



**Title of Project:**

Language Choice and Code-switching among Sequential and Simultaneous Bilingual children: An Analysis of Grammatical, Functional and Identity-related Patterns

**Researcher:**

Katherine O'Donnell Christoffersen  
University of Arizona  
[odonnka1@email.arizona.edu](mailto:odonnka1@email.arizona.edu)



Katherine O'Donnell Christoffersen

**Research Supervisor:**

Ana Carvalho  
University of Arizona  
[anac@email.arizona.edu](mailto:anac@email.arizona.edu)

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**Project Summary**

***Research Findings***

Despite the fact that it is natural for bilinguals to use all of their linguistic resources across diverse settings in a variety of ways, negative perceptions of language alternation have promoted the popular misconception that code-switching and language alternation are characteristics of bilinguals who are incapable of speaking one language well and, thereby, must resort to some deviant form of mixed language use (Weinreich, 1953). This deficit perspective on bilingual language alternation proliferates within and outside the United States. For instance, up until recently, the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language defined “espanglish” as “a form of speech used by some Hispanic groups in the United States, in which they mix *deformed* elements of vocabulary and grammar from both Spanish and English” (Real Academia Española, emphasis added). Still, adverse popular misperceptions of language alternation and code-switching impact speakers in unfortunate concrete ways, including prejudice towards bilingual speakers and language policies attempting to regiment the separation of languages in the classroom.

In spite of the deficit discourses surrounding code-switching and language choice, research has not found any empirical evidence for these claims. Quite to the contrary, research over the years has proven that code-switching is actually a highly developed linguistic skill of highly proficient adult bilinguals, characterized by shared rules of appropriateness, permeable grammatical switch points, and strategic uses in conversation (Lipski, 1985; Pfaff, 1975; Poplack, 1980; Timm, 1975; Zentella, 1981a, 1982, among many others). However, the characteristics of language choice and code-switching by simultaneous (2L1) bilingual children



and second language (L2) learners is less clear, in spite of incipient research in this area (Fuller, 2009; Potowski, 2004, 2009; Reyes, 2001, 2004; Zentella, 1997). Especially scarce are studies which draw a comparison between simultaneous (2L1) bilingual children, who learned both languages before age three, and sequential (L2) bilingual children, who learned a language other than their L1 after age three (except Potowski, 2009). Yet, the present study is the first to examine the code-switching and language choice patterns of 2L1 and L2 bilingual children under the age of 10, contributing to an understanding of the discursive functions, grammatical switch-points and identity-related patterns among very young 2L1 and L2 bilingual children.

The setting for the study is a Spanish language immersion school in Tucson, AZ with programs in French, Spanish, and German at the time of the study; the school has since added a Chinese program. The primary participants of the study include 30 students from the kindergarten (4 female, 4 male), 1<sup>st</sup> grade (7 female, 4 male) and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (5 female, 6 male) classes. Of the 30 students in the study, 24 (12 female, 12 male) are sequential (L2) bilinguals, having learned Spanish as an L2, and 6 (4 female, 2 male) are simultaneous (2L1) bilinguals. The primary method of data collection for the present dissertation research was through the audio-recording of spontaneous speech in the kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Spanish immersion classrooms. Over the course of four years, I was involved in participant observation for over 150 hours in these classrooms, practicing close observation and offering assistance when possible. The primary dataset for the current dissertation includes 36 hours of transcribed, recorded spontaneous speech in the form of classroom audio-recordings. Beyond the primary dataset consisting of classroom recordings, two Spanish immersion teachers, eight students, and eight parents of the Spanish immersion students were interviewed about the children's language use patterns and language attitudes.

The findings of the study are threefold, including analyses of 1) a model of language choice based on the research, 2) language choice and communicative function in the classroom, and 3) grammatical and functional patterns of code-switching.

In the analysis of language choice based on the research, this paper offers an alternative ecological model of language choice, the Dynamic Model of Social Structures, which centers on the notion of language as a social structure (Gafaranga, 2005) among other social structures. The proposal of this model and its application to language choice in a bilingual program demonstrates the merits of taking the perspective that language is one social structure among other social structures (Gafaranga, 2005), a view that is able to portray language choice as an engaging, dynamic process occurring simultaneously between and within various social structures (i.e., broader society, social network, local context, and individual linguistic behaviors). The model highlights 1) how social structures influence one another and 2) how individuals enact social identities through the discursive functions of their individual language choices. The implementation of the model in an elementary Spanish immersion program exemplifies the application of this model. The present analysis, which is based on the Dynamic Model, demonstrates how individual language choices enact identities (such as that of an "experienced Spanish immersion student", among others), how parents impact language choice, and how students and parents respond to contested language legitimacies where some acknowledge the importance of Spanish in Tucson, and others ascribe Tucson a status of a "non-Spanish speaking place." The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates its advantages in classroom research. Moreover, by exploring the social dynamics reflected and constructed during language choice,



such an analysis of is able to provide educators with important insights into the various social structures which influence the rich funds of knowledge which students bring to the classroom (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

The analysis of language choice and communicative function imparts several significant research findings through 1) the analysis of language use by grade level and 2) the analysis of communicative function. An analysis by grade level demonstrates several key findings. First, upper grades use more Spanish conversational turns with a high percentage of Spanish use in all grades. Also, while heritage speakers of Spanish use more Spanish in the classroom, the L2 learners continue to use more Spanish than English. The top two communicative functions of Spanish turns in the classroom are assertions (37.8%) and requests (17.0%), and the top communicative function for English turns is playing (95%). This may be expected, since students may tend to use the classroom target language (Spanish) for more academic functions and reserve the societal language for informal functions (Tarone & Swain, 1995). Interestingly, though, students use the target language, Spanish, for a wide variety of functions including evaluating/complaining (13.4%) and positioning, blaming and arguing (8.1%). These quantitative findings suggest that students in immersion programs may use the target language and first language in more nuanced ways, which contradicts Tarone & Swain (1995). This prompts several questions: Have students been taught the informal use of the target language? Has it been modeled for them? Or are they adopting the use of academic/formal target language forms for informal functions, such as evaluating, complaining and arguing? A qualitative analysis of communicative function suggests students are in fact adopting academic target language for informal functions. Additionally, interviews with the teachers suggest that an egalitarian philosophy of teaching may lead to teachers' use of more informal dialogue with students.

The analysis of grammatical and function patterns of code-switching provides several interesting findings. First, L2 learners switch points were more varied than 2L1 bilinguals; the L2 learners included adjective/adjectival phrases, verb phrases, and imperatives as common switch points. Also, although L2 learners violated the equivalence constraint more often than 2L1 bilinguals, this rate is comparable to NYPR (2L1 bilingual) children (Zentella, 1997), meaning that all bilinguals violate this constraint to some degree, and it is not unique to L2 learners only. In the analysis of discursive functions of code-switching, 18.8% of individual code-switches could be assigned to conversational strategies. It is also quite significant that L2 learners and 2L1 bilinguals code-switched for a variety of strategic purposes, including footing (for realignment and appeal) and clarification and/or emphasis. The similar grammatical patterns of code-switching, combined with its strategic uses, call for a re-evaluation of code-switching by children and L2 learners, one that includes code-switching as a resource (Ruiz, 2010) and the development of a bilingual pedagogy which incorporates multiple languages into the classroom.

These research findings recommend two important implications for second/foreign language teaching: 1) a reconceptualization of classroom code-switching and 2) a flexible bilingual pedagogy (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). First, classroom code-switching and language alternation has commonly been treated with disdain, as a deviant linguistic practice in the classroom. Part of this is inherent in the terminology. Researchers such as García (2010) have suggested that code-switching after many years carries a social stigma, so they prefer to use the term 'translanguaging' to describe the multiple and mixed language practices that creatively



draw from linguistic and cultural systems in innovative combinations. The term ‘translanguaging’ may provide a powerful, more positive alternative in contexts where researchers and teachers could use it to elevate this often stigmatized linguistic practice. Second, the research findings demonstrate the potential linguistic, sociolinguistic and educational value of code-switching and language alternation in the classroom as a strategic tool used by 2L1 and L2 bilingual children for various purposes. While many language programs are characterized by a strong separation of languages, language immersion programs may be especially so (Lee, Bonnet-Hill, & Gillespie, 2010). Rather than partitioning languages (Spolsky, 2004), the findings of this dissertation advocate a flexible bilingual pedagogy as presented by Creese & Blackledge (2010) in which “the boundaries between languages become permeable” (p. 112). In essence, this pedagogic approach allows for code-switching and language alternation, or translanguaging, as a site for language learning and teaching and recognizes this linguistics practice as a resource (Ruiz, 2010).



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