A Study on Chinese-English Code-switching from Register Perspective

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Abstract. Chinese-English code-switching is getting more and more usual in both written and spoken forms as China carries out international exchanges and cross-culture communication. The analysis is done on the basis of previous research achievements and register theory in Halliday’s Systemic Functional linguistics (1978) employed as a theoretical framework with the purpose of analyzing the code-switching in People’s Daily. By means of study and analysis, it is found that the linguistic structure of the Chinese-English code-switching is mainly insertional code-switching, with phrasal insertion and lexical insertion taking up over the half; and that the register is realized by code-switching in newspaper and code-switching consists of register. Register variables restrict language choice in code-switching. Field governs code-switching on the purpose and subject-matter.

Introduction

As a significant issue in sociolinguistics, code-switching has absorbed considerable attention over the years. Code-switching, the alternating use of two or more language varieties by bilingual or multilingual speakers within one conversational experience, either in the same conversational turn or in a continuous turns, has become an increasingly valuable field of research. The academic publications on code-switching are discussed in many sociolinguistic conferences both at home and abroad.

The present research mainly concentrates on the features and functions of code-switching in written form from newspaper in order to investigate the correlation between code-switching and diverse news genres and the theoretical framework of present research is provided by Halliday’s register theory. The research studies code-switching in People’s Daily. The study will be interpreted from the aspect of three register variables, namely field, mode and tenor. Two problems are solved: (1) what are the distributional and linguistic features of Chinese-English code-switching in the newspaper? (2) what are the relations between register variables and Chinese-English code-switching?

The theoretical framework of this research is primarily based on register theory in systemic functional linguistics and the methodology used is a quantitative approach for solving problem (1) and a qualitative method for problem (2).

The present study of code-switching from Register Theory is significant in both theoretical and practical perspectives. As for theoretical significance, code-switching is: Firstly, a well-researched topic in the field of sociolinguistics. It belongs to both a linguistic phenomenon and a social one. Since 1970s, researchers [1] abroad and home have analyzed code-switching from perspectives of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics and so on. Secondly, register theory is applied in many fields such as translation theories, language teaching. Synchronically, the research is a useful way to investigate how the bilinguals are chosen from their linguistic repertoire. Diachronically, code-switching research is carried out to investigate and predict the language change.

The current research is expected to analyze how readers comprehend the news. In fact, the research on code-switching functions as a reference for the newspaper editors or writers. As for newspaper readers, the study helps them better understand code-switching.
**Research Design and Rationale**

There are two steps in the data collection of present study. Firstly, all newspapers of *People’s Daily* in January and February 2010 are collected, with 15 topics in number. Then the whole reports in these issues are inspected, where code-switching samples are collected and counted. All 810 reports including 3215 code-switching are collected for this research. The following analysis aims to study the first research problem “What are the distribution and linguistic features of Chinese-English code-switching in the newspaper?”

**Data Analysis and Results**

Based on Myers-Scotton’s Matrix Language Frame Model (1993), in sentences or discourses which involve code-switching, one code is matrix language, and the other is embedded language; the sentences or discourses are composed of matrix language and embedded language; and the matrix language determines the structure of the sentences or discourses. Because the newspaper chosen is a Chinese one, and the data analyzed is Chinese-English code-switching, the matrix language is Chinese and the embedded language is English.

In the classification of the data, the means applied are used by Huang Guowen [2], and the code-switching is divided into two types: alternational code-switching (ACS) and insertional code-switching (ICS). ACS belongs to inter-clausal switching while ICS to intra-clausal switching. And insertional code-switching can be subdivided into textual insertion, clausal insertion, phrasal insertion and lexical insertion [3]. The general distributions of code-switching are ACS is 0.0%, while ICS is 25.6% in letter insertion, 0.4% in clausal insertion, 17.5 in phrasal insertion, and 56.5 in lexical insertion.

The code-switching is added up in *People’s Daily* by the preceding means. And it is found that all the code-switching examples in the newspaper are intra-clausal insertional code-switching, with word insertion being the most, phrasal insertion next and clausal insertion the least.

And then the appearances of code-switching are counted in different genres of news, international (387-12%), domestic (2190-68.2), sports (93-2.9), financial (275-8.5), technology (122-3.8), and other news (148-4.6) individually. The result show that code-switching occurs commonly in domestic news, with a frequency of 2190 examples, accounting for 68.2%. This statistics is quite different from the result by Huang [4]. The reason is that *People’s Daily* is both the most important media for the broadest range of target readers to gain a deeper understanding into the guideline policies of the Central Committee, and an important window for the world to observe China as well.

**Register Analysis Applied to Code-switching**

The previous chapter presents the study results and solves the first problem. According to the above analysis, the linguistic structure of Chinese-English code-switching is mainly insertional code-switching. The findings will be analyzed by adopting Halliday’s register theory to solve the second study problem: what are the relations between register variables and Chinese-English code-switching? More specifically, the textual structure and the functions of code-switching will be analyzed. The research is carried out from the angle of field, mode and tenor individually.

**A Field Analysis on Code-switching**

Field is concerned with mapping the reality of the world around us, i.e. who is doing what to whom, when, where, why, how. It refers to subject matter and setting. The subject can be technical or not. According to Halliday [5], field impacts on wording. It is indicated that field has great effect on the occurrence of code-switching in newspaper discourse. Because register is classified according to field of discourse, register includes both the technical and the non-technical, namely, medicine and linguistics as well as shopping and games-playing. In other word, what are written will determine whether the field of discourse is technical or not.
According to Hymes, field refers to setting and ends. The occurrences of code-switching in different settings show diverse ends. Because political, cultural and social lives are comparatively earnest, the language is used formally. In different settings, the ends of appearance of code-switching are variable.

**Code-switching in Technical News.** “It may be that the more technical registers lend themselves especially to language activity of the discussion type, where there are few, if any, related non-language events.” The language activity of the patient consulting the doctor in the surgery, or of research scientists in the performance of a laboratory experiment, is very clearly functioning as means of operation and control. If a term paper, a mathematic lecture and the politics are mentioned, the technical registers will occur, hence the formal style of language is used. In technical register, language is required to be more economy and facility.

As for the field of technology news, code-switching is briefly the conversion of technical terms. It is based on the technology news with high expertise. The code-switching in technology news mainly belongs to obligatory switching. It is mainly for accuracy’s sake.

[1] 评审专家说：“这些成果的产业对推动广东LED产业迅速发展具有重大意义。（《广州“才新政”推动产业新局》2010-2-4）

In example [1], the setting is: the research product is significant for “LED” industry to be developed. Because the main purpose here is to provide information, it is more convenient and more appropriate to code-switch between English and Chinese without any translation.

**Code-switching in Sports News.** To be specific, field reflects the ideational meta-function, which is concerned with mapping the reality of the world around us, that is, who is doing what to whom, when, where, why, how, shows differences in the field. Hence all the participants in the field can distinguish different fields. The sports news aims to deliver the latest news to the people who are interested in sports objectively and quickly.

[2] 美国职业棒球大联盟MLB老牌劲旅纽约洋基队3日携带球队历史上第二十七座世界冠军奖杯来到中国, 这是该奖杯第一次在中国亮相。（《美国职棒劲旅洋基队访华，世界冠军奖杯亮相北京》2010-2-4）

The setting of code-switching is that the famous baseball team came to China. It is known that the baseball in China is in a nascent condition. So the visit is significant to develop baseball in China. And many readers are not familiar with baseball in USA.

**Code-switching in International News.** As for the international news, the readers are mainly concerned with daily current affairs, i.e. the hot issues about political and economical situation in the world and about the various aspects of society. Since such news report should be based on objective facts, its language should be brief, succinct and easy to be understood. The reason will be discussed based on the following case analysis.

[3] 总部设在美国硅谷Better Place 公司2月7日宣布，明年将在以色列境内建立70至100个电动车充电站。（《以色列将建电动汽车充电网》2010-2-11）

The setting in the field of this example is about the establishment of charging wet by a famous corporation of USA. In such field, the end of the occurrence of code-switching is facility. The function means that Chinese-English code-switching is used in order to avoid any ambiguity. “Better Place” as a famous corporation in USA, it is not well-known in China as some big international companies like “Microsoft”, “Dell”, so the Chinese are not familiar with its name.

**Code-switching in Domestic News.** In domestic news, which are mainly concerned with daily national affairs, i.e. the hot topics about political and economical situation in China and about the various aspects of society. Since such news report should be based on objective facts, its language should be economic. As Myers-Scotton [7] noted, the bilingual “having the choice of items from two systems is able to select less complex forms from the two languages in preference to more cumbersome ones”. Economy is known as the “principle of least effort”, it refers to that some bilinguals use code-switching to save time and energy.
实现COD减排目标还有很大困难，因为在减排同时还要消化新增项目带来的新排放。（《污染物减排要打持久战》2010-2-3）

The setting is about the topic of pollutants emissions. In such a condition, the writer keeps using the original English name of the technical term in order to be economy. Compared with its Chinese expression 化学耗氧量, English abbreviations are more economic.

**Code-switching in Financial News.** Financial news is a page with a fix group of readers, many of whom are businessmen or concerned about business. In the 21st Century, with the international business competition being increasingly fierce, the importance of the information accuracy has been more and more emphasized. For example, in business news involving foreign enterprises name, or the models of products, Chinese-English code-switching is a commonplace. The original quotations make the expression more accurate and clear.

[5] 据了解，在极端情况下，RAV4车辆加速踏板松开时会发生卡滞，可能导致车辆不能及时减速，影响行车安全。（《质检总局将监督一汽丰田召回》2010-2-4）

The setting is that Toyota Company recalled all of the cars with the model of RAV4. It is known that Toyota has many models. The code adopted is to express the accurate model of them. If the code-switching doesn’t occur, more troubles will happen.

**Code-switching in Comprehensive News.** In this kind of news, the affairs are on the literature and foreign cultures. The present code-switching in this field aims to create a certain foreign image. Different languages which belong to different cultures have different histories, and hence have their social prestige and different social influence. That is why the editor likes to apply code-switching in such field. Myers-Scotton [8] states that code-switching is a strategy, which can heighten the speaker’s prestige in listener’s mind, at least during the course of conversation. Code-switching is not random mixing of two codes. The speakers who can use the code-switching successfully must have the good ability of using two languages, and master the shared principles of these two languages. In example [6], with the setting of admiring for William Shakespeare, “To Be or Not to Be” is used to create a literature image to the readers that they have received a good education, and they are proficient in two languages, and then enjoy a great prestige among the masses.

[6] 莎士比亚真是伟大。400年后，“To Be or Not to Be（活着还是死去）”这个著名的问句，依然敲击着那么多人的心灵。

**A Mode Analysis on Code-switching**

The mode of discourse refers to the medium which determines the role played by the language activity in the situation. The mode of discourse in fact involves how one subject is discussed or found, and then the mode will be chosen accordingly. What form of communication the user chooses is just the mode of discourse. Generally speaking, the primary distinction on the mode of discourse is divided as spoken and written language. Different users in different situations tend to express their ideas with such two varieties of language. The mode of discourse primarily consists of two channels: spoken and written. And the difference between speech and writing has an important influence on the language system. The same is true with influence on code-switching.

**Code-switching in Spoken Mode.** The written language frequently appears in newspaper, but sometimes the spoken language occurs in the conversations of newspaper. The style of the spoken language will always be different from that of the written language. Spoken language refers to the form of communication, but it doesn’t mean the style of spoken language is bound to be informal. For example, the speech made on science is much more formal than that of a casual conversation about weather, though both of them are accomplished orally. In the newspaper, the code-switching in conversation is relative more informal in style.

[7] 他转述了一位青年朋友对社会上比富、宠星等陋习的尖刻议论之后，笔锋一转，说起了契诃夫：“听罢小G之言，我说：你这描绘，属于典型化手段。”（《向契诃夫学些什么》2010-2-4）
The setting is a speech on social morals, which is related to people’s daily lives, hence the language must be looser and more informal than that on political issues. The code-switching used for an address in the spoken mode is more varied and dynamic than the address without it. The occurrence of code-switching shows the intimate relation between the speaker and someone. The expression describes the speaker’s underlying information beyond the topic.

**Code-switching in Written Mode.** Diverse users in different field show their ideas with spoken and written language. Spoken language presents the informal style. While written language frequently occurs in some articles, textbooks, documents, manuals, or official statements. The formal features of communication in written language therefore show the formal style: logical, accurate, well-organized and serious, etc. Reading aloud a scientific speech is a special case of written rather than spoken. It should be noted that the colloquial words and learned words can emerge in either spoken or written language.

[8] 游客用手机登录wap.visitbeijing.com.cn,就可“拥有”一位随时、随地、随身的旅游咨询员。The subject is an introduction about webs. The writer and readers demand the accurate writing of webs. The writer wants to make readers login the web sites and readers would like to find those web site. The code-switching adopted is relevant to the features of written language. It is known that the writing of web must be set rigidly. Hence the input should be seriously treated to make writing accurate. All of the elements are shown to us the features of formal style.

**A Tenor Analysis on Code-switching**

Tenor consists of the personal tenor and functional tenor. The former refers to the speakers’ social relationship. The latter is the objective of language activity. Halliday [6] states that personal tenor constrains the formality of language use. The more intimate the relation is, the lower the formality. The formality contains mood, modality, vocative, personal pronoun and so on. Gregory & Carroll [10] state that in fact, three register variables are related only to the role relationship. Field is the result of purposive role; mode is the relationship between the communication party and media; and tenor is the relationship within the communication parties.

Tenor has a strong controlling function of the appearance of code-switching, which totally construe textual structure and functions of code-switching. Due to textual structure, most code-switching examples impacted by tenor are lexical insertions. The following analysis is primarily based on the interpersonal functions of code-switching and how tenor controls the appearance of code-switching in diverse cases.

The participants in communication function differently. In different communicative situations, various styles of languages are used for diverse purposes. When speakers use more than one language, the choice will be more complicated. Hence the choice of code-switching is related to the language listener’s competence and the relationship between the two parties.

From the tenor perspective, the international and domestic news are mainly about social, political and cultural matters, hence they are popular with large amount of audience. All of people, regardless of their ages, social status, and educational background, are supposed to be potential readers. Relatively, in technology news, there is a narrow range of readers who are mostly professional workers or amateurs. For them, technical terms are common but rare. In this situation, lots of technical jargons are immediately quoted in English. So the code-switching in technical news functions as a “gap-filling”. In technical news, writers and editors naturally use the original language, which sometimes has a discriminating function, or an addressee specification as Gumperz defines.

When writing and editing the newspaper, readers’ interests must be considered. As the international business competition is increasingly wild, the importance of the information accuracy has been placed more and more emphasis on. So it is not against the economic principles anyway, but actually of profound significance. The code-switches which are in the form of the original English following the Chinese version or vice versa can make readers find the accurate information easily.

[9] 通过并购，联想走出了这样一条品牌再造路径：Think带动Lenovo, Lenovo 带动Idea。Here, the three words “Think, Lenovo, Idea” are the three steps of reconstitute the new brand. If they
are not translated accurately, it may cause serious consequence. Hence the code-switches which are in business news reflect a feature of accuracy, which is a perfect method to make a communication successful.

Summary

The study is designed as a quantitative and qualitative research to investigate the distributional and linguistic features of Chinese-English code-switching and the relations between register variables and code-switching. It is found that the linguistic structure of Chinese-English code-switching is mainly insertional code-switching. From the angle of three register variables, the research indicates that field is concerned with mapping the reality of the world around us. In different fields, the code-switching functions diversely. So in different types of news, the appearance and function of code-switching differ a lot. It occurs frequently in professional news like technological and financial news rather than in serious news like political news. An evident textual feature of code-switching in the previous discourses impacted by field is a significant number of English abbreviations, and the function of code-switching is briefly ideational. Mode controls code-switching on the media of discourse. The frequency of code-switching in written form is relatively higher than that of spoken form. Tenor’s controlling function is reflected from four perspectives, that is, role relationship, power, social distance and degree of formality and the code-switching functions interpersonally. Hence code-switching is used as a significant skill to satisfy readers.

References