

## Code-switching

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## Review Gardner-Chloros

When bilingual speakers mix their two languages in ordinary everyday speech, this is referred to as *codeswitching*. It is often frowned upon by educators, parents, language guardians, and often by the very speakers themselves. In a new book on the topic, Penelope Gardner-Chloros argues that such negative attitudes towards the phenomenon are misguided. They are informed by a purist attitude, and in matters of language, purism often does more harm than good. While this is the take-home message the author wishes to impart, most of the book has a narrower, and more academic focus: to provide an overview of the work that has been done on codeswitching in a good forty years of research. This review focuses more on the wider issue, whether codeswitching should be treated with the scorn it so often encounters.

Gardner-Chloros (hereafter: G-C), who works in the UK and has done extensive fieldwork on bilingualism in the Alsace (a region of France where much of the local population speaks Alsatian, the indigenous variety of German, and French) and in the Greek immigrant community in England, draws one overriding conclusion regarding the academic research on codeswitching, and it's this: The phenomenon is so complex, and includes so many aspects, that it needs to be treated in a holistic way. It is very hard to study it purely for its grammatical characteristics, for instance, ignoring the social circumstances in which it thrives or is constrained from occurring. Similarly, there is a limit to what psycholinguists can learn about the phenomenon considering the wide gap between unnatural laboratory conditions and the informal nature in which most codeswitching actually takes place.

She arrives at this conclusion through an admirable analysis of the entire field. The book is divided into eight chapters, five of which are devoted to one particular aspect, all five of which have generally been studied without paying much attention to the other ones. G-C does a nice job surveying the respective fields in each chapter, but does not shy away from providing her own assessment of the strengths and weaknesses. This makes the book at once a valuable summary for the relatively uninitiated (say, students and linguists who have not specialized in bilingualism) and for those specialists, a thought provoking essay on the state of the field. The other three chapters are an introduction to the phenomenon and how it is studied (Chapter 1), a positioning of codeswitching amidst the various linguistic outcomes of language contact (Chapter 2), and a conclusion that goes way beyond merely summarizing what has been said in the course of the book (Chapter 8). The book concludes with a useful Appendix on methodological issues, very handy for students who wish to undertake a study of bilingual speech. There are also subject and author indexes, and a reasonably up-to-date bibliography. The fields covered in the five chapters that make up the body of the work are: the social factors that induce people to codeswitch (Chapter 3), the features of codeswitched conversation (Chapter 4), the grammatical aspects of codeswitching (Chapter 5), the psycholinguistic mechanisms that make it possible to switch (Chapter 6), and the way in which children, and adults when they acquire a second language later in life, learn how to codeswitch (or how to avoid it; Chapter 7).

Codeswitching is often seen as sloppy speech. G-C convincingly shows that this is a direct result of a dominant view of language which sees it as a relatively inflexible, self-contained system, with its own set of words and grammar rules. Any educated speaker is supposed to take care not to have another language 'interfere' with this "standard". The reality is however, that languages change every day, and G-C confronts the reader with the historic fact that even English in origin could be seen as a mixture (of English and Norman French).

Moreover, G-C claims that codeswitching is “no more than the bilingual manifestation of universal discourse practices”, because monolinguals also switch back and forth between different speaking styles many times in the course of any given day, as some situations call for informal talk, others for a more formal style, and there are many levels in between. Bilinguals just possess a much richer set of instruments to do the same thing. Codeswitching enables them to express all kinds of nuances; by switching, they index attitudes, specify reference, draw attention to the point, introduce reported speech, soften a potential insult, etc.

But to an ear attuned to the ideal of purity in language, codeswitching immediately provokes a negative reaction. Much of what G-C has to say in her book about the social aspects of the phenomenon is meant to debunk some of the myths that lie behind this hostility. It is clear that codeswitching is so natural in communication among bilinguals that it would make teachers' lives a lot easier if 1) they wouldn't have to worry too much about eradicating it; and 2) they were encouraged more to make use of it in classroom situations in which it has been demonstrated to be helpful. For instance, codeswitching can enable the teacher to differentiate between pedagogic remarks and the subject matter, and allows him or her to fulfill different roles, from directing attention to including shy pupils.

In her discussion of the literature, it becomes clear at some point that G-C has her preferences and sometimes dismisses particular approaches for reasons that others, with different preferences, may find ill-advised. Most significantly, traditional linguistic approaches to codeswitching that focus on systematic and regular features, particularly in syntax, are evaluated fairly negatively, while conversational approaches that emphasize the creativity involved in bilingual speech receive lots of praise. G-C is certainly entitled to her views, and some we find better argued for than others. On the one hand, sometimes her dismissal of grammatical approaches strikes us as rather unfair, given that the tasks of linguistics include finding out what is common to all language users, and what that means for our knowledge of the cognitive underpinnings of language. On the other hand, G-C makes persuasive and balanced arguments for the necessity to study codeswitching for what it helps people achieve in communication.. However, while G-C presents pragmatics and conversational analysis as an alternative to grammar, we would rather have it as valuable *in combination with* studying the more traditional linguistic aspects. This would constitute exactly the holistic approach that G-C, overall, argues for so passionately.

### *Bio*

Ad Backus got his Ph.D in 1996 at Tilburg University in The Netherlands. The thesis was on codeswitching among Turkish immigrants in Holland. He has worked since then on various topics related to bilingualism and theoretical linguistics, and is currently back at Tilburg University, as an Associate Professor. Some of his recent publications include *Linguistic effects of immigration: Language choice, codeswitching and change in Western European Turkish*, with Normann Jørgensen and Carol Pfaff, in *Language & Linguistics Compass*, and *Loan translations versus code-switching*, with Margreet Dorleijn, in *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Code-switching* (edited by Barbara Bullock & Jacqueline Toribio).

Nadia Eversteijn is currently writing a PhD thesis at Tilburg University on the functions of codeswitching in bilingual speech. She focuses empirically on Turkish-Dutch mixing in Holland. She also works as an online consultant for bilingual parents, answering questions about bilingual child rearing and educational aspects of bilingualism.