

FUNCTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS
ON SLOVENE-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present some data on Slovene-English code-switching; this is defined as the alternate use of two linguistic systems by an individual speaker within the same conversation. A distinction is made between code-switching on the one hand and borrowing on the other. Only those items that are not phonologically and morphologically integrated into the receiving language are considered to be code-switches (cf. Wentz & McClure 1977, Pfaff 1979, Poplack 1980, 1981, Berk-Seligson 1986). For instance, in the sentence quoted in section 3.2.3., “First je že graduiral na high school,” only *first* and *high school* are considered to be code-switches, while *graduiral* is a borrowing. For more examples, see the second half of this article. Some of the functional and structural constraints that govern this sociolinguistic phenomenon are examined, and a tentative explanation of the governing motives is provided.

2. Research Design

2.1. Data Collection

Data for this study were gathered from American Slovenes, partly in Slovenia during the summer of 1986, but for the most part in Cleveland, Ohio, in August 1987. A total of 75 subjects participated. Of these, 30 were first-generation, 39 were second-generation, and 6 were third-generation immigrants. The relevant demographic data are presented in Table I.¹ All the participants were functionally bilingual, and could accordingly be placed on a continuum ranging from Slovene-dominant bilinguals at one extreme through balanced Slovene-English bilinguals in the center to English-dominant bilinguals at the other extreme.²

		1 st GENERATION 30 (40%)		2 nd GENERATION 39 (52%)		3 rd GENERATION 6(8%)
		pre-war 19(63%)	post-war 11(73%)	pre-war 31(80%)	post-war 8(20%)	pre-war 6(100%)
SEX	male	26	54	42	37	33
	female	74	46	58	63	67
AGE	15-30				87	50
	30-40		18	6	13	50
	40-60		64	26		
	60-70		18	42		
	70->	100		26		
EDUCATION	less than 12 years	100	9	10		
	high school		18	58	25	
	college		73	32	75	100

I. PARTICIPANTS: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA (%)

2.2. Methodology

Two techniques were used for data-collection: interviews (here labeled 'conversational interviews', see below) and follow-up self-report questionnaires on language use and attitudes. A total of 130 hours of conversation was tape-recorded; 45 questionnaires were filled out by participants.

With regard to the techniques designed for this study, it should be pointed out that the original intention was to gather information from as large and as varied a random sample of subjects as possible in order to be able to examine the impact of different sociolinguistic factors on code-switching. After the first few interviews, however, it became clear that code-switching was not very likely to occur in an interview with a stranger. It was hypothesized that a more intimate setting involving small groups of people related to each other (through family or friendship or ethnic organization membership ties) would be better suited for the observation of code-switching. As a result, the original concept was modified to focus on people who were part of small or medium-sized social networks (similar to those in Milroy 1980). The two immediate objectives, therefore, were (1) to gain access to groups of this kind, (2) to design a kind of interview that would yield maximally natural speech data.

The first objective was achieved through the assistance of an in-group member of the community with whom I had earlier become acquainted, and in whose home I stayed throughout the whole period of my fieldwork in Cleveland. She and the members of her family provided initial contacts with the participants in this study, introducing me as 'a friend from the old country' and, in most cases, participating in the conversational interview sessions themselves.

As for the second objective, it was hypothesized that in order for the participants to produce natural speech data, including code-switches, the interviews would have to resemble natural conversations to the highest degree possible. I therefore focussed on the major difference between interviews and conversations, i.e., the roles assigned to the participants in the speech events. In an interview, the interviewer is in a superior position, is perceived as the one who has the right to ask questions and control the direction of the exchange, while the interviewee is under an obligation to provide answers to the questions. In conversation, on the other hand, topics are not pre-specified and participants are free to choose their own. Also, the amount of speech contributed by the participants is normally more equally distributed, and the contributions are normally more content-loaded.

Typical interviews took place in the relaxed atmosphere of the subjects' homes with groups of from two to six present: interviewees, myself, and occasionally my bilingual American Slovene friend. The topic—my interest in the life of the Cleveland American Slovene community—was introduced in very general terms either by myself or by my friend, after which I provided no further guidance. Instead, I listened, answered their questions about myself, related my personal experiences and, in general, adapted my linguistic behavior to that of my interlocutors. While the same topics did recur every now and then, this happened spontaneously, without my pursuing any specific set of questions. The tape recording was done as unobtrusively as possible with a free-standing, pocket size, battery-operated recorder. Although the subjects were in all cases asked their permission to be recorded, it happened more often than not that they forgot all about it. A comment by one of my interviewees, "Oh, I didn't realize you were still taping. It's all right, but you're really wasting good tape. I've nothing interesting to tell you. I feel really bad about it," is really illustrative. The informal character of such sessions was enhanced by the non-threatening, friendly environment of the subjects' homes: ethnic dishes and drinks

were usually offered, and often Slovene songs were sung and jokes told. The relaxed atmosphere was also characteristic of those interviews that were recorded at the picnics, the parades, and after the meetings of singing society rehearsals.

While I as yet have no empirical proof that my approach works better than other techniques used in the past (cf. Labov 1972 on the use of peer contexts and the contexts of personal narratives), I nevertheless feel that the larger amount of less focussed speech obtained in these conversations may be an indication of their efficiency. Another factor that seemed to contribute to this end was the fact that I interviewed most of the participants only after I had already met them several times and in different settings. I also had a chance to observe the same people in different roles.

In all cases, the participants were given the choice of speaking Slovene, or English, or "half pa pu" as they called it. I switched codes too, since my strictly adhering to either language would more likely than not have resulted in an undue emphasis on that language and would have prevented, or at least lessened the amount of, code-switching.³

As for the second data-collection technique: the questionnaires were designed to explore the subjects' attitudes towards the two languages and their use, with regard to different topics, situations, and interlocutors. Questions about their attitudes toward their ethnic heritage, their involvement in the organization of ethnic activities in the community, and their contacts with 'the old country' were included, and also the request for self-rating with respect to reading, writing and speaking ability in the two languages. The questionnaires were administered after all the conversational interviews were completed, so as not to affect the subjects' normal linguistic behavior. The choice of language for completion of the questionnaires was left to the respondents.

The two techniques were designed to answer the following research questions:

1. FROM THE FUNCTIONAL VIEWPOINT

1.1. What is the relationship between code-switching and the situational components, viz.:

1.1.1. The participants in the conversation?

1.1.2. The topic of the conversation?

1.1.3. The setting of the conversation?

1.2. What motivates code-switching and what is its social function?

2. FROM THE STRUCTURAL VIEWPOINT

2.1. What types of code-switching occur in the data?

2.2. Do the structural constraints proposed in previous studies (Wentz & McClure 1977, Sankoff & Poplack 1979, Pfaff 1979, Poplack 1980, 1981, McClure 1981, Woolford 1983) apply to these data?

2.3. Which are the most frequently switched items and structures?

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Functional Aspects

3.1.1 Components of Speech Situation

3.1.1.1. Participants

The participant factor turned out to be the most important one in code-switching. Apart from their motivations (see 3.1.2.), two aspects of the participants' code-switching behavior are considered: a) their ability to switch codes, and b) the extent to which they switch codes.

The participants' ability to switch codes depended primarily on their functional competence in the two languages; this in turn depended on the following variables: the age and order in which the two languages were learned; the educational level; the language used in the home during childhood and at present; the opportunities to actually communicate in the two languages; and the length of time spent in the U.S.A.

The extent to which the participants switched codes in conversations seemed to be affected, in addition, by the participants' attitudes toward the maintenance of their language; their subjective feeling of being more comfortable speaking one or the other language; and their attitudes toward code-switching itself.

With respect to all these criteria, the sharpest differences were seen to be across generations. The complete data are presented in Tables II and III. Detailed commentary, which must involve the quantitative analysis of the relations between these variables and measures of ability in and extent of code-switching, will be the subject of another report.

3.1.1.2. Topic

The topic of the conversation did not appear to have a significant effect on code-switching. The same topics were discussed in the two languages by different participants and—when both my bilingual American Slovene friend and I were present—by the same participants. While certain topics did seem to be discussed in one language more often than the other, this did not occur with any reliable consistency. When this did occur, it could be explained by an association between the language chosen and the particular topic: e.g., an event more often discussed in Slovene than in English was one that had been experienced in a Slovene-language context (in Slovenia or at an ethnic event) or one that had previously been discussed in Slovene.

This was confirmed by the questionnaire answers. First-generation and pre-war second-generation respondents reported that they spoke about family, childhood, 'the old country' and ethnic events more often in Slovene than in English; the other generations did so to a much lesser extent and, apparently, their association of such events with a particular language was weaker. Topics more frequently discussed in English than in Slovene, on the other hand, were work, business, government, technical matters, and the like.

3.1.1.3. Setting

The setting of the conversation seemed to be more relevant to the occurrence of code-switching than topic. The settings that seemed to favor code-switching were home environments, groups of friends or family members, and other relaxed, informal occasions; more formal occasions almost precluded code-switching. For instance, the official, working part of a singing society rehearsal or a fraternal organization meeting would be strictly in English, whereas the discussion afterwards would be in either or both languages. By the same token, large informal ethnic events such as picnics, dancing performances and parades, seemed to encourage code-switching. Information provided by participants, on questionnaires and informally, supported this observation.

3.1.2. Motivation

While all the factors mentioned above may make for an interesting classification of American Slovenes according to degree of code-switching, they still lack the power to explain why code-switching should occur at all. I believe that motivations for code-switching may best be explained within the framework of *interpersonal accommodation theory* (Giles 1977, 1980, 1984), whereby the speaker adjusts his/her speech style to that of the

		1 st GEN.		2 nd GEN.		3 rd GEN.
		pre-war	post-war	pre-war	post-war	pre-war
L1 learned	Slovene	100	100	84	38	
	English			16	62	100
Age of L2 learned	Prior to kindergarten			16	62	100
	kindergarten/grade school			84	38	
	late teens	16	100			
	after age 20	84				
Household language	during childhood	S	100	100	54	100
		E			16	80
		S-E			30	20
	at present	S			16	
		E		36	20	65
		S-E	100	64	64	35
opportunity to speak Slovene	w/spouse	21	100	71		
	w/children	37	100	16		
	w/parents		32	100	34	
	w/grandparents					34
	w/friends	100	100	100	37	
	w/neighbors		10	48		
	ethnic organiz.	100	100	100	100	100
	visiting Slovenia	12	100	100	100	100

II. FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPANTS' ABILITY TO SWITCH CODES (%)

ATTITUDES TOWARDS:		1 st GEN.		2 nd GEN.		3 rd GEN.
		pre-war	post-war	pre-war	post-war	pre-war
Ethnic heritage	positive	100	100	100	100	100
	negative					
nationality	Slovene	79	100	50		
	American Slovene	21		32	50	25
	American			18	50	75
language maintenance	important	100	100	81	22	25
	not important			19	78	75
	order of importance (1-5 scale*)	1	11	72	3	12
		2	21		38	12
		3	63	28	10	
		4	5		16	
		5			33	76
mother tongue	Slovene	100	100	52	25	
	English			48	75	100
Feel more comfortable speaking	Slovene	100	82	42		
	English		18	58	100	100
code switching	approve	58		45	25	68
	disapprove	42	100	55	75	32

* Slovene music, old traditions and holidays, traditional food, language, work ethic.

III. FACTORS AFFECTING EXTENT OF CODE-SWITCHING (%)

addressee. This adjustment may be interpreted as an attempt on the part of the speaker to become more like the addressee; the strategy works in the interest of a smooth interaction and is employed whenever the conversation is perceived by the speaker as potentially profitable. In different situations benefits to be gained from a conversation may vary to a great extent; in the case of my interviews, the benefits for my interviewees would have included: news from 'the old country'; the fact that I was going to write a book about American Slovenes and therefore promote their case; interest in the story to be related; or simply my company and my interest in them. The way for them to signal their willingness to establish closer ties with me was to resort to what we had in common: ethnic background and language. Even those who were clearly English-dominant switched codes. This hypothesis was confirmed, time and again, when my bilingual American Slovene friend was present at the conversation interview sessions: while interviewees did code-switch when talking to her, they did this to a much lesser extent than they did with me, although they were fully aware that I spoke English well. Similarly, the extent to which they switched codes with other participants varied according to their perception of the addressee. They switched codes more when talking to those, mostly elderly, people whom they perceived as more competent in Slovene or whom they knew (or thought they knew) to prefer to speak in Slovene. A further test was my own code-switching practice: when I would switch codes, in most cases the participants would reciprocate by following my linguistic example.

Once the decision to switch codes is made, of course, other reasons for code-switching may come into play, such as easier and faster access to a certain item or structure in the relevant language at the given moment. As the primary objective of speakers who are willing to accommodate their addressees is smooth and efficient communication, this too can ultimately be explained within the same theoretical framework.

Two other reasons reported by participants for their use of code-switching were (a) for humorous effect, which again falls into the category of interpersonal accommodation; and (b) in order to exclude a third person from the conversation, which is the direct reverse of interpersonal accommodation.

3.2. Structural Aspects

Note that the examples presented in this section have been extracted from the total corpus at random and are in no way meant to be representative of the linguistic behavior of the community at large. The frequency and relevance of various code-switching patterns can only be determined by applying a thorough statistical analysis to the data. Until this is accomplished, these examples serve the purposes of illustration only.

3.2.1. Code-switch types

The data show that Slovene-English code-switching is predominantly **intersentential**, i.e. the switches occur between sentences: one or more completely Slovene sentences are followed by one or more in English, or vice-versa. **Intrasentential** code-switching (switches within one and the same sentence) on the other hand occurs with a much lower frequency; it is normally limited to single lexical items, discourse markers, and other short constituents. While some researchers consider bilinguals who switch **intersententially** to be less competent code-switchers (see Pfaff 1979, McClure 1981, Zentella 1981, Poplack 1980, 1981), my data do not support this view. If anything, the pre-war second-generation participants, who are balanced bilinguals and appear to code-switch more than the others, have the most intersentential code-switches. A possible reason for the higher frequency of this kind of code-switching may be the negative attitudes of the

majority of participants toward code-switching, as well as the syntactic structures of the two languages themselves.

3.2.2. Constraints on code-switching

3.2.2.1. The Free Morpheme Constraint

This constraint states that code-switching cannot occur at the point of morpheme-binding, i.e., at the boundary between two morphemes (cf. Pfaff 1979, Sankoff & Poplack 1979, McClure 1981, Poplack 1980, 1981). In other words, an item is not assimilated grammatically (e.g., it is not conjugated or declined) in the receiving language unless it is also assimilated phonologically. It is not clear whether this constraint holds true for the Slovene-English code-switching data analyzed here: a very few counter-examples occur, and these are for the most part limited to proper names,⁴ as in the third example in 3.2.2.1.. Here CLEVELAND is considered unassimilated (and therefore English) because of its unassimilated pronunciation [klíjvlənd]. If the speaker, on the other hand, had pronounced this word [klívəland], it would have been considered assimilated, i.e., Slovenized, and its use would not have counted as code-switching. The distinction between code-switching and borrowing should be observed at all times while analyzing the data.⁵

je en reku, da majo Judje največ *SCIENTIST*ov

[Someone said that Jews have the greatest number of scientists]

jaz to ne *LIKE*am, YOU KNOW

[I don't like this, you know]

SEE, v *CLEVELAND*u je blo zmeraj taku THAT. . .[See, in Cleveland it has always been such that . . .]

3.2.2.2. The Equivalence Constraint

This constraint states that code-switching may occur only at points in a sentence where the syntactic rules of both languages can be adhered to. A number of studies, especially ones dealing with Spanish-English code-switching, have demonstrated its validity (Sankoff & Poplack 1979, Pfaff 1979, Poplack 1980, 1981, Woolford 1983). My data show numerous violations of this constraint, however. Among the most frequent are:

a. ungrammatical word-order:

ja pa tolk prišparal, da je *SECOND CLASS* karto kupil.

[He saved enough to buy a second class ticket.]

Standard: . . . karto drugega razreda . . .

b. passive instead of active voice:

NO, IT WASN'T EASY dokler *niso bli otroci gor zraseni*

[No, it wasn't easy until all the children were grown up]

Standard: . . . niso otroci odrasli

c. omission of the impersonal 'it':

Ø IS CHEAP, če imajo SALE

[It is cheap if there's a sale on]

Standard: It is cheap . . .

d. omission of the reflexive 'se':

pa Ø ne spomnim, YOU KNOW, THIS WAS SO LONG AGO
 [I don't remember, you know, this was so long ago]
 Standard: . . . se ne spomnim . . .

e. use of marked personal pronouns instead of the zero pronominal form in unmarked positions:

in potem sem *jaz* šla v STORE TO CHECK
 [And then I went to the store to check]
 Standard: in potem sem šla . . .

f. omission of determiner:

in potlej smo kar naenkrat zagledali 0 HOUSE IN WHICH WE WERE TO
 STAY FOR THE NIGHT
 [And then all of a sudden we saw the house . . .]
 Standard: . . . the house . . .

g. omission of case markers in nouns (and adjectives?):

jaz sem pol šel iz HIGH *šola*⁶ na univerzo 'Case Institute'
 [I then went from high school to Case Institute of Technology]
 Standard: . . . iz . . . šole . . .

h. omission of prepositions, or redundant use of prepositions:

ja, smo čakali *za* štir leta BEFORE WE WERE FINALLY ABLE TO GET IT
 BACK
 [Ya, we waited for four years. . .]
 Standard: . . . smo čakali štiri leta . . .

i. no dual number agreement between auxiliary and I-participle:

. . . pa *smo imela* večerja AND THEN . . .
 [. . . and the two of them had supper and then . . .]
 Standard: . . . *sva imela* . . .

It is possible that Spanish-English code-switching is governed by this constraint more than Slovene-English code-switching because of the greater similarity between Spanish and English, and the greater divergence between Slovene and English syntactic structures.

3.2.3. Examples of Common Switches

a. discourse markers (*WELL, YOU KNOW, BUT, NOW, O.K., ALRIGHT, SEE, I MEAN; ja, no*)

b. conjunctions (*AND, AND THEN, THAT; in, in potem, potlej, da*)

c. numerals, in dates, addresses, measures:

Eden ima tri otroke. *FIRST* je že graduiral na HIGH SCHOOL.
 [One has three children. The first has already graduated from high school]

Oh, tu je *MAYBE FOUR* tisoč *SLIDES*, če ne več.
 [Oh, there may be four thousand slides here, if not more.]

O.K., *sva se poročila IN NINETEEN THIRTY-FIVE*
 [O.K., we were married in 1935.]

d. quotations:

AND I SAID, "*SURE bi blo drugač. Tebe ne bi blo.*"

[And I said, "Sure it would have been different. You wouldn't have been there."]

e. single lexical items—nouns, adjectives, verbs:

. . . in so ble amerikanske bolniške strežnice, je blo hudo in so mi prinesli *BABY*.
Je bla *BEAUTIFUL BABY*.

[And there were American nurses, and it was very difficult and they brought me the baby. She was a beautiful baby.]

Pa je bil en *SWITCH*, pa je blo treba obrnit taku, da *WORK*.

[And there was a switch that had to be turned so that it would work.]

4. Conclusion

This research is still incomplete; this is especially true of the structural analysis, where much more needs to be done. Quantitative analyses are also required. In spite of the tentative nature of this article, I believe that it has provided some insights into the phenomenon of Slovene-English code-switching, especially with regard to the non-universal character of the *equivalence constraint* and also with respect to the motivation for the phenomenon.

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NOTES

- * Revised version of paper presented at the 19th AAASS Annual Convention, Boston MA, November 1987.
- 1. Participants in this study were guaranteed complete anonymity.
- 2. All the interviews were carried out by the author, a native Slovene with fluent English and formal training in linguistics.
- 3. Although I made a few conscious attempts to switch codes in each conversation, so as to have a basis for comparison between different subjects' responses, I could by no means control it all the time. My linguistic behavior, code-switching included, was no doubt influenced by that of my interlocutors.
- 4. Other nouns and verbs figure very rarely in this respect.
- 5. In the data reported here, Slovene texts are given in lower case and English texts in upper case letters. Examples of phenomena under discussion are italicized. Translations are given in square brackets.
- 6. At first sight, *high šola* in this phrase could be analyzed as the genitive case of *high šol*; but this is shown not to be so by the occurrence, several times elsewhere in these data, of *high šola* in subject position.

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POVZETEK

FUNKCIONALNE IN STRUKTURALNE OMEJITVE PRI KODNEM PREKLAPLJANJU MED SLOVENŠČINO IN ANGLEŠČINO

Podatki za raziskavo so bili zbrani med Američani slovenskega porekla v Sloveniji in v Clevelandu (ZDA) s pomočjo t.i. 'pogovornih intervjujev' (glej 2.2.) in ankete o jezikovni rabi anketirancev ter njihovim odnosom do obeh jezikov. Članek se dotika dveh vidikov kodnega preklapljanja: funkcionalnega in strukturalnega. S funkcionalnega vidika analizira razmerje med kodnim preklapljanjem in komponentami govorne situacije (udeleženci, tema, okolje) ter ponuja možno razlago motivov, ki privedejo do tega pojava. V strukturalnem delu obravnava tipologijo kodnega preklapljanja in ugotavlja veljavnost oz. neveljavnost nekaterih strukturalnih omejitev, navedenih v dosedanji literaturi (predvsem za angleško/špansko jezikovno področje), za kodno preklapljanje v govoru ameriških Slovencev. Raziskava je v začetni fazi in za boljše poznavanje kodnega preklapljanja bo potrebna temeljitejša kvantitativna analiza zbranih podatkov. Ne glede na to nudi članek zanimiv vpogled v omenjeni sociolingvistični pojav.