Constraints on Written Code-Switching: Evidence from Guaraní/Spanish Jopara

Once considered “deviant” use of language, code-switching has come to be understood as a highly ordered feature of the bilingual experience cross-linguistically (Brice & Brice, 2009). In the case of Paraguay, where Spanish and Guaraní have been in contact for nearly 500 years, figures have estimated the bilingual population between 60-80%, making it one of few truly bilingual nations. Yet, this may understate widespread contact phenomena between the two, which have given rise to jopara. Further, amid efforts by the Paraguayan government to institutionalize jopara as the Guaraní taught in schools, defining jopara proves a vested national interest for Paraguay (Niño-Murcia 2011).

How do current definitions describe jopara? This variety has been variously described as an unstable language mixing (“métissage”) (Lustig 1996; Pottier 1970); as Guaraní with hispanisms (Fernández Guizzetti 1966); an everyday ill-spoken Guaraní (Galeano Olivera n.d.); as a transitional pidgin (Boidin 2006a), or a third language (Bakker, Gómez Rendón, and Hekking 2008); a creole (Boidin 2006b; Pic-Gillard 2003); or even as a Spanish spoken in Guaraní (Morínigo 1959). What is needed, then, is clearly to apply a systematic means of analyzing and identifying jopara.

In this talk, we employ leading theories of codeswitching to analyze the first novel written entirely in jopara: Ramona Quebrasto (RQ) (Ayala de Michelagnoli 1989). We find that the language choices evinced in “RQ-jopara” don’t comfortably fit current models of CS structure. Following Deuchar et al.’s (2007) quantitative approach, we characterize RQ-jopara as predominantly insertional, but with strong alternational features. This is consistent with Muysken’s (2000) proposal that colonial settings and asymmetric proficiency lead to insertion. Alternation is favored in this case by the stability of bilingualism, but disfavored by the lack of complete language separation or strong norms. Consider (1), a common example of the insertion pattern, and (2), a common example of alternation.

1) ¡Dio mio, me hace todo py’ajere! 2) ¡Marā piko che mombe’u si no podemo remedia! My god, it makes me sick! Why would I tell you if we can’t fix it!

We will also discuss the pitfalls that we have encountered applying Myers-Scotton’s Matrix Language Frame Model (Jake, Myers-Scotton and Gross 2002) and Deuchar et al.’s Quantitative Model to Ramona Quebranto, specifically jopara’s morphological peculiarities and the determination of constituency and clause structure. For example, example (1), in containing a single CP, can be clearly explained as a Guaraní switch with a Spanish Matrix Language. Yet, example (2), in containing two CPs entirely in both languages, may be interpreted as containing no switch at all if the sole unit of analysis is a CP, as the MLF Model suggests. We conclude by talking about possible theoretical implications on future coding of applying the models to these real-world data.
References


