

Evaluation and Comparison of Two Research Papers on Code-Switching in Hong Kong

Qimeng Shi

School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Neusoft University of Information, Dalian, Liaoning 116023, China
 Email: shiqimeng@neusoft.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

Code-switching is a common phenomenon in Hong Kong where a variety of cultures and languages coexist under its special international status. This paper evaluates and compares two research papers on code switching in Hong Kong, and provides useful guidance for related research. Through comparison and evaluation, this paper finds that both papers cover the Cantonese-English code-switching phenomenon with comprehensive case study and data analysis. However, both studies fail to collect real verbal data in daily conversation and thus they cannot reflect the real facade of code-switching in Hong Kong today. This paper concludes that further studies on code-switching need to focus on daily spoken data.

Keywords: *code-switching, Hong Kong, Cantonese, English*

1. INTRODUCTION

As a city with special international and political status, Hong Kong is a city where Mandarin, Cantonese, and English are the official languages and dialects. Among those languages and dialects, Cantonese is spoken by most people. With its special situation in international finance, Hong Kong also has a considerable number of populations speaking English [1, 3]. Therefore, Cantonese-English code-switching has become a notable phenomenon for a long time. Studies on code-switching suggest that the mixture of Cantonese and English reveals the cultural identity of the population and has turned the city into a Multilingual Hong Kong [4].

This paper takes a sociolinguistic point of view to compare and evaluate two studies on the case of Cantonese-English code-switching in Hong Kong to provide more insights on related further studies.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Questions

1. What are the major differences in two studies concerning Cantonese-English code-switching in Hong Kong?
2. What are the merits and defects in two studies?

2.2. Data Collection

The two research papers are extracted from cnki.net and both are dissertations for Master's degree of China's renowned universities. Both research papers study the Cantonese-English code-switching phenomenon in Hong

Kong. The first paper presents a case study based on spoken data of a soap opera called *Wars of the Genders*. The second paper is a research based on data from four internet forums of Hong Kong. Both are empirical research with original data. The titles of both papers are listed below.

R1: On the Mixing of English in Hong Kong Cantonese: A Case Study of Code-switching in the Sitcom *Wars of the Genders*

R2: Exploration and Analysis of Cantonese-English Code-switching in Hong Kong Forums

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Evaluation and Comparison of Introduction

For, R1, there is a brief introduction of the bilingual profile in Hong Kong discussing the languages currently spoken in Hong Kong, status of English and code-mixing phenomenon and six domains in Hong Kong. Then the author discusses the rationales and objectives for the study respectively. The author discusses two rationales for the research. One is an argument towards negative opinions and another is using new data collecting approach. For R2, the author presents a general introduction of code-switching studies and then discusses the necessity for this study by only pointing out the limitations of traditional data collecting methods. Then the author states the aims and focus of the present paper and point out the advantages of data collected from internet. The author also introduces the code-switching phenomenon in Hong Kong. Both papers present well-organized introductions with enough information of code-switching phenomenon in Hong Kong. Also, both papers justify their data collecting

approaches and point out limitations of traditional methods. To summarize, this paper finds that R1 is a more creative research paper with its rationales arguing against traditional negative opinions on code-switching as well as with its creative data collected method. However, R2 does not show any creative idea at all. In addition, the introduction of R2 uses too much space on the data collected approach. Instead, it should make more efforts on stating the significance and necessity of the study.

3.2. Evaluation and Comparison of Literature Review

Both papers present detailed and comprehensive literature review. However, the focuses are different. For R1, firstly, the author presents a review on the various definitions by different researchers. Then, the author states clearly that this paper will follow the definition of Myers-Scotton [2] and will use code-switching and code-mixing interchangeably. The author also provides a brief review of the development of studies on code-switching from the perspective of sociolinguistics and grammar. Besides, the author gives a short review of other approaches to the research of code-switching. Then, previous studies on code-switching between English and Cantonese in Hong Kong are reviewed. As for R2, the author first introduces the definition of code and code-switching and the differences between code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing. Besides, the author reviews previous studies inside and outside China.

Both papers review enough literature for their studies. However, R1 presents too little critical comments on previous studies while R2 does well on this. But R2 reviews too little studies within the Hong Kong setting. Thus, R2 should focused more on Hong Kong instead of looking the big picture of China since the code-switching in Hong Kong holds so many differences with that of mainland China [6].

3.3. Evaluation and Comparison of "Borrowing" Issue

Both papers define the term "borrowing". However, R1 presents a whole chapter to discuss and argue that English elements in Cantonese/English ML+EL constituents are considered as code-switching not borrowing. The author of R1 reviews abundant literatures on borrowing, states similarities and differences between borrowing and code-switching and uses both table and examples to further explain. On the contrary, R2 just mentions the issue of borrowing in literature review section with short discussion. R2 simply admits that the difference between borrowing and code-switching is obvious. In my opinion, both have limitations. As for R1, a single chapter for borrowing is not necessary. It is actually one of the three objectives of R1. Thus, this objective should be excluded. For R2, although the difference is obvious, some examples

should be provided to support the "obvious" argument. Both authors have to make more efforts on how to balance the structure of the papers. What is more important and what is irrelevant should be taken into consideration.

3.4. Evaluation and Comparison of Data Collecting Methodology

For R1, data is from a TV soap opera in Hong Kong. 60 episodes with code-switching are used. Spoken data is transcribed using the Cantonese writing system. For R2, data is 60 threads downloaded from four Hong Kong forums. Both data collecting methods are able to avoid the problem of invading privacy, but they are not able to get rid of lack of objectivity and spontaneity. However, both methods have huge limitations. For R1, although the author claims that the conversations in the situation comedy is similar to communication in daily life and the actor usually does not use a script and speaks spontaneously, conversations in the situation comedy is not real daily talk [5]. Since comedy has to be broadcasted on public television, any actor has to refine his or her language. No matter how spontaneous the language is, it is not the same as daily communication. Moreover, the number of actors in a situated comedy is too limited. Thus, the data is not large enough to show the code-switching phenomenon of a society. The data collecting method is really creative, but it is not so convictive for a scientific study. For R2, the data collection method is not justifiable at all. First, although the internet allows people to express themselves freely, the speech of people on the internet holds so many differences with the speech in daily communication. Internet language, written or spoken, is much different from real life language.

The data from the internet cannot reveal the real situation of code-switching phenomenon in Hong Kong society. Second, the identities of those internet users are not sure. Problems such as whether the code-switching is produced more by male or female, young or old, are unknown. Thus, the data is not valid to make any further analysis. Although the author claims that internet has become a part of people's daily life, there are huge differences between internet language and daily life language [7]. Comparing both methods, this paper finds that it is hard to say which is more suitable for doing a research.

3.5. Evaluation and Comparison of the Research Issues

For R1, research issues are clearly discusses in introduction as following:

- (1) English elements in the Cantonese/English ML+EL constituents are considered as code-switching and not borrowing, if they are not phonologically integrated in the predominant language Cantonese.
- (2) English elements in Cantonese are mostly content morphemes and are not randomly inserted. The

morpheme-syntactic constraints on the inserted English elements in Cantonese sentences can be explained by the Matrix Language Model.

(3) Cantonese/English code-switching is a social-pragmatically motivated behaviour and serves as various discourse strategies.

As for R2, the research question is to (1) study the mixed constructions and morphosyntactic features of Cantonese-English code-switching and (2) the strategies of Cantonese-English code-switching occurring in the data.

The research issues of R1 and R2 are very clear and theoretically based. For R1, it is valuable for the author to argue against mainstream negative opinions about code-switching and try to test that code-switching is a social-pragmatically motivated behaviour which serves for various discourse strategies. Compared with R1, R2 carries out the research from a different perspective. R1 is testing whether certain things can be explained by certain theories), R2 is using certain theories to explain certain things.

3.6. Evaluation and Comparison of Data Analysis

For R1, data is analyzed in three phases. First, it reviews many literatures and confirms that all the data used belongs to code-switching instead of borrowing. I think the author should provide some examples of misuse between code-switching and borrowing. Second, grammatical features of English elements in Cantonese are explained by applying Myers-Scotton's MLF model. Table indicating the frequency and the proportion of English items in ML+EL constituents in the corpora is made. Phase three is the analysis of code-switching as discourse strategies. Eight extracts from the corpora are analyzed and various discourse strategies are identified and analyzed. For R2, in the analysis of mixed constructions and morphosyntactic features of Cantonese-English code-switching in Hong Kong Forums, all language levels are made. Tables are made to show the frequency of occurrences. Percentage of each type of code-switching is also provided. Statistical demonstration is always convincing. And examples accompanying by detailed explanation are used to present the results. In the end, the author presents seven points to summarize the overall results. Moreover, in the analysis of discourse strategies, linguistic and socio-psychological perspectives in conscious use and gratitude expressing and fixed expressing patterns are discussed in unconscious use. Both papers use tables, examples and explanation words to present the analysis. However, since the objectives of two research papers are different, the data are analyzed in totally different ways. R1 is more creative and precise while R2 is very detailed and comprehensive covering almost everything. For R1, the analysis of eight extracts is enough for this research, but not enough to show the general phenomenon of a whole society. For R2, various strategies are listed to match the data which uses the strategy, but how about some data that explores strategies

that are not cited by the author? Or how about there are any data that does not follow a traditional pattern? Problems like those should be considered by the author.

3.7. Evaluation and Comparison of Conclusion

Both papers are able to give a very well-organized conclusion by summarizing major findings, achieved significance, implication for future research as well as limitations. I think the limitations pointed out by the authors are very essential and valuable for future research on the same topic. With consideration of those limitations, further research will be better carried and be improved to avoid such flaws.

4. CONCLUSION

Both research papers evaluated above are on code-switching in Hong Kong setting. However, the data collection method of R1 is more preferable. Compared with R2, the data of R1 is more similar to real daily life speech. The data of R2, if strictly speaking, is not scientific and credible in any way because the lack of any real information of the internet users behind. On the research issues, both papers clearly define their research questions. However, on the review of literature, R2 outperforms R1 because of its ample critical thoughts. Moreover, R1 takes more space to review irrelevant literature such as "borrowing", while R2 just mentions it with several lines. On the presentation of the results, both papers offer detailed and comprehensive analyses. Tables, statistics and examples are all included. However, R2 lacks a focus when analyzing the data. On the contrary, R1 only analyzes several important aspects. Unfortunately, both papers are not able to provide a statistical analysis of which strategy is used more often or less often. In the conclusion parts, both papers are able to summarize the whole research and point out the limitations.

To summarize, both papers are not qualified to uncover the real situation of code-switching phenomenon in Hong Kong society. Let alone the analysis parts, the data of both papers are not real daily spoken or written resources. Both types of data used in the two research papers involve various interferences from various parts. If one wants to study the code-switching issue of Hong Kong society, one has to do a research based on real data. Maybe the best way to deal with real data is to actually live in Hong Kong and observe the code-switching phenomenon in one's own real life.

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