

Code-Switching in the Media

— A Filipino Case Study —

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In the complexity of the modern world, where the formation of boundaries between countries has often resulted in ethnically mixed national populations, multilingualism has become the norm rather than the exception. A particularly good example of this phenomenon is the case of the Philippines, a country wherein physical geography automatically isolates islands (of which there are more than 7000) into diverse ethnic groups. The result has been a multitude of native languages (e.g., Tagalog, Visayan, Cebuano, Ilonggo) and dialects. However, the close proximity of islands coupled with the demands of economic migration have led to frequent intercultural contact. Consequently, through inter-ethnic marriage, employment within multi-ethnic companies, and the ethnic mixing natural in an increasingly urbanized society, as well as educational programs aimed at the spread of the two official languages (Filipino and English), many Filipinos have become adept in two or more languages. In fact, it would be fair to say that monolingualism is relatively rare in the Philippines, except among less educated, older, isolated and poorer segments of the population.

It should be pointed out, however, that multilingualism does not necessarily mean that people are equally adept at all the languages at their disposal. The government policy has been to require all students to study the two official languages. Filipino, which is essentially Tagalog - the native language of the populous Manila region of the island of Luzon, has been chosen as the first national language and heavily promoted through education and the media. One of the main reasons for this choice was the perceived need to create a unified nation: the thinking being that one language makes one nation. However, peoples from other regions in the country have been sometimes resentful of this linguistic imposition and as a result the ability and willingness of Filipinos to use the language is almost inversely proportional to their proximity to Manila.

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Consequently, the establishment of English as a second national language was deemed a practical way to help to neutralize this reluctance to use Filipino. English has been viewed as neutral, because historically it is not the native language of any region of the country. Moreover, a legacy of the colonial era and WW2 has been a tendency among many Filipinos to respect American culture and value English as a tool for international communication. The introduction of English into the Filipino educational programs in elementary school, combined with a society in which English is used extensively for business and as a *lingua franca*, has produced a relatively high level of English competency compared to most other Asian nations.

It has become common, therefore, for Filipinos to be fluent in one or more local languages in their home region, and conversant to varying degrees with both Filipino and English. These widespread multilingual skills have caused the prevalence of a linguistic phenomenon in oral communication called *code-mixing*. Code-mixing refers to local vocabulary composed of a combination of two languages. For example, an honorific form of address to a medical doctor in Indian English is 'Doctor Sahib.' In the Philippines, a general store is called a 'sari-sari store' (from the Tagalog sari-sari meaning 'all kinds, variety'; 'a 'pamboat' is a small motor boat (a mix of Visayan and English); 'inter-sityo,' to describe competitions between different districts (from the Spanish sitio meaning 'site; district').

In addition to the frequent use of code-mixing, standard English lexis may have local variants. These linguistic behaviors have been studied and form part of what is called *Taglish*, a distinctly Filipino dialect of English. For instance, a lavatory is called a 'comfort room' (or CR, for short). Words may also have an extended range and frequency of use, as in the case of 'transfer':

Standard English	He changed his seat.
Taglish	He transferred his seat.

As is the case for other Asian dialects such as Singlish (Colloquial Singapore English), educated Filipinos have varying opinions on the acceptability of Taglish: some condemning it as an inferior form of English while others recommend its promotion, at least partially as a source of social cohesion (by acting as a linguistic in-group mechanism).

Another significant feature of verbal communication in the Philippines is the use of *code-switching*, defined as "the movement back and forth between two languages or dialects within the same sentence or discourse" (Fromkin et al, 2003).

Bilingual Filipinos, when speaking Tagalog (or another local language), often add an English word or phrase within a sentence. They may also switch back and forth between the languages with ease and speed. Similarly, when speaking English they may splice a sentence with words from another language.

Contrary to popular belief, code-switching rarely means the speaker has an imperfect knowledge of the language being used - and hence substitutes words from another language to fill in lexical gaps. Rather, such code-switching is a product of a strong grasp of the grammars of both languages. Fromkin et al (2003) refer to the universal nature of such phenomena, giving as examples the Quebecois in Canada (French and English), the Swiss (French and German), and Latinos in the USA (Spanish and English). They point out that the inserted words follow the syntactic rules of the inserted language instead of using the rules of the language in which they are implanted.

If this observation of code-switching is true for the Filipino situation, then one can expect that there would be major syntactic switches when shifting from English to Tagalog or vice versa. This is because word order in sentences is quite different : normal sentence order in English is SVO (Subject - Verb - Object), in Tagalog it is VSO. For example,

English	Mother is cooking fried fish for dinner.
Tagalog	Nagluluto ang nanay ng pritong isda para sa hapunan. cooking Mother fried fish for dinner

So, if you code-switched English and Tagalog, following the above theory, an utterance such as the following might be observable :

My mother nagluluto ng pritong isda para sa hapunan.

On the other hand, both languages follow the same pattern for noun modification (i.e., adjective + noun), as the above sentences illustrate with 'fried fish' and 'pritong isda.' Therefore, it is logical to assume that code-switching would be fairly easy for such kinds of phrases between the two languages. Regardless, the use of code-switching throughout the Philippines is rampant - to such an extent that politicians give speeches replete with code-switching, TV personalities shift smoothly and without hesitation from one language to another.

These types of code-switching in most multilingual countries tend to be found primarily in verbal communication. It is seldom or never a feature of writing, perhaps because writing is viewed as a formal, rule-bound form of communication. It may be considered a restricted code, since it follows set syntactic norms. Verbal

communication is usually more flexible : users may feel free to ignore grammar rules when speaking, yet more careful and constrained when writing. A newspaper, as a written document, ought to follow typical writing patterns, therefore one might suppose that code-switching would be seldom employed - except perhaps for quotes of speech. What makes the Philippines an interesting case is that code-switching is actually common in the print media, especially in newspapers.

The purpose of this study is to examine samples of code-switching in Filipino newspapers in order to identify the ways they appear and form hypotheses on the reasons for their occurrences. In his analysis of codes, Hartley (1993) states that they are created for a specific purpose and follow explicit rules. He contends that the study of a code system leads us to three key questions :

- How does the code operate? (its structure and functions)
- What does the code do in normal conversation?
- How does it relate to other codes?

These three questions will form the underlying areas of focus for this study (though it will substitute 'print media' for normal conversation in the second question).

Data Analysis

Three Filipino daily newspapers have been chosen as the sources of data :

- *Manila Bulletin*, August 6 & 8, 2004 (English-language national daily) MB
- *Philippine Daily Enquirer*, August 19, 2004 (English-language national daily) PDE
- *Bulgar*, August 19, 2004 (Tagalog-language national tabloid daily) B

From even a cursory examination of the three dailies, it is abundantly clear that code-switching is much more prevalent in the Tagalog-medium *Bulgar* than in either of the two English dailies. A content analysis of each reveals the following types of code-switching (see Appendix) :

1. Insertion of individual lexical items, usually compound nouns
(e.g., *Payut na TV host, trip 'Lumuhod' sa Papa* B)
2. Quotations that include spoken code-switching
(e.g., *Malaro kasi si Erik by nature* MB)
3. Transitional markers or phrases to link sentences
(e.g., *In short, nayuri 'yung* B)

There are three main ways that individual lexical items are used :

- (1) when no appropriate vocabulary exists in the language that is being used ;
- (2) when vocabulary exists in the language but the inserted code-switching language is shorter or clearer ;
- (3) when the lexical item inserted is normally used in colloquial speech, regardless of the language being used.

From the samples looked at in this study, it is apparent that Filipino code-switching -in both speech and newspapers - follows the universal pattern discussed by Fromkin et al (2003). That is to say, when code-switching from Tagalog to English or vice versa the syntactic rules of inserted language is not violated. A good example of this is : “I have to continue my training *para hindi mawala ang form ko,*” said Figueroa. PDE

The Tagalog phrase means ‘so as not to lose my form (figure).’ The word *ko* means ‘my,’ but appears in the sentence after the noun it modifies, as is natural in Tagalog, even though it is being inserted into an English sentence (where ‘my’ would normally precede the noun modified).

Based on the evidence from these newspapers, it might be safe to say that Filipinos tend to code-switch in places where it is easy to switch without violating grammar rules of either language. Tagalog and English are relatively easy to code-switch from a syntactic point of view, because many of the syntactic rules are similar ; moreover, Tagalog sentence patterns allow SVO word order like English - even though this pattern is less common than VSO.

It also seems that most of the longer pieces of code-switching are whole chunks of language (e.g., *para hindi mawala ang*) which act in similar ways to individual lexemes. They are usually relatively fixed forms, such as phrases or clauses, transitional devices or compound nouns. This fact probably makes code-switching easier to carry out.

The newspaper is different from many other print media in that by definition it is providing an information service for the masses. Hence, in most cases it needs to use language that the majority of the populace can understand easily. In addition, it is the function of a newspaper to report what newsworthy people are saying. As a result, the language of a newspaper often uses language forms and patterns more commonly associated with spoken language than writing,

The code-switching provided by the samples in the Appendix clearly indicate

that this linguistic technique occurs primarily in speaking situations. Code-switching is used in reported speech, where the exact words of a speaker are being quoted. Therefore, in news, sports or features interviews it is common to find code-switching in quotations. In the comics, too - no doubt for spoken authenticity, though also at times for the creation of cross-linguistic humor - the characters in the strips may use code-switching. Letters to the Editor and personals are both in some ways forms of dialogue, so in that respect the language they use may use code-switching as a kind of emulation of speech.

In the English dailies, the non-English words are usually italicized - perhaps to show that they have not changed the words from the original quote. In the Tagalog paper *Bulgar*, the use of English is more frequent, so English is not italicized. This may reflect a greater frequency of use of English code-switching in normal Tagalog speech than the reverse.

In fact, it is apparent that only among the straight news stories (those without quoted speech) is code-switching rare or nonexistent. One can say that these kinds of stories are the only ones that follow more closely the objective third person point of view style of scientific or academic reports (i.e., non-dialogue).

The obvious question about Filipino code-switching is why it is being used at all. Obviously, it is a feature of multilingualism that as one advances in proficiency in other languages than one's mother tongue, it becomes easier and easier to shift from one to another. For speed and economy of words, it may be suitable to switch into one's other language. As mentioned earlier, there may also be no existing lexis for a concept in one language, thus requiring a switch to an alternative language. (This of course brings into question the notion of loan words, i.e., At what stage is a word from one language absorbed into another language permanently?) There is also the case where the name of a concept is unknown in one language and therefore the speaker resorts to the use of words from another.

In addition, there are sociolinguistic aspects to the use of code-switching. It may be a matter of unconscious pride in one's multilinguistic skills to use code-switching. Related to this, code-switching into English from another vernacular language may be an attempt to show off one's sophistication, high education or status. In the converse situation, someone who is in a high status position, such as a politician or actor, may switch from English into Tagalog in order to show they are "one of the people." This may help them to relate more closely to their fan base.

From the point of view of the newspapers, as has been already mentioned it is

a function of the relatively 'oral' nature of this form of writing that code-switching is common. English has an international cache and is widely perceived as important for success, so this may help to explain why code-switching is less common in the English dailies studied here. On the other hand, the Tagalog daily is a tabloid and as such is intended for a less literate audience. Moreover, its content is much more heavily focused on gossip and entertainment than on serious news items. Hence, there should automatically be more code-switching in a tabloid than in a regular daily newspaper. It would be better to compare an English tabloid - should such exist in the Philippines - with a tabloid such as *Bulgar*.

Conclusion

The present study is merely an initial examination of an intriguing aspect of Filipino communication style. The next step would be to interview Filipino journalists to find out what prompts them to use code-switching so frequently compared to journalists in other countries. This may naturally also necessitate informant interviews of ordinary Filipinos to learn their attitudes and behaviors in speech on this matter. It will also be a logical step to examine the use of code-switching in broadcast media and make linguistic comparisons.

The Philippines has a more developed system of code-switching than in Japan, for example. That is natural in a multilingual society. However, Japan is slowly evolving and becoming more racially diverse. In time there may be a much greater level of use of code-switching here, though whether it will be between Japanese and English or Chinese remains to be seen. In any case, the linguistic melting pot of the Philippines provides some dynamic opportunities and lessons for Japanese communication in the 21st Century.

Bibliography

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APPENDIX : Samples of Code-Switching in Filipino Newspapers	
Manila Bulletin	
<i>Type of Newspaper Feature</i>	<i>Sample ; (page)</i>
News report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Nakita ko ang mukha noong bumaril dahil malapit lang siya noong pinaputukan nya ang kuya ko,” Apollo said. (1) • This study is the only known study in the world on the combination of ampalaya-banaba and turmeric (luyang dilaw) done on both diabetics and non-diabetics. (2) • Nantes said under his program called “Reporma para sa Nayon” (Reforms for the Barrios). . . (9)
Advertisement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With Western Union’s Domestic Money Transfer sigurado ka sa iyong padala. . . (9)
Comics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I’ve forgotten my false teeth here! Please look for it in the kitchen. Ayun! Napatungan ng patay na isda! (C2) • Win I grow up I will bi da’ prisidint op da’ Flippiness!! Nyek! Ampangit ng ambisyon mo! . . . (D3)
Entertainment (Feature)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I felt that <i>lahat ng performances ko were ok. Palagay ko sumablay lang doon sa interview ko last Thursday. . .</i>” (D5) • “<i>Malaro kasi si Erik by nature. Para siyang bata kaya click kami lalo sa biruan. But it wasn’t always like this.</i>” (P2)
Sports News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Nevermind that, talo kung talagang talo. Ang nakaka-hiya, host country tayo pero nanghihiram pa tayo ng bat sa mga Hapon. . .” (J2)
Education (Feature)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When I was around 10, <i>parang gusto ko naming mag-piano,</i>” she reckons. (G4)
Philippine Daily Enquirer	
<i>Type of Newspaper Feature</i>	<i>Sample ; (page)</i>
Letters to the Editor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And Quezon was, indeed, considered “<i>Ama ng Wikang Pambansa</i>”; so why follow suit? (A12)
Advertisement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tanong ng Bayan ABC : I-text ang inyong “fearless view” sa 2910... • “ituro mo gov t corrupt offcial & tax evaders instant reward ka.” Ito ang dpat ipnukala di new taxes. . .” (A16)
Sports News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Talagang talo. Naunahan tayo sa strategy (We lost clean. We lost out in the strategy),</i>” conceded Lopez. (A17) • “I have to continue my training <i>para hindi mawala ang form ko,</i>” said Figueroa. “I also want to keep watching other archers. . .” (A18)

Comics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bakit wala sa yellow pages ‘yung “Escort Service”? Baka under Commercial and Industrial... (A20) • Teka... Mga CD case ko ‘to at mga cellphone housing, a! (A20)
Lifestyle (Features)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That’s why our omnibus tagline Sarap! Saya! Sulit! Is really appropriate for all the 555 product lines,” explained Owen Cruz... (D4)
Bulgar	
<i>Type of Newspaper Feature</i>	<i>Sample ; (page)</i>
Headline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shabu Sa Toothpaste Nabuking (1) • Pakyut Na TV Host, Trip ‘Lumuhod’ Sa Papa (1)
Job Titles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ipinaliwanag ni Las Pinas Rep. Cynthia Villar (2) • Batay sa ulat ni Det. Gordius Alumbro (2) • Ayon kay Presidential Spokesman Ignacio Bunye (2)
Political Cartoons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I lied again! Bwa-ha-ha-ha!!! (3)
Editorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kung sa origna prepaid cards, ang marining no kapag ini-load mo ay ganito : “You have successfully loaded... please consume before... your current balance is...” (3)
Personals (Text Message Jokes) (Love) (Messages)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctor : Misis, good news.Patient : Dok, miss pa po ako. Doctor : Ah, ganu’n ba? Miss, bad news... Buntis ka. (4) • I’m Rhaijhin, 18, looking for a textmate, ‘yung puwedeng maging boyfriend.’ (8) • To Tauries 14 : Thank you for your love, patience and understanding. Sana makabawi rin ako sa iyo... (10)
Gossip & Celebrity News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May tsismis ang ilang staff na isang gay bar sa Timog... (6) • Walang reason na ibinigay... (6) • “I’m starting to like him na, he knew Gospel and sermon last Sunday. Regular church goer siya as in St. Jude novena pa,” sibi ni Kris. (6) • In short, nayari yung... (7) • And speaking of Robin, naalala tuloy... (7) • Incidentally, kasama rin... (7)
Advice Column	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kailangang sa bandanghuli, masabimo sayong sarili, “I remember the boy but I don’t remember the feelings anymore.” Mukhang hindi madali, no? ... (8)
Crossword	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 Kasalungat ng written49 Co ng basketball noon (11)
Sports News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... ang dating boxing association head at Manila Mayor... (12) • “I’m happy and what I’ll always remember is my performance na di ko inaasahan pero maganda po ang kinalabasan...” (12)