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Code-Mixing Causes Confusion In Young Bilingual Speakers, Or Does It?!

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Abstract – This study provides empirical, comparative and statistical analysis of 2 different categories of people: the first category was 250 students academically involved in educational establishments; their monolingual and bilingual language experience and their attitudes to people who mix 2 languages at their speech. A long with the survey which was carried out at the metro station of Beruniy, we did the second experiment, namely, we took interviews from 67 mothers of 1-14 year-old children, residing in Tashkent, in order to gain reliable information about children being brought up in a monolingual/bilingual or even multilingual atmosphere; those children's language development and difficulties, parents' plans for their children's language skills, support and motivation. Especially, we intended to observe if bilingual environment is causing any language confusion to a child and the role of parent's code-mixing in the family. The obtained results of the first experiment were different from what we had expected. The participants expressed neutral (44%) and positive (35%) attitude to code-mixing among bilingual people. The second experiment opened the doors to the world of young children and their language experience retold by their mothers. At the final stage of our analysis we realized that code-mixing as a common language phenomenon is rather natural and not seen as a linguistic error among majority participants of the experiments. Concerning the children and their language development which was under empirical and statistical studies, majority of them who are experiencing sequential bilingualism in particular, from early ages did not display any language confusion; though simultaneous bilingual children of young age had some confusion with vocabulary comprehension.

Keywords – Monolinguals, Language Systems, Language Mode, Language Development.

I. Introduction

A lot of children all around the globe are practicing bilingualism since their infancy. Although bilingual children are believed to have more flexible intellect and developed cognition and show better academic results according to some scientists, yet, there are some costs of bilingualism parents and educators ought to be aware of. One of those phenomena that is not welcomed by many scientists and language users in whole is code-mixing. In this article, we study the causes and effects of code-mixing on children and based on our scientific findings we study language environment in the capital of Uzbekistan and find out people's language status and their attitude to code-mixing in bilingual people, including children.

II. Background Of The Study

Code-mixing is an incredibly complex, but at the same time, effortless language phenomenon which occurs in bilinguals' language performance frequently. To be more specific, code-mixing is the process when a bilingual of any age combines language units of both languages within a sentence/utterance.

For many language scholars code-mixing is a normal and acceptable outcome in language performance as code-mixing in bilingual children occur naturally: they observe this process in adults' language output and follow their league [1, 2]. As they say, parents are the first teachers for children and, hence, parents guide their offspring in their early communication journey. Young language learners who are thirsty to discover the world where they have just come, will do everything the way their parents do, including language learning. In this consideration, we are likely to assume that parents who do not mix languages in oral communication in their daily lives bring up children who, also, try not to mix languages in their speech.

According to some linguists mentioned in the works of Krista Byers-Heinlein and Casey Lew-Williams, community where bilingual children reside makes impact on children language development as well [1,2; 2]. Obviously, the environment which the language users are surrounded by plays a tremendous role in shaping one's language skills as they communicate with each other, spend more time together and are in many cases emotionally bound to one another. Friends who the children play football with, schoolmates who they study together from the morning until late afternoon, neighbors who call them out to go for a walk in the evenings will certainly add their fair share to their language boosting process.

When we observe that code-mixing is natural and common everywhere, we wonder, what causes code-mixing. How does it occur?

According to Grosjean's views on language interactions in bilinguals, which was brought up in the works by P. Brook & V. Kempe, bilinguals' languages are in constant competition to be active and thus, for the user of two languages, it takes everyday choices to use either of the languages at a time to "digest" data in the form of a language piece. In the time the opted language is being implemented, the other language is forced to rest [3, 13]. Bilinguals with two language systems are bound to opt for one of the languages to comprehend the data around, by deactivating the second language for a while. It is such a process which creates flexibility in the mind of a bilingual to choose the most effective means to gain the needed data.

Another empirical situation might occur when a bilingual receives data, his/her mind may measure the data in both language systems, and then choose it to stay in his mind in one of the language systems, which is closer to his/her personal mentality**.** The information stored in a bilinguals' mind is likely to be in the language which has shaped the biggest part of his mentality or even culture.

Here, I assume, culture plays a great role, in perceiving the information in a certain language mode. Given that, even though semantically a language piece is clear by the bilingual in both languages, still there should be the closer translated/perceived version of that very language piece in one of his/her language systems. The perception of that language piece in the preferred language shapes a concept as clearly as possible; therefore, every time the user implements that language piece, and the picture/sensation comes to his/her mind immediately.

III. Materials And Methods

During the research we studied various literature, including articles and books on bilingualism in children. In the field of bilingualism, the phenomenon of code-mixing was learned thoroughly and we searched for reasons/causes to/of code-mixing among young children. We tried to link the impact of the surrounding people including parents and friends to the child's code-mixing and language performance on the whole. We based our research on 3 main sources. The primary one is Krista Byers-Heinlein and Casey Lew-Williams' work [1] in collaboration named "Bilingualism in the early years: What the science says" which was published in 2018. It discusses about young children who are exposed to bilingualism from early age and the advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism in their journey into bilingual language development.

The second piece of scientific work which we found crucial to study [2] was by Comeau, Genesee and Lapaquette with their "The modeling hypothesis and child bilingual code-mixing" published earlier in 2003. This linguistic contribution discussed issues of the environment that shapes the child as a language user. Finally, another linguistic work [3] by Francois Grosjean and Krista Byers-Heinlein written in collaboration was absolutely revolutionary and captivating: "Speech Perception and Comprehension" and it was published in 2018. In the article, the authors discussed many issues including language modes in bilingual minds and constant competition of the two languages to be activated in different situations.

In the research we approached to empirical, comparative and statistical methods. In other words, we started the research from observation. During the experiments (the survey with students of 15-27 years old and interviews with mothers of 1-14 year-olds) we observed their answers, reactions to the questions. After the experiments were done, we compared them all, as our target was to

find out what percent of the participants are bilingual (multilingual) or monolingual and how they react to code-mixing. At the end we put all the results to the tables working out the statistics in percentages.

IV. Results And Discussions

Now when we have collected some data about how the language mixing occurs and how the data in the bilingual mind is stored, we prefer to delve into finding out more about the society we live in and their attitude to bilingualism and code-mixing. For this reason, we have carried out two experiments in the form of a survey and interviews in Tashkent among two different groups:

EXPERIMENT 1. The first group of people was teenagers and adults between the ages of 15-27. Given that people of this age were available the most, near to the National University of Uzbekistan. They were all students of lyceums and universities located around Beruniy Metro station. As we considered this spot of the city to be the fullest with the students of the target age, we opted for certainly this location to have our survey. The aim of the survey was to find out what proportion of the students studying in Tashkent's biggest academic area is bilingual, so the number of questions asked in the survey was few enough, five. We would just come up a passerby and ask them:

1) How old are you?

2) Where do you study?

3) How many languages do you speak?

4) What are those languages?

5) (Then, we would explain them what code-mixing is and when they recognize/recall such situation from their observations, we would ask the final question). What's your attitude to people who code-mix in their speech?

The total number of participants in the survey was 250. The data was gained within a week during the daytime between 2-5pm on weekdays.

When we gathered the data it took us another week to analyze and see the results.

When finally all the data was analyzed we discovered that in the students' town:

1. First of all, during the analyses after having collected all the data for this experiment, all 250 participants were categorized into three groups according to age difference. The first group consisted of teenagers between the ages of 15-19. The second group was of young adults between the ages of 20-23. Finally, people who are 24-27 years old made up the third group.

Out of 250 interviewees whose answers were thoroughly analyzed (since there were some other interviewees who were 27+, whose answers were not included to the 250 as target object of the experiment was to find out data about younger adults until the age of 27).

Out of total number of 250, there were 127 young adults at the ages between 20-23 which made the biggest proportion of participants in the experiment and that equaled to 50.8%, followed by the category of older students between the ages of 24-27 with the 29.9%. 49 teenagers between the ages of 15-19 made the smallest percentage (which is 19.6%) of the total number of participants taken part in the experiments.

Table 1

№	Age	Number	Percent
1	15-19	49	19.6%

2	20-23	127	50.8%
3	24-27	74	29.6%
	Total	250	100%

2. To the second question which was about the place where they all studied answered more than 250 people but only those people's answers, who were students, were included in the experiment. Given that, those who worked and academically were not involved anyhow were not the target of this experiment.

Our aim was to observe the level and range of monolingualism/bilingualism/multilingualism among the young generation and predict the hypothetical future of the language usage by the future holders of the country in the capital city.

Amongst the 250 participants in three categories of ages the results were in such fashion:

Table 2

№	Age	Lyceum	University
1	15-19	26	4
2	20-23	1	126
3	24-27	-	93
	Total	27	223

Namely, 26 teenagers studied at lyceum and 4 of them have already managed to become students of universities. Among the young adults who fell into the second category only 1 person was at lyceum and the whole other majority of 126 people were at universities. Among the third category of 24-27 agers there were none who attended lyceum and 93 of them all were enrolled in university courses. In total, out of 250, 27 were lyceum students and 223 people went to university.

When participants were asked the third question, which was "How many languages do you speak?", the results looked this way:

Table 3

№	The number of languages spoken by participants	The number of speakers	Percent
1	1 language	161	65%
2	2 languages	68	27%
3	More than 2 languages	21	8%

	Total	250	100%

3. To conclude, among the 250 interviewees, 161 of them were monolinguals who comprised 65% of the whole student population taken part in the experiment. The percentage of the bilinguals was equal to 27% with 68 people, followed by merely 8% of multilingual language users who spoke more than two languages and they made up 21 people among the army of 250 students.

Table 4

№		15-19		20-23		24-27		Total
1	1 language	76	47%	44	27%	41	26%	161
2	2 languages	15	22%	26	38%	27	40%	68
3	More than 2 languages	2	10%	9	43%	10	47%	21

If we look closely to the table above, the number of mono-, bi- and multilingual speakers is thoroughly categorized in three age groups with percentage relative to the total number.

The biggest number of monolinguals is in the category of teenagers (76 people), while in the other two categories that number is almost half of teenager's (44 and 41people). However, the number of bilinguals almost equally dominates among the second and third age categories with 26 and 27 speakers, leaving behind the category of teenagers with solely 15 bilingual speakers. Finally, the same trend is observed with multilingualism, whereas the number of multilingual students among the two older-aged categories exceed with 43% and 47%, whereas multilingual teenagers were only 2 making up the rest 2%.

5. As to what languages are widely spoken among the participants, we drew our conclusion in the form of a table below:

Table 5

№	Different Languages	The number of speakers	Percent
1	Uzbek	229	92%
2	Russian	48	19%
3	English	29	12%
4	Other languages (Korean, German, French, Tadjik, Kazakh)	11	4%

Among the 250, Uzbek, the state language was dominating with the army of 229 speakers (92%), followed by the two other languages which were relatively close in popularity: Russian with 19% and English with 12% of speakers. Finally, there were 11 speakers of other languages too and they made up the tiny 4% of all the participants.

5. In the end, it was the time for us to settle to the target question which was the core of this experiment – to get to know participants attitudes to bilinguals/multilinguals who code-mix in their language performance. After having analyzed the data about this issue, we have come to realize that the people's attitudes were not as negative as we had expected to.

Table 6

№	The participants' attitude to code-mixing	Number of participants	Percent
1	Positive	88	35%
2	Negative	52	21%
3	Do not care/ does not matter	110	44%
	Total	250	100%

The biggest part of the group (44%) would have neutral attitude to code-mixing phenomenon is speech, along with the second biggest part (35%) expressed positive attitude to code-mixing too. Only with 21% 52 participants expressed negative attitude to such phenomenon in language users.

Table 7

№	Attitude	15-19 y.o		20-23 y.o		24-27 y.o		Total
1	Positive	18	37%	46	36%	24	32%	88
2	Negative	10	20%	24	19%	18	24%	52
3	Do not care/does not matter	21	43%	57	45%	32	44%	110

In the table above we can see the detailed number and percent of people and their attitudes to code-mixing.

EXPERIMENT 2. The second group of people was mothers of 1-14 year-old children. The experiment two was in the form of an interview. The aim of the interview was to know what proportion of youngsters is being raised to be bilingual, what languages are being preferred to practice from young age and the probable future of those young language users.

The questions asked during the interviews were different depending on the mothers' time and willingness to converse (5-7 questions in total):

1. Are you a bilingual (or maybe multilingual)? If yes, how long have you been bilingual (or multilingual)?
2. What languages do you speak?
3. What do you think is the right age for exposing a child to the second language?
4. Do your children speak one or more languages? What are those languages?
5. Have you ever noticed language confusion in your children? If yes, what do you think caused that?
6. Which foreign language(s) do you think are important for your children's bright future?
7. How are you supporting/helping your children to develop their language skills?

The data collection was done by 15-40min interview talks at random places where we predicted the data would be attainable, such as cafes, supermarkets, buses, bus stops, entrances of kindergartens and primary schools. All in all, we managed to talk to 67 female parents, which took us three months.

1. Initially, before gaining information about their children, we had intention to know the mothers better, as we were aware that for a child's success in language learning the environment that parents have created around their children was of paramount importance. That is to say, if parents themselves were active language users, then it is, in many cases, a matter of time for children to become fluent users of those languages. Hence, first two questions were to explore the mothers' language abilities.

Out of 67 mothers 31 were monolinguals and they were the 46% of all the interviewees. Bilingual mothers were slightly fewer – 28 females with 42%. Last but not least, there were multilingual mothers as well with only 8 people making up the smallest proportion of 12%.

Table 8

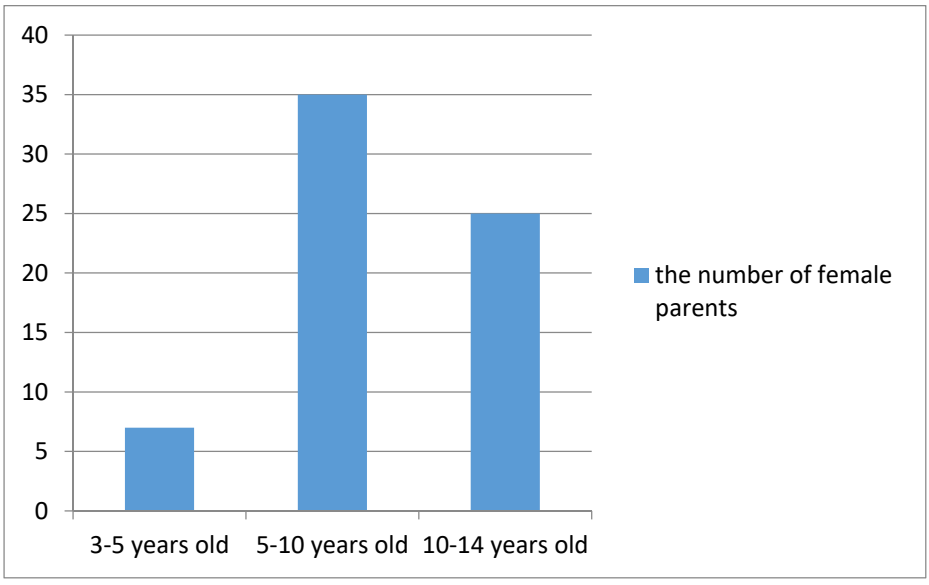
№	The number of languages spoken by participants	The number of speakers	Percent
1	1 language	31	46%
2	2 languages	28	42%
3	More than 2 languages	8	12%
	Total	67	100%

Looking at the results of the interviews we can note that 54% of the female parents were either bilingual or multilingual. Thus, we found it relevant to ask them a following question about the duration of them becoming and/or being bilingual/multilingual. The vast majority answered that the time when they considered in such way was since their childhood and school time.

2. Amongst the mothers languages such as Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh, Tajik, Kirgiz, English and Arabic were spoken.

3. Now, it was the turn for exploring their children. To the question about the right age to introduce a child to the second language, opinions varied this way:

Diagram 1. The right age to expose a child to the second language according to female parents' opinions



All in all, many mothers were of the view that it is best to introduce the second language after the age 5.

4. In the city of Tashkent we could guess that among children there are two widely spoken languages – Uzbek and Russian. Answers to this question met our expectations. Children of our mothers spoke Russian and Uzbek, however, the number of monolingual children slightly exceeded.

5. Question №5 was absolutely special to highlight as it was about language confusion in bilingual children. We intended to know if their bilingual children have a tendency to confuse languages or have trouble in comprehension of the two languages. There was a follow-up question asking for the causes of such dilemma.

Out of 67 females, majority were positive and proud to realize that bilingualism had no negative impact on their children. Though, just under 3% of them (2 mothers) recalled that they had observed language confusion in their children. As we were listening to the mothers it seemed as the mothers themselves had trouble to understand and explain the reasons for confusion. We tried to brainstorm all the causes to assist them understand and recall for more specific data. As a result, they said that in a bilingual family at the early age (2-4 years old) a child listening to his father and mother who communicate in two languages often have some confusion in vocabulary comprehension and thus confusion. Obviously, these ladies were talking about simultaneous bilingualism in children.

6. The 6th question of the interview was about foreign languages the mothers find important for their children's future. Through collecting information about those languages, our aim was to make distinct prediction of the languages spoken by the future holders.

Majority mothers opted for English, Russian as of great importance for academic success and better job prospects. However, there were females who would rather found Korean and Arabic as one of the most important and future-promising languages for their children.

7. The final question of the interview was about parents' role in children's language development. We asked how they are helping/supporting their children in language learning. Their answers were not very surprising. Many of the parents were of the view that courses in language centers are of great help in learning a foreign language. However, this was monolingual mothers' views in many cases. Bilingual/multilingual parents were sure that it starts at home, in the atmosphere where a parent communicates with a child in the target language. Some mothers highlighted reading books in the target language together is an effective way of activating the target language along with encouraging a child to read more.

V. Conclusion

On the whole, on the grounds of the results of the first experiment, we realized that in the capital of Uzbekistan among the ages of 15-27 year-old young generation attitude to code-mixing was rather neutral. Many among the participants considered code-mixing as a natural phenomenon in language performance. According to the data gained from the interviews with mothers of 1-14year-olds, the results justified the situations when exposing a child to simultaneous bilingualism is likely to challenge the young language learner and lead to confusion. However, this is not the case with sequential bilingualism. Furthermore the role of bilingual parents is not taken for granted: the more active the parent is as a bilingual or multilingual, the smarter is the child is growing around that parent.

References:

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[3] Francois Grosjean and Krista Byers-Heinlein "Speech Perception and Comprehension" 2018