

Social Aspects of Code-switching In Bilingual Children

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Growing up in a bilingual community the child quickly acquires the ability to alternate languages with the aim to achieve a specific communicative function. The present study explores some of the reasons for code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing in the bilingual child's linguistic performance, which include various ways of socializing through language, performing speech acts, story-telling, and expressing emotions. In bilingual children, language alternation is predominantly viewed as unmarked choices or as situational code-switching.

Keywords: *bilinguality, borrowing, code-switching, language socialization, speech community, the markedness model*

1. Introduction

In speech development of multilingual children not only two or more linguistic forms are acquired, “but also the socialization to the rules and expectations that accompany the usage of those languages” (Badequano-López and Kattan 2007: 69). Learning these forms and their meanings occurs within a social context. Language socialization, as a field of study “offers a unique perspective for understanding the development of these competencies in bilingual and multilingual contexts, especially since language contact is the predominant condition in most societies” (ibid. 69). The multilingual child grows up in a speech community, which can be defined as “a group of people who interact by means of speech” (Bloomfield 1935: 42). Entrenched in “sociological, psychological, and anthropological approaches to the study of human development, language socialization takes its goal the explication of the ways younger or newer members of communities are socialized to the beliefs and sociocultural and linguistic practices of their communities, both explicitly and implicitly, through the use of language, while also being socialized to community-specific ways of using language” (Badequano-López and Kattan 2007: 74). Language socialization studies are longitudinal – they look at development of individuals across time; ethnographic – they are concerned with long-term description of common practices of communities; cross-cultural; and from the point of view of methodology, descriptive and analytic – they do not prescribe ways of how to socialize or teach children, but rather “illustrate the range of practices by which language and culture are acquired” (ibid. 75).

The focus of the present paper is on some of the socialization aspects of speech development and code-switching in children determined by multilingual contexts, whereby alternation of codes is viewed as a conversational strategy, which “serves specific interactional tasks for participants” (Gafaranga 2007: 280). Even though the present study offers an interpretation of various aspects of language socialization of children in a multilingual community grounded in a relatively short-term observation, its objective is to contribute, through the analysis of several case studies, to the current knowledge in early bilingualism and language socialization.

2. Aims of research and methodology

The present study focuses essentially on some of the social aspects of code-switching and

borrowing in bilingual children. It is a case study based on the observation of several children under the age of six. Its main aim is to examine some of the properties of code-switching and borrowing during interaction which takes place in bilingual settings. The author collected data in the form of audio-recordings and a diary, documenting natural speech recorded in natural settings. The study attempts to trace general language development features rather than the emergence of particular items.

Since this is a study of a limited number of speakers, the findings cannot be applied to all very young bilinguals. Nevertheless, an individual case study may contribute to the general knowledge on the relationship between speech acquisition and the social context.

The group of observed children on whom the present study is based include¹: *Stephanie*: 5 years old; mother tongue Slovak; immersed in a three language environment including Slovak, English and German; dominant language Slovak; consecutive bilinguality; *Emilie*: 6 years old; mother tongue Hungarian, immersed in a Hungarian and German speaking environment from birth; dominant language Hungarian; learning English as a second language in kindergarten; simultaneous and consecutive bilinguality; *Paul*: 3 years old; Stephanie's brother; mother tongue Slovak; immersed in a three language environment including Slovak, English and German; dominant language Slovak, consecutive bilinguality.

Daniela: 6 years old; mother tongue German; learning English as a second language in kindergarten; consecutive bilinguality.

There are also other important interlocutors participating in this study: Stephanie's mother, whose mother tongue was Slovak and was also fluent in English, Spanish, German and Italian; Stephanie's father, whose mother tongue was Slovak and was also fluent in English, Czech and Italian; Delaney, Alicia and Danielle, American university students, whose mother tongue was English; and Nastya, a Russian university student, whose mother tongue was Russian and was also fluent in English.

3. Code switching and socialization

Socialization can be viewed as „the learning of given social rules through which social structures are reproduced, and as the acquisition of the motivation to practice these structures in role performance“ (Cook-Gumperz 1984: 114). The individual child is “acquiring as social self through dialogue with others more authoritative and through the taking on of social role requirements which is done for the most part willingly” (ibid. 114). The child “is seen as beginning life as a social being within already defined social network; through the growth of communication and language, the child, in interaction with others constructs a social world” and “it is through these verbal and communicative processes as conversational exchanges that social action itself is constituted” (ibid. 114-115). Some of the discourse processes in children's conversations can be accomplished through applying methods “which build on the linguistic pragmatists' distinction between propositional content or literal meaning and illocutionary force or intended effect to analyze conversational management” (ibid. 117). Active participation in conversation and cooperation are fundamental conditions for successful speech activity. The speakers ought to recognize each other's intentionality and understand the topic and aim of the interaction, on which they base their responses.

¹ The following description of children observed for the purposes of this research includes the *dominant language* of each child, which is an estimate based on the ratio of time they are immersed in the natural environment where this language is spoken compared to the time they are exposed to the other languages. In the instances of *simultaneous bilinguality*, the child was exposed to both languages from its birth. In instances of *consecutive bilinguality*, the child was exposed to the second (and third) language later.

Example 1.

Stephanie: (jumping on the trampoline, addressing Delaney)

“Delaney, come here! There’s a spiderman on the trampoline!”

Delaney: (Went to the trampoline to get the spider out.)

The utterance produced by Stephanie represents *an indirect speech act of requesting*. The locution is in the form of an affirmative sentence, it is a statement whose illocutionary force is to invite the interlocutor to perform an action. Observing the cooperative principle, the interlocutor (Delaney) carries out this speech act to completion by a perlocutionary act: she takes the spider out of the trampoline. Naturally, this indirect speech act involves the use of distinct paralinguistic features: raised pitch and emphatic intonation, stress and rhythm, which contribute to the accurate interpretation of the intended speaker meaning.

As they develop their social skills through language, bilingual children become aware of the rules of politeness and the cooperation principle in social interaction. One of the rules is to include everyone in the conversation. Another rule is to use polite expressions in order to express greeting, apologizing, thanking, asking a favor, etc. Children acquire these institutionalized expressions quite easily and learn how to use them in different contexts. They are very sensitive to the semantic and pragmatic aspects of these phrases and the nuances they carry within themselves.

One of the main reasons for code-switching in children is *to achieve a communicative function*; another one is *to include everyone in the conversation*.

Example 2. Paul, Delaney, Paul’s mother and Paul’s father going to visit Paul and Stephanie’s grandparents and pick up Stephanie, who spent the afternoon there. Paul’s father is trying to park the car in front of the grandparents’ house.

Paul’s father (to Paul): “Môžeme tuto zaparkovať? Zmestíme sa tu?” (Can we park here? Shall we fit in here?)

Paul (to his father): „Áno, zmestíme sa.“ (Yes, we’ll fit [in here].)

Paul (to Delaney): „Grandma.“

Delaney: „That’s where Stevka is?“

Paul: „No, grandma.“

While commenting on the parking space with his father, Paul made sure Delaney did not feel left out from the conversation and even though he did not translate what the matter he and his father were discussing was, he found a different topic to talk about with Delaney: who the house they stopped at belonged to. As Delaney assumed that’s where Stephanie had spent the day, she asked Paul whether that was the case. However in that moment, Paul found it relevant to emphasize that was where the grandmother was, not his sister.

Example 3. Emilie visiting Stephanie at her house.

Stephanie’s mother: “Emilie, willst du die Suppe als Stevka hat?” (Emilie, would you like some soup, as Stevka’s having?)

Emilie: „Ja.“ (Yes.)

Stephanie: (To her mother) „Mami, ja juž nechcem [polievku]. (Mom, I don’t want any more [soup].) (Translating for Emilie) Ich will net die Suppe.“ (I don’t want the soup.)

Emilie: „Ich auch net.“ (Me neither.)

Stephanie: „Emilie, komm!“ (Emilie, come!) (Asking Emilie to go to her room.)

In Example 3, Stephanie translated to Emilie what she had told her mother about the soup, so as to include Emilie in the conversation and avoid making her left out, since she does not speak Slovak.

Example 4.

Alicia, an American student was visiting Stephanie at her house. At the same time other guests from Slovakia came to visit the family. As they entered the house, Stephanie took the role of introducing everyone to Alicia in English: “This is Gabika, this is Eliska, this is Dominik...” Stephanie comprehended it was important and polite to introduce the guests in her house to one another, so as to make them feel comfortable and possibly help them develop further conversations within a multi-cultural speaking environment. Stephanie also accurately estimated that the common language was English, since Alicia spoke no Slovak and the guests from Slovakia had a fairly good command of English.

Example 5.

Later in her room with Alicia, Eliska (5), Stephanie’s brother Paul and Stephanie’s mother present, Stephanie asked “Where is Eliska?” in English, while not addressing anyone in particular, immediately followed by the question “Eliska, kde si?” in Slovak, thus addressing Eliska in person. Stephanie seemed to have the intention of including everyone in the conversation, therefore, she first posed the question in English. When wanting to address a particular a person who did not understand much English, she switched to Slovak, the common language of both Eliska and Stephanie.

Example 6. Emilie and Stephanie playing with play doh. Cutting out different shapes.

Emilie: “Eh, das ist deine, Stefka.” (Oh, that’s yours, Stefka.)

Stephanie: „Bitte, ein Herz, Emilie.“ (A heart, please, Emilie.)

Emilie: „Warte, warte, ich bin nicht fertig.“ (Wait, wait, I’m not finished.)

Stephanie: „Ich mache eine...dis, schau, Emilie.“ (I’ll make one...this, look, Emilie.)”

Example 7. Nastya, a Russian student visiting Stephanie’s family at Christmas time. English is the language she uses to speak to the family members.

Stephanie (to Nastya): “Come, play hide-and-peek!”

Stephanie’s mother (to Stephanie): “Števíka, Nastenka is doing the dishes now, you have to wait a little.”

Stephanie (to her mother): “Ale ja nechcem čakať ani trošku!” (But I don’t want to wait even a little bit!)” (and to Nastya): “Please, come on!”

When reinforced by the parents and other community members, polite expressions, such as “bitte” (please) in Example 6 and “please” in Example 7 become part of everyday social interaction not only in conversations between children and adults but also among children themselves. Stephanie’s mother often spoke the language of the majority (i.e. not Slovak – her mother tongue, which is also the mother tongue of her children) when speaking to her children. This strategy was used to teach the children that it is polite to include everyone in the conversation and thus choose the linguistic code everyone understands (see also Example 13 below).

It was very important to both parents of Stephanie and Paul that the children acquire and use the appropriate *polite expressions* in every language they were learning. The children’s caretakers were also encouraged by the parents to insist that the children use these expressions whenever it was desired as in Example 8.

Example 8. Danielle, an American student playing with Paul.

Paul: "Picaboo!" (asking Danielle to play with him)

Danielle: "Can you say 'please'?"

Paul: "Please."

Danielle: "There you go!"

Code-switching in children is often conditioned by their desire to *socialize through making a small talk*, commenting on the speaker's well-being, the weather, etc.

Example 9.

Paul: (taking a cell phone and putting it to his ear, pretending to be calling Delaney) "Hello!"

Delaney: (pretends she has a phone in her hand) "Hello!"

Paul: "How are you today?"

Delaney: "Good! How are you today?"

Paul: "Good. How are you today?"

Delaney: "I'm great, how are you?"

Paul: "Good. Great. How are you today?"

Delaney: I'm good. What did you do today?"

Paul: "How are you today?"

Then switching to another person (his mother, his father, his godmother, his godfather), Paul continues the conversation in a similar fashion. He clearly saw this type of interaction as an amusing socializing activity, whose function was to make a small talk with no informative function.

Paul enjoyed using English just for the purposes of socializing. He would greet the sun in the morning: "Good morning, sunny!" or comment on the things he saw around: "Pretty flowers!" He often asked the question: "How are you today?" with a big smile on his face. He enjoyed making a conversation over the phone:

Example 10.

Delaney: "How are you?"

Paul: "Great!"

Delaney: "What have you done today?"

Paul: "Good. No! Telephone!"

Delaney: "The telephone's ringing! How are you, Palko?"

Paul: "Good. How are you?"

Delaney: "I'm good, thank you for asking."

Paul: "Mee too!"

Delaney: "You too?"

Paul: "Me too good."

Paul also enjoyed just making a small talk or saying polite expressions to carry a conversation:

Example 11. Paul going to bed at bedtime.

Paul: "Good night, Delaney! See you tomorrow!"

Example 12. At dinner table at around 8 pm.

Paul (to Delaney): "Sunny come out."

Delaney: "Yes, the sun did come out today."

Delaney agreed with Paul's comment to make him feel that he was right, however, the sun had set by that hour of the day.

Socialization through language is intrinsic to human nature. Children who are five or six years old have become mature enough to *carry a conversation about some of the essential issues in their lives*. The following example shows how Stephanie and Emilie, using German as their common linguistic code, discuss some important matters in the car (Example 9).

Example 13.

Emilie: „Ich hab' schon eine Schultasche.“ (I already have a school bag.)

Stephanie: „Ich hab' auch eine Schultasche.“ (I also have a school bag.)

Emilie: „Hast du wirklich eine Schultasche?“ (Do you really have a school bag?)

Stephanie: (to her mother) „Maminka, ten ruksak, nie ten Minnie Mouse, ale ten veľký, to je aký?“ (Mom, the backpack, not the one with Minnie Mouse, but the big one, what kind is that?) ... (and to Emilie) „Ich hab' eine Anna und Elsa.“ (I've got one with Anna and Elsa.)

Stephanie's mother: “Stevka, du hast noch keine Schultasche. Du hast einen großen Rucksack, aber das ist nicht eine Schultasche. Eine Schultasche ist anderes.” (Stevka, you don't have a school bag yet. You have one big backpack, but that's not a school bag.) (Stephanie's mother answered Stephanie's question in German, so as to include Emilie in the conversation.)

Stephanie: “Eliska war Heute im Kindergarten und die Daniela.” (Eliska was in kindergarten today and Daniela.)

Emilie: „Die Daniela net.“ (Daniela wasn't.)

Stephanie: „Ja! Daniela ist da!“ (Yes! Daniela was there!)

Emilie: “Aber sie ist schon die Schulanfängerin.“ (But she is just starting school.) (Doubting that Daniela could have been in kindergarten in July, while it was already summer break and Emilie thought none of the ‚Schulanfänger‘ could go to kindergarten anymore. Emilie herself did not attend kindergarten in the summer, she thought it was finished for her and all the children who were going to school the next year.)

Emilie: Ich war raus geschmiesen. Die Regina und die Doris haben meine Hände und meine Füße genommen und schup, schup, schup und ich hab' geflogen. Und dann hab' ich was gekriegt.“ (I was thrown out. Regina and Doris took my arms and my legs and ... I flew. And then I got something.)

Stephanie: „Was? Eine Tasche?“ (What? A bag?)

Emilie: “Ja, eine Tasche aus Papier und da war 'was lecker drinnen.“ (Yes, a paper bag and there was something yummy inside.)

Stephanie: „Was, ein Zucker?“ (What, a candy?)

Emilie: „Ja. Lecker, lecker!“ (saying with emphasis and excitement) (Yes. Yummy, yummy!)

Emilie: “Ines ist nicht deine Freundin, weil sie hat dir ‚Po Po‘ gesagt.“ (Ines is not your friend, since she told you ‘bottom’.)

Stephanie: „Kannst du Ines sagen das ist net schön?“ (Can you tell Ines that it's not nice?)

Emilie: „Ich bin net da.“ (I'm not there.) (Emilie meant to say that could not talk to Ines as she did not attend kindergarten anymore, where she would normally meet with Ines.)

Stephanie: “Emilie, bist du mein Freund?“ (Emilie, are you my friend?)

Emilie: „Ja, ich bin deine Freundin.“ (Yes, I'm your friend.)

Both Stephanie and Emilie spent two years in kindergarten together. Both of them acquired most of their German in kindergarten. Even though they could already lead a casual conversation in German, Emilie's performance in German seemed to be on a higher level than Stephanie's. Emilie's vocabulary seemed to be more extensive, her grammatical forms

and sentence-structure were more accurate and complex than Stephanie's. The reasons for that might be several. Emilie is almost one year older than Stephanie, she was born in a German speaking country and, even though the language her parents and her sister spoke to her was Hungarian, she had had a longer exposure to German than Stephanie, i.e. in public places (other than kindergarten) with German-speaking population, where her parents had taken her since she was born. Stephanie had only lived in Austria for two years and often spent longer periods of time outside of Austria. Moreover, Stephanie was acquiring three languages at the same time (Slovak, English and German), while Emilie was acquiring two (Hungarian and German).

4. Emotive expressions, story-telling and code-switching

According to Luzio's (1984: 72-73) findings from his study on bilingual children of migrant workers accusations, reproaches, warnings, joking accusations, funny remarks, demands, pleadings and protestations which belong „to the directive and/or expressive attitudinal types of speech activities as opposed to the declarative type“ are often performed in the mother tongue. As language choice „also communicates familiarity and emotional nuances“ it is natural for the bilingual child to refer to „common knowledge and emotions in the language one is most familiar with“ (ibid. 73). The intensity and expressivity of some of the idiomatic expressions typical for the native language of the child can hardly be translated into another language, therefore the child may choose to code switch into the mother tongue. However, this has proved not to be true, provided that the child has acquired such expressive means in the second language.

Speech activities characterized by emotionally charged or expressive demands, serious or playful accusations, humorous comments and personal narratives uttered with a great range of intonational structure, increased intensity and distinct rhythm are conducted in any of the three languages. Both Stephanie and Paul look for the best emotive expression in English, Slovak or German to reveal their feelings or states of mind. For instance, in English: oh-oh!, ouch!., ouchie!, please!, ieee!..., whoopsie, Oops-a-daisy, Oh, my gosh; in German: jé!, aua!; in Slovak: au!, jupí!, jaj!, aha!

The speaker's involvement in story telling which may encompass his double role as narrator and subject of the story „manifests itself in a wide range of emotional structures“ including rhythm, intonation, informality, pronounced accentuation and exaggeration (ibid. 77-78). Types of speech acts, such as emotional demands, reproaches, threats, funny comments, intensive pleading, protestations or personal stories involve an „emotive-expressive component, which reveals a part of the speaker's identity.

Code-switching in story telling is often associated with the context in which the plot is set. That includes not only the time and the place of the event but also other participants who may speak different languages, including the narrator of the story himself or herself.

Example 14. Stephanie on her way home from kindergarten in the company of her mother. Stephanie: “Maminka, Regina hovorila, že ja poznám Elisabeth. Aj Anna. Anna je Elisabeth *schwester*.” (Mom, Regina said that I know Elisabeth. And Anna too. Anna is Elisabeth's sister.)

Stephanie was naturally speaking in Slovak to her mother when she was retelling her what the principal had said to her in kindergarten that day. However, Stephanie transferred a linguistic element, i.e. a word from the original language (German) into the target language (Slovak). Interference and transfer are likely to occur when the child is describing a situation which encompassed the use of a different language. For instance, when her mother was

reading a book in German to Stephanie, Stephanie asked questions about the different characters in the story while mixing Slovak and German: „Čo robí *Katzchen*?“

5. Code switching, code mixing and borrowing

Language, as part of social and cultural work, plays the key role in revealing different social identities of individuals (Cf. Herbert 2001: 223). In multilingual settings more than one language is often exploited in conversation. Social identity “is recognized by insiders and outsiders as something that may be assumed, declared or negotiated” (ibid. 223). Speakers use more than one language variety “in order to simultaneously activate more than one social identity” (ibid. 225). The interpretation of what the speakers do with language in a multilingual setting draws on the analytical framework developed by Carol Myers-Scotton (e.g. Myers-Scotton 1993). The present model employs a threefold distinction between borrowing, code-mixing and code switching. Borrowings “are typically known and used by both bilingual and multilingual speakers, they are widely distributed through the community, and they typically reveal a process of historical incorporation” (Herbert 2001: 225-226). Code mixes are “synchronic incorporations of lexical material from one language into a second” (ibid. 226). In code switching “the operative grammar in conversation changes” (ibid. 226).

Central to the sense of „communication as a coordinated activity is obviously the negotiation of meanings between participants“ (Gafaranga 2007: 283). Stephanie often switches codes when talking to her mother. There are instances of multiple code-switches or borrowing from German to Slovak to English in her speech. In her case, code-switching is often conditioned by a relevant semantic component within a specific context, for instance, *donut* (English) vs. *šiška* (Slovak): no direct equivalent in Slovak, *cup-cake* (English): no direct equivalent in Slovak, *die Elsa Farbe* (German) – *Elsa color* (English) – „*elsovská farba*“ (Slovak): naming a specific color (blue and turquoise) that was used with the main character Elsa in the *Frozen* movie, *Erdbeere icecream* (German + English): referring to the flavor of icecream or *Elsa icecream* (English): referring to the color of icecream, *bubble gum* (English) and *chewing gum* (English) as two different equivalents of *žuvačka* (Slovak) conveying different meanings in each of the English equivalents.

Code-switching and code-mixing can be explained through the Markedness Model developed by Myers-Scotton. This model recognizes four functions of code choice:

- a. *Code-switching as sequential unmarked choices*: found in situations “wherein the conversational participants or the topic of conversation switches during the conversation”, i.e. “the introduction of an additional conversational participant changes the definition of the communicative situation and the original speakers respond to the new definition by [...] switching to a language known by all participants” (Herbert 2001: 227-228). Myers-Scotton (1993) further classifies exclusionary switching as marked and inclusionary switches as unmarked (cf. Herbert 2001: 229). Gumperz (1984) refers to this type of code-switching as situational code-switching.
- b. *Code-switching as marked choice*: understood as “the speaker’s strategic (conscious or unconscious) use of a new code in order to superimpose a message on a communicative act” (Herbert 2001: 230).
- c. *Code-switching as unmarked choice*: also classified as code-switching as a linguistic variety by Herbert (2001) indicates “instances in which the speaker’s choice of some individual code does not send a particular meta-message; rather, the fact of code-switching, which occurs frequently within the conversation, serves such a communicative function” (ibid. 239). According to Myers-Scotton (1993), three “conditions must be met for this type of code-switching to occur: (1) the speakers must be bilingual peers, (2) the conversations occur in

informal contexts, (3) interactions involve in-group members” (Herbert 2001: 244). There is also presumably positive evaluation of each code. Speakers exploit their linguistic repertoire to give flavour to their conversation (cf. *ibid.* 244).

- d. Code-switching to make an explanatory choice.

In case of bilingual children, code-mixing and borrowing may be regarded predominantly as sequential unmarked choices. The choice of the borrowing is closely associated with the context in which the borrowing is used. The reasons for borrowing might include insufficient competence in the target language or the immediate state of mind. When the child is frequently alternating languages, it naturally happens that he may resource to another language if the word in the target language does not immediately come to his mind.

Example 15.

Stephanie (to her mother): “Maminka, ty máš krásny *necklace*! Aj to nás naučíš v škôlke – *necklace*, lebo to detičky nevedia. Ale Lina vie.” (Mom, you have a beautiful necklace! Will you teach us that [word] in kindergarten, because the children don’t know it. But Lina does.)

Stephanie’s mother taught English in the kindergarten Stephanie attended. Stephanie was asking her mother to teach the word ‘necklace’ to the children. One of the children in kindergarten, Lina (6) spoke four different languages – Spanish, Hungarian, English and German. She was fluent in all four of them. Stephanie recognized that Lina’s English was very advanced.

Example 16. Stephanie speaking to Delaney. Singing a song about a monkey playing at the bay. Children fill in the names of different animals and the activities the animals do.

Stephanie: „...elephant *tanzen*...” (…elephant dances...) (borrowing from German)

Mother: „Elephant dances?”

Stephanie: „Yes.”

Delaney and Stephanie continue singing and talking. Stephanie sometimes started her sentences with ‚aber‘ (in German) and continued in English.

Example 17. Stephanie playing with Delaney.

Stephanie: „Will you ice-cream?” (Do you want ice-cream?)

Stephanie borrowed the verb form ‚will‘ from German, meaning ‚want‘.

5.1 Code mixing “just for fun”

In a playful manner, bilingual children often tend to mix words from different languages as part of their creative activity. Moreover, they invent new words and attach new meanings to them or attach no meanings to them, just for the sake of playing with sounds.

Example 18. Paul playing and mixing Slovak with English.

Paul: “Ide *monkey*, nejde *monkey*...” (Monkey’s going, monkey’s not going...)

“Ide *dinosaur*, nejde *dinosaur*...” (Dinosaur’s going, dinosaur’s not going...)

“*Rocket gall!* *Rocket gall!*”

“Where are you, *loptička*?” (Singing as in The finger family song.) “Tu je! Where are you?” (Where are you, ball? Here it is! Where are you?)

“*ujo uncle*, *ujo uncle*” (uncle uncle, uncle uncle)

Example 19. Paul playing tennis with his mother. The ball rolls away from Paul. Mixing Slovak with English.

Paul: “Ty chod’ zobrat’ *You!*” (You get it! You!)

Mother: “You get it!”

Paul: “You get it! You! You get it! Loptičku zobrat’. (Get the ball.) You get it! Hm, nepočuje maminka.” (Hm, mom doesn’t hear.) (Mother is pretending not to hear.) “You get it, mami! (You get it, mom.) You get it!”

The game goes on, the ball rolls away again.

Paul: “You get it! Písaj! Písaj! (You get it! Write! Write!)”

Example 20. Stephanie talking to her brother while playing with play doh. Mixing Slovak with German.

Stephanie: “Toto musíš *weg räumen!*“ (You’ve got to put it away.)

Example 21. Stephanie playing with her cousins from Slovakia. Mixing Slovak with German.

Stephanie: “Toto je *Schwester*. *Moja Schwester...*” (This is my sister. My sister.)

Example 22. Paul putting his slippers away when going to bed. Mixing Slovak with English.

Paul: “*Good night!* *Papučky, good night!*“ (Good night! Good night, slippers!)

Example 23. Paul looking at flowers in the garden. Mixing Slovak with English.

Paul: „*Kvetinka. Flower.*“ (Flower.)

Example 24. Paul looking into the sea in Mallorca. Mixing Slovak with English.

Paul: „*Rybička. Fish. Fish.*“ (Fish.)

Example 25. Paul counting. Mixing German with English and Slovak.

Paul: „Eins, zwei, drei, *four, six, seven, sedemnášť, osemnášť.*“

Example 26. Stephanie, Emilie, Paul, Delaney (an American university student) and Stephanie’s mother at the playground. Stephanie and Emilie are on swing chairs.

Stephanie (talking to Emilie): „Ich kann nicht schneller.“ (I cannot [go] faster.)

Emilie: „Ich bin schneller. Bischen muss du so und so.“ (I’m faster. You’ve got to go a little so and so.)

Stephanie: „Jo?“ (Yes?)

Emilie: „Jo, so muss du machen und dann bist du hoch.“ (Yes, you have to do so and then you’re high.)

Stephanie: „Ich bin auch hoch.“ (I’m also high.)

Emilie: „Ich bin auch hoch.“ (I’m also high.)

Stephanie (to her mother): „Mami, ja už sa viem húpať, pozri ako! Emilie ma naučila.“ (Mom, I know how to swing, look how!)

Stephanie (to Delaney): „Delaney, look!“

Delaney: „Did you do it all by yourself?“

Stephanie (to Delaney): „Yes!“

Delaney: „They didn’t even have to push you?“

Emilie (to Stephanie): „Ines hat so gemacht. Nur einschalten. Die Ines und ich hab‘ so gemacht. Scho! Ich hab‘ so gemacht. Ich zeige dir, scho! Einsitz so da, deine Füße ist so da, schau, sitz du da! Hast du das gesehen? Ich war so hoch! Aber das kannst du net machen.“ (Ines did [it] so. Just to switch on. Ines and I have done [it] so. Look! This is how I’ve done it. I’ll show you. Sit there, put your feet that way, look, sit there! Did you see? I was so high. But you can’t do that.)

Stephanie (to Emilie): „Ich kann so machen. Ich *like...* (I can do it. I *like...*) (switching to English)

Emilie: „So kann mann vielleicht so machen. Aber net so!“ (That way, perhaps, can you do it. But not that like that!)

Stephanie: „Emilie, schau!“ (Emilie, look!)

Emilie: „Sie möcht’ immer so. Ich bin soo hoch!“ (She wanted always like that. I’m so high!)

Stephanie: „Emilie, aber du net.“ (Emilie, but you don’t.)

Emilie: „Hey, schau! Hey, schau! Palko ist net hoch.“ (Hey, look! Hey, look! Palko isn’t high.)

Stephanie (to her mother): „*Look*, mami!“ (*Look*, mom!) (switching to English again)

In Example 26 Stephanie seemed to be confused with English and German. She was having a difficulty expressing herself in either language. Her poor linguistic performance might have been affected by her tiredness that day. Some of the possible reasons why Stephanie used borrowings from German when speaking in English and vice-versa may include the following: a) the two languages are related by their common origin in the Germanic group of languages, which means that their phonological inventory and vocabulary are closer to one another than, for instance Slovak and English or Slovak and German; b) in general, the child may assume that borrowing words from another language will contribute to better understanding between her and her interlocutor, while speaking in a second language in which she is lacking sufficient competence; c) both Stephanie and Emilie participated in an English course in kindergarten, therefore, Stephanie might assume that Emilie would understand her English borrowings; d) being exposed to German for approximately 5 hours a day (in the mornings) and to English for 6 to 7 hours a day (in the afternoons and evenings along with Slovak) might have caused Stephanie to think in those two Germanic languages most of the time and the English or German words were the ones that ‘came to her mind first’ when trying to express an unknown concept in one of the two languages.

6. Conclusion

From their birth, children acquire the rules for socialization through language. In a bilingual or multilingual speech community, the child has to discover the appropriate ways of social interaction pertinent to a particular culture. In order to achieve the desired communicative function, very young bilinguals become aware of and skilled in language alternation, learning how to use one code or the other in given circumstances. Myers-Scotton (1993) explains code-switching as “a form of performance expressing the capability of the speaker to exploit the socio-linguistic values associated with different linguistic variants circulating within the community” (Ben-Rafael 2001: 252). According to the present study, the most common reasons for code-switching and borrowing in children include: a) the context of borrowing, b) the semantic element, i.e. in some cases the equivalent “does not quite fit”, c) the borrowing is seen as the “fastest choice” or what comes first into the mind, d) not knowing the equivalent in the source language, e) including everyone in the conversation, e) socializing through small talk, f) performing a specific speech act, and g) observing the rules of politeness. The child presupposes his interlocutor will understand the reasons for language alternation, e.g. to include everyone in the conversation, or in instances of borrowing, its meaning. This segmental code-switching often includes ready-made expressions, greetings and other polite and institutionalized expressions. The choice of language is simply a variant at the disposal of the speaker while the discourse remains fluid and uninterrupted. Code-switching is viewed as unmarked choices, either respecting the majority language or including everyone in conversation.

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