organize the second pair part made "conditionally relevant" by the first. In this case, the data doubtlessly 'contradict' our expectation: instead of a second pair part, what follows the first pair part in extracts (1) to (3) is silence, and after this silence, not a second participant's utterance, but a continuation of the first participant's turn. (In extract (4), we find another participant's utterance; it is, however, not the one predictable on the basis of the adjacency pair initiated by the first utterance, but one related to the on-going conversation between mo. and fds., who both disregard Niccolo's intervention.)

It looks as if our data were at odds with our interpretation of the arrowed activities as first pair parts; in neither case the features enumerated by Schegloff & Sacks seem to hold. But although in fact no second pair part is observable in the conversational slot in which we expected it, we can show that co-participants orient to this second pair part as a feature of the conversation documented in the extracts. More precisely, we have evidence that at least the co-participant producing the arrowed activity orients to the adjacency pair structure and sees the absence of its second part, not as any absence, but as the absence of an expectable and describable next activity. (And in fact, in this sense, the data are not 'exceptions to the rule', but valuable evidence for its relevance.)

Let us look at the silence *post* our candidate first pair parts again. Just as the continuation of the on-going conversation which excludes Niccolo in (4), it is attributable to the addressed second participant who - for some reason or other - fails to produce the required next activity. Such behaviour is 'inferentially rich': it invites the first participant to contextually infer the 'why' of the lacking response. (Possible 'why's include: the other party couldn't hear or understand it, wouldn't be disturbed doesn't know how to respond, doesn't know how to interpret the first pair part, etc.)

Compare, in this context, the following, very similar data:

(5) (QUATTRO CANI 800, E)

06 No.: schener (Stuhl) [(meinsch?) [hn?
07 t: [K̄arneval [Karneval
(f)
→08 was machst du K̄arneval;
09 (1.0)
10 No.: versteh ich ni:cht!
*11 t: karneva:le, ke fai; -
12 No.: oo_moo
(etc.)

06 No.: nice (chair) [(you think?) [hn?
07 t: [carneval [carneval
→08 what are you going to do in carneval;
09 (1.0)
10 No.: I don't understand it!
*11 t: in carneval, what are you going to do; -
12 No.: m
(etc.)

(6) (VIERER G:67/II)

06 m: adesso tu c'i devi dire le parolac'c'e ke sai
06 in italiano.
07 Al.: A]o
→08 Cm.: [ich!! - - owei/o der Alfre:do [weiß am/ weiß
(f) (f)
09 Ag.: [he he he
(f)
→08 Cm.: am meiste;
10 m: kome?=
*11 Cm.: =(lesch)/ - ehm ehm Alfredo sa eh: - [piu
(mp)
12 Al.: [a eh: ich
(mp)
13 weiß echt nicht
>

06 m: now you have to tell us ((all)) the swearwords
06 you know in Italian.
07 Al.: oh [yes
→08 Cm.: [me!! - - kno/ Alfredo knows m/ [knows most;
09 Ag.: [he he he
10 m: what?=
*11 Cm.: =(last)/ - ehm Alfredo knows eh: - [more
12 Al.: [no eh: I
13 really don't know

Just as in the first extracts, there is some trouble with a participant's turn in data (5) und (6); it is dealt with in a different way, though. In (5), t's

question *was machst du Karneval*; ('what are you going to do in caranaval') is followed by silence instead of a second speaker's response, and in this sense, invites the first speaker to draw inferences about this notable absence in a fashion exactly parallel to data (1) to (3); but in addition, recipient Nora explicates her problem with t.'s first turn in a fairly explicit way in line 10, relating it to her lacking (passive) competence in German. In (6), Camillo's (Cm.) attempt to 'pass on' the task of enumerating Italian swearwords is not even followed by silence but immediately receives the recipient's *kome* ('what'), i.e. an open repair initiation.

If we now compare how a conversational activity is rendered 'problematic' in the first and the second set of examples, we can easily find the following differences; although the 'covert' problematization we have found in the first set (i.e. the notable absence of a next activity) avoids initiating an other-initiated, subordinated repair sequence¹³, it has the disadvantage of leaving the first speaker uninformed about the reason of the second participant's problem. Open repair initiations such as the ones we have observed in (5) or (6) can narrow down the range of possible interpretations; eg. in (5) to only one interpretation. In any case, an open repair initiation excludes one alternative which is of great relevance in the case of a 'covert' problematization: that the first participant has not been heard.

Common to all our extracts is the fact that the first participant (*post* silence and/or repair initiation) makes another attempt to elicit a recipient's response (cf. (1):09, (2):01/02, (3):03, (4):15, (5):11 and (6):11), and if this is not successful, additional ones (cf. (2):03/04. The linguistic activities by which this is done are re-dos of the first (but unsuccessful) pair parts. On the structural level of the organization of conversation *via* formats, they are new instances of first pair parts; on the level of the actual time in which the interactions unfold, they are second attempts: here is the reason why we speak of non-first firsts. (Note that this description of the activities in question may not be one which is available to all participants; if, in(1) to (4), the problem is actually one of hearing on the acoustic level, the addressed second party will not necessarily be aware of the non-first character of the first pair part he now hears.)

From the perspective of everyone who is in a position to compare first and non-first firsts (that is, in (1) to (4), at least from the perspective of the first participant and all non-addressed hearers and overhearers, in (5) and

(6) from the perspective of all ratified participants and potential overhearers) there is one important difference between first and subsequent first pair parts: the language in which it is formulated.

We notice that Niccolo switches from Italian to German in (1), and in (2), Fiorella switches from German to Italian in (3), and so does Niccolo in (4); t. uses Italian instead of German in (5), and Camillo in (6). So here we seem to have a structural position in which code-switching occurs, not always, but with a certain regularity.

This might be all we are able to say about code-switching on non-first firsts; language alternation could be seen as one of the strategies available to Italian-German bilingual children in Germany to mark non-first attempts. However, I want to consider a hypothesis here which goes beyond this description; the hypothesis is that the direction of code-switching on non-first firsts is not arbitrary (as it should be if its only function was to mark their being non-first), but is related to the location of a 'problem' in the first first, as inferred by the speaker.

There is some evidence from monolingual conversations that non-first firsts orient to the supposed problem in the first first - for instance, if the problem is located by the speaker on the level of acoustic understanding (i.e., on the level of the 'channel'), this can be reconstructed from an increase in loudness on the second attempt. By changing amplitude, the speaker displays the contextual inference prompted by the second participant's non-response¹⁴. A similar display of problem location can be observed in extract (2), line 01; Niccolo provides evidence for the interpretation that - according to his inferences - Innocenza's non-response is due to her lacking attention, by formulating a summons (an address term preceding his second formulation of the question).

Could it be possible that code-switching on non-first firsts locates 'wrong language' as the problem of the first attempt? In this case, silence would be interpreted by first speakers as a 'covert' pendant of example (5), where Nora explicitly states that she doesn't (or doesn't want to) understand.

Some suggestive if very weak evidence for this hypothesis is the fact that if second participants take up first speakers' non-first first pair parts, they do so in the newly chosen language; it is this language which conforms with their preferences or competences at least to such a degree that they do not switch back into the other language.

Extracts (4) and (6) provide some more evidence for the non-arbitrariness of the direction of code-switching; here, we can observe a conflict of language choice before the code-switching occurs, and language can be seen as the conflict resolution. Thus, in (4), Niccolo's mother and mo. have been talking in Italian; when the boy intervenes (line 11), he not only intends to interrupt this conversation but also introduces a language which is not the agreed-upon language of interaction between mo. and fds. By code-switching into Italian in line 15, Niccolo yields to the established language, and thereby improves his chances to elicit a response. In (6), m. has asked Cm. to enumerate swearwords in Italian (line 06), but he responds in German and thereby also initiates a conflict on the level of language choice. M.'s repair-initiation (*kome*) is interpreted by the boy as a reminder of the language preferentially used by m., and therefore elicits an Italian reformulation of the 'pass'.

In order to see if the remaining examples conform to our hypothesis as well, we have to take account episode-external knowledge about the preferences and competences of the participant¹⁵. As far as (1) is concerned, we know that the language preferentially used among Rocco and his friend Niccolo is German; Italian has been used for the conversation with mo., and an adult German bilingual who usually insists on this language. Consequently, Niccolo's code-switching on the non-first first in line 09 is a switch into the 'normal' language of interaction between the boys. (In line 11, he re-directs his attention to mo. and, taking up the language she and he have used on the way, 'translates' Rocco's answer for her.)

Similar considerations have to be applied to extract (2). In this case, it is necessary to know that the language usually spoken between Niccolo and his sister Innocenza is German (mainly due to Innocenza's influence); the boy's code-switching in line 03 can again be seen as the use of the unmarked language, and as a 'correction' of the old language use.

Whereas Niccolo's code-switching behaviour in (1) and (2) mainly orients to his co-participants' language preferences, Fiorella in extract (3) orients to her co-participant's linguistic competence: because Serafina had only been in Germany for two or three months at the time the recording was made, she hardly knew any German and 'had' to be addressed in Italian.

A final set of examples can be cited to support our hypothesis. As not all non-firsts coincide with code-switching, we may ask which ones don't; we can predict that no code-switching will occur in this position if the common language

of preference, and the one in which all participants are competent (enough), is used for the first attempt already. This is indeed the case:

(7) (SCHNECKENFRESSER 28:4/%)

((discussion about eating habits in Italy and Germany among four 15- to 17-years olds))

13 Al.: du musch schau^e was des für dein Kö[r]per denn isch
 14 Ag.: [du musch au
 15 mal schau^e was des für - [u partafol'ë=
 16 Cl.: [der/
 →01 = [hör mal
 02 Cm.: [hn,
 03 m: ohn [hn hn^o
 *04 Cl.: [hör mal
 05 Ag.: [oo(..... [.....)oo
 06 Al.: [kwand=jë ag'g'a ppenzá u mang'á:r;
 07 a mi non me interessënë i so:ldë

13 Al.: you have to see what it is for your bo[dy is then
 14 Ag.: [you also have
 15 to see what it is for - the [purse=
 16 Cl.: [the/
 →01 = [listen
 02 Cm.: [hn,
 03 m: hn [hn hn
 *04 Cl.: [listen
 05 Ag.: [(..... [.....)
 06 Al.: [when I have to think of eating;
 07 for me I am not interested in money

(8) (HELPER 40/41)

((Several children and two adults - mo. and t. - are playing a card game. The point is to 'help' the player who is in a 'problem situation' represented by a picture; this is done by giving him one of one's own cards, and by explaining how the thing represented on it could be of help. Mainly because of the two adults, the agreed-upon language for the game is Italian.))

→16 Nc.: iO sO unO Monika -
 *16 iO [sO unO
 17 In.: [ich glaub ich weiß
 01 was=[ë is
 02 mo: [ja u uno dopo l=altro -
 ((continues in Italian))

→16 Nc.: I know one Monika
 *16 I [know one
 17 In.: [I think I know what [(it) is
 02 mo: [yes o one after the other -

In (8), Niccolo choses the language-of-interaction from the very beginning of his linguistic activities; in (7), Clemente's language choice agrees with his friends' and his brother's language choice, and in addition is the language usually spoken among the four youngsters. In both cases, the original language has no potential for being given up for the sake of some interactional effect.

Let me then summerize the results of this little conversation analysis of one of the many types of conversational code-switching, and relate these results back to the discussion of Gumperz' "semantic" approach.

(1) We have identified a conversational environment, and briefly described it in technical terms, in which code-switching occurs with a certain regularity - apparently not only in Italian migrant (guestworkers') children in Germany, but also in other bilingual communities. By the very fact of being amenable to such a structural description, code-switching on non-first firsts is "situational": it coincides with a certain activity which is partly marked by it.

(2) We have given some evidence that the direction of code-switching in this position is not arbitrary but related to local problems of language choice in the tape-recorded episodes, and to larger scale language preferences, language competences, and regularities of language use. These are referred to, but also maintained and supported by the directionality of switching on non-first firsts. In this sense, the local meaning of this type of code-switching is dependent on, and at the same time contributes to, a context-independent ("semantic") value associated with the two languages i.e., it is "metaphorical". (An example for such a 'value' is the preference for German as the language regularly used in many peer groups.)

(3) Despite these regularities, code-switching on non-first firsts is in no way predictable. Although the contextual conditions may be given (i.e. divergence of language preferences or competences), a participant is free to choose if s/he wants to use this particular strategy to enhance this chances of getting another party's response. Having to decide between giving up a (momentary) language choice, and eliminating a possible (inferred) reason for the second participant's non-response, s/he may as well opt for the first alternative. There is no (almost) one-to-one relationship between language choice and situation.

4. Conclusion

Although many linguists have for a long time held the view that code-switching is not meaningful at all, it is - thanks above all to Gumperz' work - widely accepted today that conversational code-alternation has interactional meaning. There is a certain danger now for the pendulum to swing too far into the other direction, i.e. to treat each and every instance of language alternation as meaningful in the same 'semantic' way. Such a view does not take into account that it is not the mere fact of the juxtaposition of two languages that makes relevant something like 'meanings' attached to these languages in the semantic sense. Code-switching may be functional without having a semantic meaning of this type. We cannot take it for granted that every switching alludes to something like the "we code" and the "they code". If we have the impression that this is the case, the burden of proof is ours. We then have to show that and how the meaning potentials of the languages are actually and effectively used by the co-participants.

NOTES

- 1 A comprehensive description of the code-switching behaviour of these children can be found in Auer (1983). For a general outline of the M.I.G.-project ("Muttersprache italienischer Gastarbeiterkinder im Kontakt mit Deutsch"), cf. Di Luzio (1982). A preliminary grammatical description of the type of Italian used by the children is given in Auer & Di Luzio (1982/1983).
- 2 Cf. Blom & Gumperz (1972: 425): "The semantic effect of metaphorical switching depends on the existence of regular relationships between variables and social situations of the type just discussed. The context in which one of a set of alternatives is regularly used becomes part of its meaning, so that when this form is then employed in a context where it is not normal, it brings in some of the flavor of this original setting." In Gumperz 1982, metaphorical code-switching is characterized as "a shift in contextualization cues, which is not accompanied by a shift in topic and in other extralinguistic (*sic!*) context markers that characterize the situation" (p. 81).
- 3 Cf. the confusion over the terms 'metaphorical', 'conversational' and 'situational' in the literature (for instance, Dittmar & von Stuttenheim, in this volume, p. 35ff; Trumper, in this volume, p. 187).
- 4 Not surprisingly, Gumperz is not entirely consistent in classifying some features as linguistic, and others as extra-linguistic. For instance, topic is the most important factor for metaphorical code-switching in the Hemnesberget study, but in Gumperz (1982), it triggers situational code-switching. Quotes and addressee selection are treated as situational factors in the older paper, but in the new ones, they have something to do with metaphorical switching, etc.

- 5 I think Pride's critique of Gumperz aims in the same direction. He writes:
 "the contrast 'situational redefinition': 'metaphorical enrichment' is perhaps
 as fundamentally mistaken (at any rate as incomplete) as would be the view
 that social situations in general cannot CHANGE quite radically upon being
 given some added - even fleeting - element of 'enrichment'" (1979: 39f).
- 6 Cf. Moerman (1973) and Pollner (1979).
- 7 Such a preference would seem to be based on a highly disputable monolithic
 conception of culture, which has been criticized in a very convincing way
 in a paper by Sharrock & Anderson (1980).
- 8 Oral communication at the workshop 'Interpretive methods'; cf. p 112.
- 9 This strategy - to answer questions on the basis of guesses instead of
 actual knowledge in order to avoid an 'embarrassing' avowal of lack of
 competence - is so wide-spread that the more clever travel guides to 'exotic'
 countries give advice such as the following (from Schwager, 1981; my trans-
 lation):

If you have to ask for the way, ask at least two natives. If their
 answers are the same, they may be correct. If they differ, ask a third.
 Natives don't want to confess that they don't know. In order not to
 lose face, they give some arbitrary answer. Also, they would consider
 it impolite not to be able to give an answer.

The situation of the European tourist who wants to know the way to the
 Taj Mahal is in no theoretically interesting way different from the one of
 the sociolinguist who wants to know what the meaning of Hindi/English
 code-switching is. (Also, tourists and sociolinguists seem to share a certain
 naiveté in treating informants' answers.) Therefore, we are well advised to
 take into consideration that the problems of tourists and sociolinguists may
 be the same when it comes to interpreting 'natives' answers.

- 10 Indeed, Gumperz repeatedly presents his interpretations of passages in
 question without analyzing them; compare eg. his analysis of the example
 on pp 80f (1982), where Gumperz writes that A.'s Hindi question treats
 the appointment as "objective fact" without giving any reasons for this
 description. Often, Gumperz doesn't seem to care very much about sequen-
 tiality; sometimes he makes strong claims about the effect of a given type
 or instance of code-switching on the subsequent development of the sequence,
 which are based on informants' reports, but fails to reproduce this sub-
 sequent passage. (I am thinking of extract (54) in Gumperz (1982):

A: apka intervyu kaisa huwa? HOW DID YOUR INTERVIEW GO?
 ((short pause))

A: how did your interview go?

where the English reiteration is said to turn the question into 'give me a
 general impersonal account' instead of 'tell me frankly, how did the interview
 affect you'.) It would surely be very valuable evidence if co-participants
 could be shown to respond in the predicted fashion.

- 11 Cf. the parallel examples from English-Spanish and Hindi-English bilinguals
 given by Gumperz (1982: 30, No. (30) (31) (32) and (92), No. (57) and
 (58)).

- 12 Note the following transcription symbols:

/	: phonetic break-off (glottal constriction)
(.)	: phonetic pause
-	: pause not exceeding 0.2 seconds
h̃ h̃ h̃	: laughter
[̣ [̣	: higher/lower pitch level
ʔ	: glottal stop

For the transcription of the Italian passages, we use the following symbols:

- E, O, I : open vowels
- e, o, i : closed vowels
- ɤ, ɔ : very closed (high) variant
- k, g : [k], [g]
- ts, dz : [ts], [dz]
- c', g' : [tʃ], [dʒ]
- s, z : [s], [z]
- s', z' : [ʃ], [ʒ]
- l', n' : [λ], [ɲ]
- mm, dd : [m:], [d:]
- ë : [ə]

Italics in the translation indicate that the original is Italian.

13 A "side sequence", in Jefferson's terms (cf. Jefferson, 1972).

14 Cf. Bergmann (1980).

15 Although this knowledge is not episode-specific, it may be reconstructed conversationally which, for reasons of space, cannot be done here. Cf. the data in Auer (1982).

References

Auer, J.C.P.

- 1982 Eine differenzielle Analyse zum Sprachalternationsverhalten von neun italienischen Migrantenkindern (=Papiere des SFB 99, Konstanz, No 54).
- 1983 *Zweisprachige Konversationen. Code-Switching und Transfer bei italienischen Migrantenkindern in Konstanz* (Ph.D. thesis, Konstanz; =Papiere des SFB 99, Konstanz, No 79).

Auer, J.C.P. & Di Luzio, A.

- 1982/83 "Linguistic variation and its meaning among Italian migrant children in West Germany", in: *Meaning, Use and Interpretation of Language*, edited by Ch. Schwarze (Berlin); an enlarged version is available under the title "On structure and meaning of variation in the speech of Italian migrant children in Germany" (=Papiere des SFB 99, Konstanz, No 74, 1983).

Bergmann, J.

- 1980 *Interaktion und Exploration* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Konstanz).

Blom, J.P. & Gumperz, J.

- 1972 "Social meaning in linguistic structures: Code-switching in Norway", in: *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, edited by J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (New York), pp 407-434.

Di Luzio, A.

- 1982 "Für eine Untersuchung der Muttersprache italienischer Gastarbeiterkinder im Kontakt mit dem Deutschen", in: *Actes du colloque sur le bilinguisme, Neuchâtel, 14.-15. 9. 1981* (=TRANEL 1982).

Gumperz, J.

- 1976/82 "The sociolinguistic significance of conversational code-switching", in: *Papers on Language and Context* (=Working Paper No 46, Berkeley); revised version as "Conversational code-switching" in *Discourse Strategies*, by J. Gumperz (Cambridge), pp 59-99.

Gumperz, J. & Herasimchuk, E.

1975/72 "The conversational analysis of social meaning: a study of classroom interaction", in: *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, edited by M. Sanchez & B. Blount (New York), pp 81-115; first in: *Sociolinguistics: Current Trends and Prospects*, edited by W. Shuy (Washington), pp 99-132.

Gumperz, J. & Hernández-Chavez, E.

1968/75 "Cognitive aspects of bilingual communication" (=Working Paper No 28, Berkeley, 1968); reprinted in: *El lenguaje de los Chicanos*, edited by E. Hernández-Chavez (Arlington, 1975).

Jefferson, G.

1972 "Side sequences", in: *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, edited by J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (New York), pp 294-338.

Moermann, M.

1973 "The use of precedent in natural conversation: A study of practical legal reasoning", *Semiotica* 9:193-218.

Pollner, M.

1979 "Explicative transactions: Making and managing meaning in traffic court", in: *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology*, edited by G. Psathas (New York), pp 227-255.

Pride, J.B.

1979 "A transactional view of speech functions and code-switching", in: *Language and Society*, edited by W.X. McCormack & S.A. Wurm (The Hague), pp 27-53.

Schegloff, E. & Sacks, H.

1973 "Opening up closings", *Semiotica* VIII.4:289-327.

Schwager, E.

1981 *Indien/Sri Lanka selbst entdecken* (Zürich).

Sharrock, W.W. & Anderson, D.

1980 On the demise of the native: some observations on and a proposal for ethnography (=Occasional Paper No 5, Manchester).

Comments

Gumperz

I don't know if I should call this a comment on the paper or a defence of my position. I think that rather than doing either, I'll start off by putting the whole problem a little bit in context. I should say that the first version of the code switching paper, the 1976 version which Peter Auer referred to was in fact a working paper which has been rewritten somewhat and is now the fourth chapter in my book which has just come out in Cambridge University Press. My reason for saying this is because I think the paper has to be put within the context of the whole argument. The paper doesn't just try to make this one point; it tries to make a number of points. The paper was a preliminary

attempt to come to terms with code-switching in general; both for a linguistic and for a sociolinguistic theory. Among other things, I wanted to make the point which hasn't to my knowledge been said before - and that is that code switching does produce meaning. In other words, I wanted to get away from the notion of function in my distinction between the notions of function and meaning.

Function is a very vague term. A social function is something significant in relation to some social system, and the definition of that social system is usually dependent on the analyst's hypothesis. The analyst's hypothesis usually depends on the type of data he has collected. And so the notion of function is problematic due to its dependence on the way in which a social system is defined.

I would like to talk about code-switching in relation to both a theory of conversation and a theory of contextualization. A theory of contextualization would enable us to distinguish, for example, between meaning as something autonomous, and meaning which is dependent on what I call - following a suggestion from Jenny Cook-Gumperz - "situative interpretation". Whereas meanings can be discussed apart from the situation, interpretations are always situative.

Interpretations are the output of a process of inference. The input for this process is supplied by certain kinds of lexical and grammatical knowledge as well as various kinds of background knowledge. Interpretation is also the result of the processing of a series of cues which structural linguists would identify as marginal, such as prosody, dialect variation, code-switching and so on. My point in this article is that some of the things that are set aside as marginal must be considered as contributing to interpretation and not to meaning. I think this becomes clear within the context of the book. So according to this perspective, if we look at code-switching then as a way of contextualizing a message, I really don't see any conflict between what Peter Auer suggests and what I'm suggesting in terms of this particular problem. I don't see myself as having suggested a model in terms of a 'formal' model. I saw the article as a preliminary step, as a way of sorting out a whole series of issues, citing data that would contribute to the solution of these issues. Certainly it is not meant to be a formal model in the way that models are used in linguistics.

There are a number of other points about the paper which I feel need to be clarified. I think Peter Auer is right in his view that the distinction between situational and metaphorical switching cannot be a total one. It can't be a quali-

tative one. It always has to be one of degree. There are, however, some very important points that distinguish situational switching from metaphorical switching. Metaphorical switching occurs demonstrably below the level of consciousness. You no more plan a metaphorical switch than you do your choice of tense or mood in speaking. People's accounts of metaphorical switching often differ from what they do, and people are often not even aware of what they do. I'll discuss this when I get to my last point which deals with the problem of elicitation. I think you get the same kind of phenomena when you ask people when they use language 'x' and when they use language 'y'. You get a whole series of conflicting answers. You get the same pattern of answers when you ask people, for example, when they use the future tense and when they don't use the future tense.

Situational switching is on the other hand much more planned. An example for situational switching is the traditional Catholic service where certain parts were said in Latin and certain parts were said in the local language. The point that I want to make about situational switching is that it is one of the things that serve to define the situation. I didn't want to say that it is a necessary condition for defining the situation. It is one of a series of factors. What the situation is, is a matter of the conversational inferences that have to be negotiated within the conversation. Conversational phenomena usually overcommunicate. What we process is a series of signals at a number of different levels of signalling.

The other point that I would make in terms of the general theory of conversation is that what the situation is is always something that has to be negotiated. This point comes out clearly in the paper by Margaret Simonot. The contrast between the Keim paper and the Simonot paper is that in the Keim paper the people were able to negotiate what the situation is or what the activity is, whereas in the Simonot paper they weren't. They differ in the nature of the contextualization. They use the linguistic side to indicate what these assumptions are. But this is never a 1:1 relationship.

When I talked about situational switching in the paper I said that it is almost a 1:1 relationship. I don't see a conflict in the two interpretations. I think that at this stage there are several interpretations possible and I welcome Peter Auer's contribution from this perspective.

Now there are two important points that need to be made about the distinction between the kind of conversational analysis that I suggest and some forms of

sociological analysis which deal with such things as non-first firsts. The problem is how do I know what a non-first first is. That assumes that we pay attention to everything when involved in a conversation, that your short-term memory retains everything that we hear. There's evidence that we don't necessarily do that. Conversational signalling is very redundant. I can also give you a sentence with certain kinds of prosodic treatment that mark it as a non-first attempt. For example, if I say "Come here.", that's a first attempt. But if I say, "Come *here!*" that's probably a second attempt. I don't have to hear the first "Come here" to process the second one as most probably a second attempt. By the way in which the message is treated linguistically I assume that it is a second attempt. It is something that is given in relation to something that was said before. Now how do you account for this in terms of the kind of structuralist analysis that you find in ethnomethodological work?

I think it's important to make a distinction between what Frederick Erickson calls "real-time processing", in other words what you can assume the speaker knows at a particular point in the interaction, and physical time. I think that if you assume such things as non-first firsts you are talking from the perspective of a text analyst who has the whole text before him. What I would have to do is to deal only with what we could assume that the speaker knows at one particular point in the interaction, and to look at the totality of cues.

Using the notion of contextualization I can deal with that because I can say, "this is treated as if it were X". I'm talking at the level of interpretation - not at the level of meaning. Given the totality of what I know, I have reason to expect that this is to be interpreted in that way. I think that if we make this distinction between meaning and interpretation and introduce the notion of contextualization we will be able to deal with those issues that conversational analysts talk about.

The final point concerns the problem of the form of the elicitation. I think it's not a question of whether we elicit or not, but rather it's a question of how we can consult an informant's opinion. When we ask an informant about the meaning of an utterance we get a whole series of interpretations, and interpretations are always dangerous. That's the point I made in chapter 2 of the book, which is a rewrite of my earlier article called "The Sociolinguistics of Interpersonal Communication". The point is that there is always an infinite regress of interpretation at the level of meaning. But if we build our elicitation theory on the traditional techniques of structural linguistics where

we focus on the perception of cues then I think we need to ask whether the informant is receiving the same kinds of cues as we are.

And usually when you ask people about codeswitching you don't ask what does this mean, but is this the same or not. Or you can give people the alternative between one of two possible paraphrases and then add a qualifier: I ask you, I ask you urgently, I'm asking you but I'm not serious. Here you can usually get a consistent pattern of responses. The first question is: Is this the same or not the same? And then if they say that it's not the same the second question is: How do you know it's not the same? What is it about the way in which the message was said that makes you think so?

This is not a foolproof methodology. But with this method we can get a consistent pattern of responses. If you get a 20/80 distribution you can assume you're doing well. If you get a 40/60 distribution you know that you have to do some more work.

So it's not a question of whether you should use informants or not. It's how you can demonstrate what the relationship is between your informants responses and your analysis.

I think generally speaking we cannot but use informants' reports. American linguists have been quarreling about the nature of Black English for the last 10 or 15 years. And we're now beginning to find out that what is crucial about Black English involves differences on the discourse level: The use of such features as vowel elongation like in the contrast between *big* and *bi:g*, or the use of certain intonational features to bring about meaning reversals like with the word *bad*. *Bad* is 'bad' and *ba:d* is 'good'. Those are all discourse level phenomena. This is especially true of the vowel elongation. We are not likely to hear the difference between *big* and *bi:g* unless we get some hints from informants. The amount of time we spend looking for these distinctions would be greatly increased without the use of informants' opinions. So, although we should treat the information we receive from informants with caution, we should in no way disregard this source.