multilingual MANCHESTER

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An Investigation of Code-Switching in the Rusholme Area of Manchester

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Introduction

The city of Manchester is the multicultural beacon of the North, boasting a multiple of vibrant ethnic areas and communities. With such diverse cultural communities, a plethora of languages are spoken in a relatively small area, this mix of languages promote foreign language learning, multilingualism of speakers and code-switching.

Code-switching is the phenomenon where, within a single occurrence of discourse, languages are interchanged, sometimes even sub-consciously. The reasons for code switching have been studied previously, "relatively few passages is code alternation motivated by a speaker's inability to find words to express what he/she wants to say in one of the other codes. In the great majority of cases, the codeswitched information could be equally well expressed in either language. Something may be said in one code and reiterated in the other code elsewhere in the same conversation. Considerations of intelligibility, lucidity or ease of expression, important as they are in some cases, can therefore not be the main determining reasons. Nor is educational inferiority an important factor." (Gumperz 1977) this would imply that the reasons are more social/attitudinal. It is an interesting linguistic feature of bilingual/multilingual speakers that we wanted to explore. With a large Asian community at our doorstep, Rusholme (The Curry Mile), we had an opportunity to investigate.

Measuring code-switching

Because code-switching is purported to be such a language phenomenon it is hard to actually measure it. The most ideal way to measure it would be to take a Conversation Analysis (CA) approach. CA approach focus on the linguistic features of talk-in-interaction and on the ways in which talk is methodically used in ordinary life (Richards et al. 1992).

Changes from initial plan

Our initial plan was to find out about code-switching within business practices in the Curry Mile, Rusholme area of Manchester. After going into six businesses, mostly restaurants along the stretch of the Curry Mile, we did not obtain the results we were looking for, i.e. some significant findings that pointed towards certain attitudes towards language use and code-switching. Many of the businesses we approached would not give their time up to answer our questions and many seemed as though we were impeding in some way. We therefore decided to change our method and our questionnaire so that it was directly aimed towards finding out about people's use of code-switching. We thought the next best option would be to approach people along the Curry Mile and ask them the questions that we had included in our questionnaire. We decided not to give out the questionnaires so informants could do them independently as many people seemed oblivious to what code-switching actually was, even though many people did do it, consciously or not. We wanted to make sure the informants knew explicitly what we were asking of them, so many of the questions we offered guidance.

Changes to our questionnaire

Our first questionnaire that we created (inc. in our plan) did not really focus heavily on code-switching but more language use. We included questions that were not exactly relevant to what we wanted to find out. Our main aim from this investigation was solely attitudes towards code-switching so we omitted several that were included in the first questionnaire. Of course the main added question was: Why is it that you code-switch? – This question was, for the most part, accompanied by a pre-written script of: "Code-switching is changing what language you use whilst in the same conversation, i.e. speaking Punjabi and then switching to English within the same conversation." – we said this to every informant before going onto the questions that were directly about code switching.

Results

Below are the results showing the 25 people we surveyed.
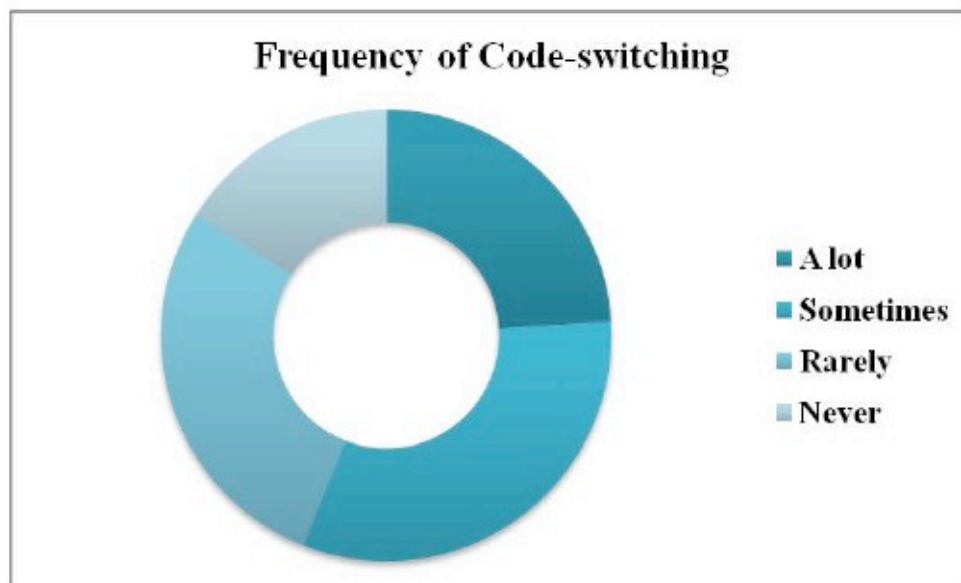
Graph showing frequency of people who code-switched

	A lot	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Freq	6	8	7	4

Below are 10 results from the most significant findings in terms of showing attitudes towards code-switching. Note that we did speak to 25 people who did or did not code-switch, not all were included due to several reasons including: time constraints, difficulties with language barriers and simply no significant findings. Also to note is that all answers responding to the question: 'Why is it that you do or do not code-switch?' have been slightly rewritten for fluency and ease of read, the attitudes remain the same.

Informant Profile #1

Age: 35

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: White Caucasian

Spoken languages: English, Spanish, (mild proficiency in Punjabi)

Predominant language: English

Preferred spoken language(s): English, Punjabi

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? Yes

How often do you code-switch? A lot

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I have been married to my husband for 3 years who is Punjabi. I try to speak Punjabi as much as possible to him to increase my vocabulary in the language. I am no way near proficient in the language enough to speak fluently to him or others in Punjabi so occasionally I will switch to English if I do not know the correct or suitable word. He will then help me with the word I am looking for – he tries to encourage me as much as possible by speaking his native language which I fully support.

Informant Profile #2

Age: 40

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: Pakistan

Spoken languages: English, Punjabi, Urdu

Predominant language: Punjabi

Preferred spoken language(s): Punjabi

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? Yes

How often do you code-switch? Sometimes

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I do not tend to mix between languages that often. When I have done in the past it is usually with my daughter. Whilst I will speak to her in English, if I do need to express something that I feel I can say better in my native language I will switch to Punjabi. If I need to speak to her about a private issue I will also switch between both Punjabi and English. My daughter speaks both Punjabi and English, but is more comfortable speaking in English so I have to consider this.

Informant Profile #3

Age: 48

Gender: M

Ethnicity: Pakistan

Spoken languages: Punjabi, English

Predominant language: Punjabi

Preferred spoken language(s): Punjabi

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? No

How often do you code-switch? Never

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I am not 100% fluent in English, so I tend to speak Punjabi most of the time. I have never experienced a situation where I have needed to mix languages together. My children are fluent in English and my native language and they occasionally mix English and Punjabi together.

Informant Profile #4

Age: 21

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: Bangladeshi

Spoken languages: Bengali, English

Predominant language: Bengali

Preferred spoken language(s): English

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? Yes

How often do you code-switch? Sometimes

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? Most of my friends speak Bengali, but we are also learning English as a second language. I am a part of the University of Manchester's Bangladesh Students' Society and whilst we do all speak Bengali, we will often find ourselves unknowingly switching to English and saying things like 'yeah'.

Informant Profile #5

Age: 21

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: Pakistan

Spoken languages: English, Urdu

Predominant language: English

Preferred spoken language(s): English

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? Yes

How often do you code-switch? Rarely

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I have lived in Britain for most of my life where I have been brought up by Urdu speaking family. I went to an all English speaking school so never needed to speak my native language other than at home. I speak Urdu with

my parents although I prefer to speak English. My family is quite happy for me using both languages and I have used the word 'cool' whilst speaking in Urdu to my parents many times.

Informant Profile #6

Age: 22

Gender: M

Ethnicity: Pakistan

Spoken languages: Punjabi, English

Predominant language: Punjabi

Preferred spoken language(s): Punjabi

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? Yes

How often do you code-switch? A lot

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I am in my third year at the University of Manchester. Most of my friends speak Punjabi and this is the language we speak when we are together. I find myself code-switching a lot just to express ideas that seem to be better expressed in English, especially if it is related to discussing university work. Although I do not mind speaking in English, I definitely feel more confident speaking in my native language.

Informant Profile #7

Age: 28

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: British Indian

Spoken languages: English, Hindi, Punjabi

Predominant language: Hindi

Preferred spoken language(s): Hindi

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? Yes

How often do you code-switch? Rarely

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I work in a shop which sells garments to ladies, the majority of my customers speak Hindi so I speak with them in a language I feel will be more welcoming and give a feel of familiarity. I do however have other customers that don't understand and then I change how I talk but I still use our words for the garments as I feel that teaching them new words is only of benefit.

Age: 52

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: British Indian

Spoken languages: English, Hindi, Punjabi

Predominant language: English

Preferred spoken language(s): English

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? No

How often do you code-switch? Never

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I came over to England many years ago and since arriving I tend to only speak English. I like English, I find it fun and it makes me feel smarter and makes me feel as part of a larger community. I can speak other languages but I feel that as I am in England, I'd prefer to speak English.

Informant Profile #9

Age: 15

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: Mixed Race

Spoken languages: English, Punjabi

Predominant language: English

Preferred spoken language(s): Punjabi

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? Yes

How often do you code-switch? A lot

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I go to school and there are a lot of white kids and I like my group of friends, so we talk to each other in our language, it means we can talk about things in private and also means that we can talk about people whilst they're talking with my group of friends. It has made me and my friends closer as we have something that other people don't understand, it is our thing.

Age: 42

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: Bangladeshi

Spoken languages: English, Bengali

Predominant language: English

Preferred spoken language(s): Bengali

Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages? Yes

How often do you code-switch? Sometimes

Why is it that you do or do not code-switch? I work in a school teaching IT so I have to talk in English most of the time, though if a fellow teacher that also speaks Bengali comes in, it is nice to show the children that I am a proud Bangladeshi man; I will slip in a few phrases to her. It is nice when the children are curious and inquire about what I said. I feel that opening their minds to language will have a positive effect on the community in the school.

Informant Profile Commentaries

1. The first female informant enabled us to gain a great insight into her own attitudes towards not only code-switching as a practice, but her attitudes towards the languages she speaks. Interestingly she was a white Caucasian female, who was actually in the process of learning the Punjabi language due to her marriage. Her husband tried to facilitate her learning his native language by speaking it to her as much as possible, and where she struggled he would help her out with the necessary word, so in effect, helping her become much more fluent in Punjabi. Although the female was not aware of what code-switching meant initially, after we had explained to her, she said that she did it often but was even sometimes unaware that she would do it. This definitely shows a positive attitude towards code-switching.

2. The second informant's response is interesting in that we get to see the attitudes of the mother and her daughter. The mother says that she does not mix between languages that often, but when she has done it has been with her daughter. The mother is not as proficient in the English language, so whilst she does speak English to her daughter, whom is more comfortable speaking English, she generally speaks Punjabi as she can communicate better in this language. Interesting the informant also said she will use Punjabi with her daughter due to privacy issues. The attitudes towards code-switching here seem positive.

3. From the third informant we didn't get any attitudes as such, more an insight into their language use. The informant explained that they were not fluent in English so they tended to speak Punjabi most of the time. They did however mention that their children code-switched and occasionally mixed English and Punjabi together. This could point towards children code-switching more than older people. This will be addressed later.

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4. The fourth informant was also of interest as they were Bangladeshi and currently learning English as a second language. He mentioned that he was also a part of the University's Bangladesh Students' Society where he mostly spoke Bengali. However, he also said that he unknowingly switches between English and Bengali when studying. The example he gave us was saying 'yeah' – this seems like a further positive attitude.

5. The fifth informant was brought up in Britain by her family who speak Urdu, and although they speak English, they aren't as proficient as their mother tongue. The speaker seems to be very proud of speaking English, and only seems to code-switch with her family to communicate with them. Nonetheless, the attitude seems positive.

6. The sixth informant was a student at the University of Manchester and suggested that he found himself code switching when studying with his friends \as certain concepts with easiest in English. Whilst he was with his friends however he spoke mostly Punjabi.

7. The seventh informant gave us an insight into code-switching for business rewards. By knowing what his customers' demographics are, he tailors his language use to provide a more enjoyable and loyal customer service. This is interesting as he mentions how he is fully aware of what he is doing when he code switches as he is trying to teach non-Hindi speakers the words that he considers to be important culturally.

8. The eighth informant was included as she had very strong opinions regarding her language use and was very anti-code-switching. This is an insight into the perceived identity and community aspects of language. She felt that by not code-switching and abandoning her other known languages, she would be more widely accepted.

9. The ninth informant showed how a sense of alienation can bring language speakers together and they can find solidarity within sharing language use, even if it is for slightly malicious intent such as talking behind someone's back.

10. The tenth and final informant that we mentioned, from the 25 questionnaires participated in, had very good morals behind his code-switching. Installing a curiosity of language into the children he teaches which opens their minds to new cultures.

Summary of findings & Conclusion

What we found out by carrying this piece of fieldwork was that code-switching in actual fact did happen a lot, and far more times than what we expected. We managed to stop 25 people all of which did or did not code-switch, whether that be consciously or not, and out of those 25 we found 10 significant findings that pointed towards the attitudes of the speaker in regards to code-switching.

Interestingly, we received a number of different responses ranging from, privacy issues to language barriers, which is what we expected to find, given the literature out there. We mostly seemed to get back a positive attitude on code-switching from the informants.

Overall, I do think this fieldwork was successful, although it may seem like a more subjective study, we endeavoured to find out the attitudes speaker's had towards code-switching so it

was always going to end up slightly subjective. Unfortunately, we would have loved to have recorded code-switching happening in its most natural state, so then we could actually go back to the informants and ask why they chose it. This could have been done using a Conversation Analysis approach, where we would have just recorded the participants. This method has been used many times, especially within classrooms to measure the rate of code-switching between teachers and pupils. Unfortunately this method was not possible as businesses, as aforementioned, seemed to be busy with waiting lists to be seen, and it would not have been practical conducting the study outside as we were essentially asking random people. Another issue we would have faced was not being able to transcribe the data we got back from the sound recorder as no one was proficient in speaking the studied languages.

References

Gumperz, J; The Sociolinguistic Significance of Conversational Code-Switching; RELC Journal December 1977 vol. 8 no. 2 1-34; University of California, Berkeley.

Richards, J. C., Platt, J., & Platt, H. (1992). Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics. Harlow: Longman.

Appendix

1. Age

16-|__| 16-19|__| 20-25|__| 26-30|__| 31-40|__| 41-50|__| 50+|
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2. Gender

Male |__| Female |__|

3. Ethnicity

_____

4. Spoken languages

_____

5. Predominant spoken language

_____

6. Preferred spoken language(s)

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(Script – explain to informants what code-switching is, prior to asking the
following questions all of which relate to this practice)

"Code-switching is changing what language you use whilst in the same conversation, i.e. speaking Punjabi and then switching to English within the same conversation." – elaborate further if need be.

7. Have you ever code-switched between two or more different languages?

   Yes |__| No |__|

8. How often do you code-switch?

A lot |__| Sometimes |__| Rarely |__| Never |__|

9. Why is it that you do or do not code-switch?

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_____

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