Multilingual Manchester

Report

2015

MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

Habitual language choices: case studies from bilingual speakers

Perisha Poonam Kaur Kudhail

Sarah Louise Lee

Grace Ormerod

1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study was to investigate the language choices of four bilingual speakers of various languages (Mandarin Chinese, Gujarati, Punjabi and Spanish) and English. By examining which domains our participants use their various languages, we investigated two main things: how their conscious attitudes matched their unconscious language practices and what their language choices revealed about their own identities.

By using language diaries we investigated the situational variance of our speakers, i.e. the whether the heritage language was used in formal, informal or intimate communication. The process is based on a system of 'domain analysis' (Fishman, 1965: 55), where habitual language use in certain situations can reveal much about the societal identities of bilingual speakers. Namei (2008) put these theories into practice, showing how language choices of Iranians in Sweden were reflected of cultural and social issues relevant to the speakers' lives, such as Swedish being used more by women to 'rebalance power structures' (p. 433). Likewise we wish to investigate what the languages our speakers use tells us about the larger social structures into which they fit.

Although domain analysis is not as formulaic as simply using one language to index ethnic identity, for example, it cannot be denied that the meanings of language choice varies based on social context (Fuller, 2007). Our use of multiple methods of data collection (attitudinal questionnaires, diaries and interviews) allowed us to compare the overt and covert attitudes of our participants towards their language choices, and to compare their actual language practice to their stated attitudes about it. This in turn allowed us to see how their social identities are constructed through discourse (Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001).

2 Method

Participants in this study completed a language diary using an online Google form for five days (Appendix 1), stating the language(s) used and what domain the exchange occurred in. Participants were asked to complete the diary as soon as possible after an exchange (at least five times a day). Additionally, an attitudinal questionnaire was administered to rate their comfort levels using likert scales (from one to five) on various aspects of their language use (Appendix 3 and 4). Speakers were asked to fill in the questionnaire before the diaries had been completed, so that speakers would not consider whether there was a difference between their overt and covert responses.

Finally, interviews allowed us to expand upon details highlighted in the diary and questionnaire, in particular some extreme responses we encountered - for example, major discomfort with using English in front of someone who did not also speak it. We also encouraged the participants to speak more freely about their opinions on their own language practice where possible, including asking for reasons behind particular behaviours shown in the diary.

3 Participants and pilot study

Table 1 shows a brief summary of the participants taking part in this study. It should be noted that one German participant was not able to participate; thus the overall number of participants became four.

There is also some variation in how long the participants have lived in Britain, and in how fluent they are in each language, which may lead to differences in their language choices. However, as our paper investigates the individual's practice and how this relates their own identity, this may not be entirely relevant to the discussion of their choices.

Participant	Languages	Age	Gender	Where lived 4-13	Native language?	Current residence /how long?	Estimated fluency in languages
1	English/ Spanish	24	Male	Mexico	Spanish	Britain, 5 years	Fluent/Fluent
2	English/ Mandarin Chinese	24	Female	China	Mandarin Chinese	Britain, 1 year and a half	Average fluency/ Fluent
3	English/ Gujarati	20	Male	Britain	English	Britain, 20 years	Fluent/Mostly Fluent.
4	English/ Hindi	19	Male	India	Hindi	Britain, 2 years	Fluent/Fluent

Table 1: Participant information.

The participant used for the pilot study part of this research generally found the Google form for the diary easy to use. However, there was confusion regarding which conversations were relevant and useful to record; the participant only recorded instances where languages other than English in conjunction with English were used (Appendix 2). To rectify this, printed instructions clearly advised the real participants to record 'all' languages used in a given situation, including their native language (Appendix 1). Overall, however, the pilot study did not highlight any major issues with the methodology and so little was changed when implementing the diary.

4 Findings

Spanish speaker:

The Spanish speaker's attitudinal questionnaire revealed a very positive attitude towards both his languages; he regarded them as having equal prestige, and indicated that he would teach both to his children. However, in formal domains English was used (such as at university or in writing), with Spanish used for informal discourse. This was particularly evident in the case of the latter, as this speaker lived in close proximity to and would use Spanish with other speakers from Latin America. This speaker's attitudinal questionnaire revealed a high level of discomfort of using Spanish in front of those who did not speak it; however with those who did, his diary showed him switching between the two.

In the family domain, he used a combination of Spanish and English which varied depending on the addressee. English was the primarily the language used for speaking to his English mother and English relations - Spanish was used to address his Mexican father, as well as the rest of his Mexican relations. When speaking to his parents together, or to his younger sister, he would switch between the two as he is certain 'they will all understand'. Conversations with his partner showed more language mixing (Spanish, English and French). Although his partner is French, they met in Spain before going on to study together in Britain. This may have led to them predominantly using Spanish together, despite both having equal fluency in their other languages.

An alternative explanation for his behaviour may stem from the speaker's own personal views on using this language. When interviewed, he revealed that he is studying South American politics, and is keen to promote his native language, regarding Spanish and being a Mexican national as integral to his identity. This is upheld by the results from his language diary, which suggest he used Spanish wherever possible; as such however, his attitudinal answers may be affected by his desire to show the equal footing of his languages.

Mandarin speaker:

The Mandarin speaker was shown both through the attitudinal questionnaire and her diary to have very strong opinions on where and when certain languages should be used. Indeed, she claimed to only use Chinese when the other person speaks Chinese, and to never mix this with English. Conversations with Chinese speakers warranted the use of Chinese, and English with native English speakers (NES). Interviews revealed the reasoning behind this as the speaker regarding it 'impolite' to use Chinese in front of a person who did not speak this language.

The language diary showed her conversing with as many English peers as she did Chinese, and would only use Chinese with family and her partner - although this can of course be attributed to these individuals not knowing English. Similar to her refusal to use Chinese in front of NES, she noted that using English among Chinese peers would be regarded as 'showing off'. When Chinese peers would use Chinese in front of NES, she would also speak in English to show that she saw their behaviour as impolite.

Interestingly, despite this, interviews showed that when speaking to Chinese colleagues about her university lectures, she would speak in Mandarin with them but use English terminology. This was not mentioned at all during her language diary or attitudinal questionnaire, in spite of her claim that it would be 'showing off'. Although she claimed English and Chinese had equal prestige for her, it appears that for this speaker that educational and work are the area to use English – perhaps because of the large amounts of terminology she is required to learn through her university course. This idea was further corroborated in the interview: while she stated she had no particular preference for either language, English was seen as 'more international', offering more opportunities for travel and work compared to Chinese.

Hindi Speaker:

For the Hindi speaker, telephone conversations to family in India were typically carried out in Hindi. However, the interview later revealed that he would use English in some more formal situations in these conversations: for example, conversation topics normally surrounding education were conducted in English, but when it came to general pleasantries Hindi was deemed more appropriate by this speaker.

Although the language diary gave us an insight into language choices made with the Hindi speaker's parents in India, it did not reveal how he spoke with peers. When asked about this in the interview, it was revealed that Hindi would be the prominent language choice with peers from India. From this, it seems apparent that the Hindi speaker regards this language as being suitable for informal discourse. Similarly, instant messaging showed him using Hindi words with a Roman script when addressing peers from India; although he could write fluently

using the Hindi script, even in India, within the messaging medium, he used the Latin script more.

Having studied in an English speaking school, he considered English to be associated with education. Despite this, the attitudinal questionnaire showed that the believed them to have equal prestige. However, English was seen as more appropriate to use in England, as it is the language his peers (international and UK based) converse in, and would only use Hindi someone conversed with him in Hindi first. This is upheld in the language diary, where in all instances that he spoke to an English speaker he responded in English. He was more comfortable speaking Hindi to people from India, feeling that he can 'speak it more fluently with no doubt that they will understand what he's saying'.

Gujarati Speaker:

The attitudinal questionnaire and interview revealed that the Gujarati speaker regarded English as the more prestigious of his two languages. This was seemingly due to his English language education, and because this language is predominantly used by people he interacts with on a professional level (e.g. lecturers, etc). On the other hand, while with family he would use both languages, it was considered respectful to use Gujarati with older members of his family as it is their mother tongue.

When talking to peers who also speak these languages, he would let them establish which language was used. As the attitudinal questionnaire highlighted the Gujarati speaker felt relatively comfortable speaking Gujarati in front of people who didn't speak Gujarati. This was particularly apparent if he wanted to convey something that he didn't want the non-Gujarati speakers to understand, particularly personal matters.

The Gujarati speaker would watch television and movies in English purely because of its accessibility; he would not make the effort to watch a movie in Gujarati. As the speaker did not know how to write in Gujarati, he was not able to consume books, online media or use social media in this language; as such, it had become solely relegated to spoken use with peers and family.
.

5 Collective results and discussion

To contextualise these results, we now examine the behaviour of speakers as a whole based on which domains they used each languages in, and what this might reveal about their social identities. The results showed that actual language use of our participants generally matched their own conscious attitudes to language use, and expected results from Fishman's domain analysis theory (1965). However, some smaller aspects of their behaviour were still very telling

about their feelings about being bilingual. The Mandarin speaker displayed behaviour that was most overtly different compared to her counterparts, who all possessed fairly similar opinions on this issue; as such many of the most extreme comparisons exist between this speaker and the others as a collective group.

As predicted from Fishman (1965), each of the speakers were more likely to use their heritage languages in the family domain, and among other heritage language speaking peers. However, our interviews also revealed differing opinions on which language was appropriate with parents, particularly for the Hindi and Gujarati speakers. While both claimed to alternate between English and their respective languages with family, their preference varied in which was more 'respectful' to use with elderly family.

These differences appear influenced by how prestigious they regarded English to be, in accordance with Fishman (1965: 56) - speakers may consider one of their languages to have 'greater intimacy, informality and equality'. Indeed, the Gujarati, Hindi and Spanish speakers all seemed to regard English as being more appropriate for formal situations, and generally regarded it as possessing more prestige. For example, the Hindi speaker claimed that English was the language of his education and thus more suitable for formal situations. This is an example of 'preference-related code-switching' (Shin and Milroy, 2000: 362) based on their experiences and cultural upbringings as to what is the 'unmarked' language to use with their families.

For the Mandarin speaker, this formal/informal distinction was not as prominent, perhaps in part due to her relative inexperience with English. As such, she would generally only divide English/Chinese usage based on who knew those languages. in the first place. Nonetheless, she would use English terminology with Chinese syntax when discussing her university course with other Chinese peers. It is interesting that despite the Mandarin speaker explicitly stating that using English around Chinese speakers would be 'showing off', she would use it in this context. Several reasons may account for this behaviour: perhaps because 'certain topics are handled better in certain languages', or because Chinese 'lacks the specialised terms for a satisfying discussion' (Fishman, 1995: 57). As was shown by the Gujarati and Hindi speakers, learning English in a primarily educational setting causes it to be relegated to this domain more than the heritage language. Alternatively, by making the choice to only use English terminology instead of speaking fully in English for this topic, it might be argued that this speaker is making use of the prestige of possessing English technical knowledge (based on her comments about English offering more work opportunities) while still indexing her bilingual identity (Bailey 2001).

Where speakers were more comfortable with the use of both English and their heritage language, this seemed to lead to increased comfort with switching between multiple languages. This time, both the Mandarin speaker and the Spanish speaker were exceptions, being highly

uncomfortable using any language besides English in front of NES. This differed from the Gujarati speaker, for example, who was comfortable not only speaking Gujarati in front of NES, but using it for the very purpose of excluding them from the conversation.

These behavioural patterns show two very different forms of unconscious group identity practice which differs somewhat from the attitudes they have described in interviews and the questionnaire. Despite the Mandarin speaker's use of English for technical terminology in her university course, she displayed no outward preference for either language, yet would act as a 'facilitator' inviting all to speak English collectively (Cashman 2005:309). Similarly, the Spanish speaker also showed discomfort speaking Spanish in front of NES as they would not understand, and would only mix Spanish and English if the addressee knew both languages.

Under this interpretation, the differing behaviour of the Mandarin/Spanish speakers compared to the Gujarati speaker is very telling about their identities as bilinguals. The Spanish speaker habitually switches languages for his own parents to understand (with little cross-over), and therefore has a tendency to simply use whichever language is most appropriate for each speaker, and would switch to accommodate the linguistic needs of each person. The Mandarin speaker, conversely, solely uses English to accommodate the NES; it might be seen as a way of integrating her multilingual identities through use of one language: and may be motivated by her choice to move to England for work and study.

In contrast, the Gujarati speaker was far more comfortable swapping between his languages (and by extension, his identities) as a Gujarati speaker and English speaker without necessarily feeling like he needed to include the English speaker in his Gujarati interactions. Again, this possibly related to his view that these languages are suitable for different levels of formality. With Gujarati being related to informality and intimacy for this speaker, it follows that it might be used to display group membership with other Gujarati interlocutors. Interestingly, although the Hindi speaker showed a similar formal/informal divide, his preference was to use Hindi with those who were from India - this appears to be a way of marking his identity as an Indian-Hindi speaker, rather than English-Hindi speaker. For both the Gujarati and Hindi speakers use of their heritage language seems to be an act relegated to more intimate or close interlocutors.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, on the whole our speakers had fairly rigid conscious standards about where a certain language should be used and when, generally reflected in their daily linguistic practice. However the smaller details in their interviews and diaries perhaps demonstrate unconscious desires aligning with their own social identity, reflecting certain aspects of their own culture or personal values, and how they identified with certain groups related to their individual experiences.

Our findings open up opportunities for further research using a more intensive diary over a longer period of time. It also raises questions about bilingual identities in cases where their actual practice does not match up to their own attitudes at all, or how bilinguals speaking the same languages might approach code-switching or mixing differently based on their own individual experiences. Through this we can gain a better sense of how language fulfils certain functions in our lives and constructing our own identities through its use, particularly among multilingual people.

7 Bibliography

Bailey. B (2001). The Language of Multiple Identity among Dominican Americans. J*ournal of Linguistic Anthropology* 10(2):190–223.

Cashman, H. R. (2005). Identities at play: language preference and group membership in bilingual talk in interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *37*(3), 301-315.

Fishman. J (1965) Who Speaks What Language to Whom and When? from *Wei, Li, the Bilingualism Reader*, pp. 55-72, London: Routledge

Fishman, J. (1967). Bilingualism with and without diglossia; diglossia with and without bilingualism. *Journal of social issues,* 23(2), 29-38.

Fuller, J. M. (2007). Language choice as a means of shaping identity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *17*(1), 105-129.

Giles, H., & Johnson, P. (1987). Ethnolinguistic identity theory: A social psychological approach to language maintenance.

Namei. S. (2008) Language Choice Among Iranians in Sweden, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development,* 29:5, 419-437

Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2004). Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts (Vol. 45). *Multilingual Matters.*

Shin, S. J., & Milroy, L. (2000). Conversational codeswitching among Korean-English bilingual children. *International journal of Bilingualism*, *4*(3), 351-383.

8 Appendix

Appendix 1: Instructions for participants

<u>**Bilingual Language Choices Study**</u>

<u>**Part one: Language Diary**</u>

- · This part involves writing down <u>all</u> languages you used in a situation, including your native language.
- · If you can, please do this for at least **7 days**, for at least **five situations** daily.
- · If possible please try to fill out the form soon after having finished your conversation/other activity so it is fresh in your mind, or at least take a few notes so you can remember later.

You can find the link to the Google form online here, which can also be filled out from your phone:

http://tinyurl.com/languagediary

It should be easy to follow, but let me know if you need further explanation of any questions.

<u>**Part two: Questionnaire**</u>

This is a short questionnaire which you only need to fill in once. Please answer it whenever you want, but if possible, before the Easter holidays are finished. Please tell me if any questions are unclear.

http://tinyurl.com/languagequestionnaire

<u>**Part three: Interview**</u>

If you are available and okay with being asked more questions, I will do a short interview with you sometime during the Easter break (April 1st – 13th April, or shortly afterwards if you're not around) to ask you questions about your language choices and what you think about the languages you use.

It'll last about 15-30 minutes, depending on how much we have to talk about.

Thanks for taking part!

Appendix 2: Pilot study results

What time of day did the conversation take place at?	What form did the conversation take place in?	With whom did this conversation take place?	In what domain did this conversation take place?	Which language(s) were you using in this scenario?	If speaking with another person, what language(s) did they speak?
Evening	Casual conversation	Contractor	Restaurant	Mainly English, small amount of French and bit of Italian, French, Italian	French

Appendix 3: attitudinal questionnaire.

http://tinyurl.com/oo6dana

APPENDIX 4: Attitudinal Questionnaire results.

http://tinyurl.com/mld8c2x