

LATVIAN-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract. People draw on the languages in their linguistic repertoire, depending on the speech participants' needs and the conversational setting. The English language has gained salience replacing the Russian language as the foreign language most often studied at schools after Latvia regained independence in 1990. Since then, it has been used widely as a lingua franca in various fields, for instance, international diplomacy, science, and education. This has been a fruitful environment for code-switching, as it is claimed that many young people alternate effortlessly between the Latvian language and the English language, which they often use as a means of communication, especially on social media. In order to ascertain the linguistic manifestation of code-switching, a study was conducted by using a qualitative descriptive research design. Extra-sentential, inter-sentential, and intra-sentential code-switching was explored on social media. Extra-sentential switching or inserting tag elements from English into Latvian, inter-sentential switching characterized by a switch from Latvian to English outside the sentence or the clause level, and intra-sentential switching or switching from Latvian to English at the clause, phrase, or word level were observed. It was found out that the most frequent linguistic manifestation of code-switching was the insertion of single words. It may be assumed that code switching between the Latvian language and the English language may point at the social status of English among young people in Latvia.

Key words: Latvian-English code-switching, extra-sentential, inter-sentential, intra-sentential code-switching, qualitative descriptive design

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching (CS) is a linguistic manifestation of language contact observed in the linguistic behaviour of bilinguals or multilinguals. Druviete, a Latvian sociolinguist, contends that code-switching results from language contacts (2021: 88).

English has become the main contact language of Latvians (Veisbergs, 2012: 148), and it has occurred in the absence of any direct geographical proximity. Regaining of Latvia's independence in 1991, its accession to the European Union in 2004 and NATO in 2004, subsequent migration and remigration processes, and the Internet having become the predominantly used medium worldwide have led to a sustained indirect English language contact in Latvia, with English taking the place of Russian as a means of communication. Another factor contributing

to the use of English is the dramatic increase of social media for communication, as English is by far the most frequently employed language online, used by about six million of the top 10 million websites (Online 1). Besides, English has become the most commonly studied foreign language in Latvia. In 2019, approximately 81 per cent of students at the general upper secondary education level in Latvia learnt English (Online 2). Therefore, it is not surprising that many young people alternate effortlessly between the Latvian language and the English language, which they often use as a means of communication, especially on social media.

It is not uncommon that speakers in Latvia command a repertoire of languages available for various uses, selectively drawing on one or another and speaking exclusively in one language in certain domains (e.g., at home, with friends) while shifting to another in other contexts (e.g., university, work). Thus, young people, for instance, may switch between Latvian (at home, with parents and grandparents) and informal English (with friends) or formal English (at university), depending on the speech participant needs and the setting. This provides a fruitful environment for code-switching, which implies that bilinguals or multilinguals use linguistic elements of both or several languages in the same discourse.

In the world, code-switching has been studied since the 1970s (in Stell and Yakpo, 2015: 2) and received 'serious scholarly attention in the last few decades' (Poplack, 2001: 2062). However, while there is abundant theoretical literature and empirical studies on code-switching involving various language pairs, as noted by Lazdiņa, a Latvian linguist, the Latvian-English code-switching remains relatively unexplored (Online 3).

Since code-switching is typical of informal communication (Baltins, Druviete, 2017: 173), the goal of the present study was to ascertain the linguistic behaviour of Latvian language speakers on social media sites. Spoken and written language is used on TikTok and YouTube, where written language is similar to spoken language in its informality, yet it is written and, therefore, at least to some extent planned.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite numerous studies on code-switching, there is little consensus over the various language contact-related terms. Therefore, it is important to first delineate the core term used in this study. Poplack and Meechan define CS as 'the juxtaposition of sentences or sentence fragments from two languages, each of which is internally consistent with the morphological and syntactic (and optionally, phonological) rules of its lexifier language' (1995: 200). Thus, according to the scholars, CS is an 'utterance-internal juxtaposition' of linguistic elements from two languages. Poplack (2001: 2062) adds that CS often takes place with no change of interlocutor or topic. Bullock and Toribio (2009: 8) emphasize that CS is an additional communication resource since many bilinguals

switch from one language to another in order to communicate their message in an unchanged setting (*ibid.*: 1). The present study uses Gumperz's (1982) definition of CS: 'the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems' (cited in Hamers and Blanc, 2000: 258). Thus, code switching refers to the overt use of single words or strings of words from two or more languages within the same utterance/interaction.

Although early code-switching studies claimed that CS was evidence of bilingual speakers' deficiency in one or both language(s), nowadays, researchers have recognized that the assumption is incorrect. Today, CS is often viewed as a resource that bilinguals utilize to achieve various communicative effects (e.g., Gardner-Chloros, 2009), to mark social roles and identities (Myers-Scotton, 1993), and to manage talk (e.g., Gafaranga, 2009).

Code-switching can be studied from structural/linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives (Bullock and Toribio, 2009: 14). The linguistic perspective deals with language form at lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels; the sociolinguistic perspective focuses on the social factors such as the interpersonal relations between the interlocutors, their motivation for CS, the prestige of CS in a speech community, social functions of CS, for instance, inclusiveness in a group or showing solidarity to a group. The psycholinguistic perspective is concerned with the cognitive mechanisms in language production, perception, and acquisition (*ibid.*).

In inter-group interactions, speakers often adjust their speech to the interlocutors' speech. Since code-switching 'is under the conscious control of the speaker, not all bilinguals are observed to engage in CS' (Gafaranga, 2009: 7). Thus, it has been argued (e.g., de Bot, 1992) that bilingual speakers are able to control their output and produce monolingual utterances, separating their languages. As a result, different patterns of bilingual language use can be expected. For instance, they may differ according to the role that each language may have played among different generations. The older, more balanced bilinguals may display the ability to use sustained sequences of Latvian in their discourse, whereas younger speakers may speak Latvian with English lexical insertions.

Although it is argued that to gain a comprehensive understanding of code-switching it is essential to integrate findings from all three perspectives (e.g., Bullock and Toribio, 2009: 14), the present study deals with selected aspects of the linguistic approach to the CS phenomenon and comments on the social aspects arising from the observations made by the authors of this paper and by the informant. The findings from code-switching studies on the relation between socio-interactive and lexical/structural effects on code-switching demonstrate that lexical and structural aspects are discourse context dependent, and discourse context can modify 'the extent to which these lexical and structural factors influence linguistic choices and code-switching patterns' (Kootstra, 2015: 50).

CS can occur at any level of linguistic structure. Poplack's model (1980: 613-615) classifies code-switching into tag-switching, inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching. Inter-sentential (or inter-utterance) code-switching refers to switches between sentences (or utterances) and occurs within sentence (or utterance) boundaries, when a complete sentence or clause is in either one language or the other. Intra-sentential (or intra-utterance) code-switching is the term for switches within a single sentence (or utterance), a constituent or even a word, which some linguists call code-mixing. Intra-sentential switching occurs when words or phrases from another language are inserted into a sentence of the first language. Poplack (2001: 2062) emphasizes that intra-sentential CS has been studied most extensively. Tag-switching or extra-sentential switching concerns the use of a tag/a discourse marker, such as *I mean, you know, like* in a different language than the rest of the sentence (or utterance) (Romaine, 1995: 122). The insertion of discourse markers functions as a means of attracting the listener's or reader's attention or giving pragmatic force to an utterance in the speaker's or writer's native language (Sharp, 2007). It is pointed out (Romaine, 1995: 112) that tag-switching can occur at a number of points in an utterance without violating syntactic rules, in contrast with intra-sentential code-switching which involves the greatest syntactic risk.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to ascertain the linguistic manifestation of code-switching, a study was conducted by using a qualitative descriptive design. The corpus comprised code-switches from two types of social media:

- 1) TikTok, which is a video-focused social networking service, hosting 15-second to 10-minute user videos. Users can interact with the audience via comments and messages. TikTok tends to appeal to young people, as 41.7 per cent of its users are between the ages of 18 and 24, and 31 per cent – between the ages of 25 and 34 (Online 4).
- 2) YouTube is an online video sharing and social media platform, which allows users to watch and upload videos, as well as it offers an opportunity to interact with the audience by posting comments, likes, dislikes, or replying to other people's comments on a video. There was an estimate of 2.24 billion YouTube users worldwide in 2021 (Online 5), and it appeals to different target audiences.

Social media platforms are now key public online locations for networking and socialising, holding vast quantities of naturally occurring data on a variety of topics. Lifestyle videos on YouTube produced by popular Latvian vloggers were searched for randomly. An informant, a 20-year-old male, who speaks Latvian as his first language and English as a foreign language provided empirical data from TikTok. The informant was asked to record TikTok content of his own

choice. The purposive sampling technique was selected because it was important to study the TikTok domain with a knowledgeable expert within. The informant acted as a participant observer, so he was able to reflect on his own reasons for CS and gain insights into the likely causes of CS by other members of the speech community.

TikTok and YouTube provided a large text-based and video-based social media data set for this study; instances of code-switches were searched for and extracted manually from a corpus of 50 videos on TikTok and YouTube and related posts. The length of the videos and posts was not considered to have an impact on the likelihood of occurring code-switching since the data – words, phrases and sentences – were analysed using a qualitative descriptive approach.

Since the corpus was primarily used for a linguistic analysis of code-switching, it consists of text and video excerpts, which were manually transcribed. Structural markup provided descriptive information about the texts. General information about a text contained ethnographic information about the participants – the metadata about the language users, for example, their age, gender, first language, the social relationship between the involved parties, as much as it could be assumed from the available information and the context.

Although it was problematic to acquire informed consent from the social media users whose data were used, the content of the postings was not considered to be sensitive. Nevertheless, in order to meet ethical standards, the data were anonymised so that the social media language users could not be identified – instead of a profile name or a username, identification codes were provided to ensure their anonymity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the purposes of this research, the data of actual bilingual interactions situated in the context of the speech community in which they were produced were gathered, and extra-sentential, inter-sentential, and intra-sentential code-switching was explored.

English and Latvian are both Indo-European languages; English belongs to the West Germanic group, while Latvian – to the Baltic group. English and Latvian differ with respect to word order, as English takes the pattern: subject-verb-object, while Latvian exhibits a relatively free word order: ‘Since syntactic relations between word forms in Latvian are usually expressed by means of inflections, word order in a sentence is relatively free’ (Lokmane, 2021: 485).

Extra-sentential switching or tag-switching refers to the use of a tag or a discourse marker, which is ‘a type of insert used in conversation. It signals interactively how the speaker plans to steer the dialogue’ (Biber, Conrad, Leech, 2003: 456). The discourse markers *well, okay, I mean, you know* are independent of sentence structure, as they often precede sentences, and they can be removed

from the initial position of utterances. The tags from the English language *like*, *well*, *you know*, *okay* and *I mean* were inserted freely into utterances in the Latvian language, as it can be seen in the following example:

- [1] *I mean* labi nosvineeti 17 [*I mean* 17 years have been celebrated well] (here and henceforth the translations by the authors of the article).

Tag-switching has occurred at the beginning of utterance [1] without violating syntactic rules. The discourse marker *I mean* is used to connect two discourse segments – in this case the video and the post. It marks the speaker orientating towards the meaning of the utterance by elaborating on the previous thought.

In the corpus, mostly single words from the English language were inserted into a sentence/an utterance. The exclamations *blah* (used to give an example in the context) and *bla bla bla*, modifying the spelling of the English language, *wow* (used to show surprise and pleasure), unassimilated colloquial loans, for example, exclamations: *kamon* (come on), *kūl* (cool), *vau/vow* (wow), *kreizi* (crazy) and the discourse marker *okei* (OK) were identified.

The following examples demonstrate the use of **intra-sentential switching**.

- [2] Cooking a cake, wait for *part 2*, when I decorate it [Kūkas gatavošana, gaidi *part 2*, kad dekorēšu].
- [3] If you know where this melody is from – *respect*. [Ja tu zini no kurienes ir šī melodija *respect*].
- [4] Maybe I am *broke*, but at least I haven't been to a charity shop. [Varbūt esmu *broke* bet vismaz nekad neesmu bijis humpalās].
- [5] We are *really excited*. [Mēs esam *really excited*]. This is simply career *destroyed*. [Šis ir vienkārši karjeras *destroyed*].

The noun phrase *part 2* [2], the verb phrase *respect* [3], and the adjective phrase *to be broke* [4] are code-switches. In utterance [5], the happy and enthusiastic young people in the video were not only *really excited*, but they were also *destroyed*, which is used to exaggerate one's victory in competition in this context (Online 6).

- [6] Alise – *our star*, *mega star*. [Alise mūsu *star*, *mega star*].
- [7] Arrived at the office in smart *outfit* and straightened hair. [Ieradies ofisā smukā *outfits* un iztaisnotiem matiem].
- [8] There is a good word in English *judgement*. [Angļu valodā ir labs vārds *judgement*].
- [9] By the way hurry up to use sales days and go '*shopping*' to Reserved, Sinsay, Mohito, House and Cropp! [Starpčitu steidz izmantot izpārdošanas dienas un dodies '*shoppingā*' uz Reserved, Sinsay, Mohito, House un Cropp!].

Example [6] demonstrates intra-utterance code-switching with *star* and *mega star* being inserted into the utterance of the Latvian language. *Star* is a borrowing; it uses a semantic meaning of the noun *star* from English. In utterance [7], the noun *office* is also a borrowing. The spelling of the noun *outfit* in English has been retained, but the ending -s has been added due to the influence of the Latvian language grammar system. Utterance [8] demonstrates an example of an intentional use of the word *judgement* in English, which the interlocutors translated afterwards. The verb phrase to go ‘shopping’ [9] is used in inverted commas, the user being aware that an English word has been inserted in the sentence in the Latvian language. Although the user attempts to preserve the spelling of the English language norms, the word *shopping* is misspelled if it was written in English. Besides, grammatical adaptation has been applied, indicating the declension of the noun. The length mark of the vowel – macron, which is typical of the Latvian language, is used.

[10] *Please don't be ugly.*

[11] *You just witnessed trauma.*

Utterance [10] in the English language used in a video in Latvian testifies to the fact that linguistic manifestation of code-switching may extend from the insertion of words to larger segments of discourse. Utterances [10] and [11] are cases of **inter-utterance code-switching**, as the complete utterance is in English, the rest of the video being in Latvian. Elliptical utterances, for instance, *Just for fun*, were also observed.

[12] Things in Latvian radio that simply *make sense*. [Lietas Latvijas radio, kas vienkārši *make sense*].

The English expression *make sense* finishes the utterance in Latvian, thus framing the discourse and attracting reader's attention to this. There is agreement in number between the form of the subject *things* and the predicate *make sense*. The use of English adds more pragmatic force to the Latvian utterance.

[13] Maybe another *crazy fan*. [Varbūt vēl kādu *crazy fanīti?*].

[14] My *crazy* birthday. [Mana *crazy* dzimšanas diena].

Utterances [13] and [14] both use the adjective *crazy*. In addition, utterance [13] has the noun *fanīti*, which is used in the meaning of someone who admires and supports a person. The noun has acquired the diminutive suffix -īti, which denotes a female and communicates a friendly attitude. Some other popular words were *cool*, *fake*, and *crazy*. Traditional loans with the usual phonetic and grammatical adaptations were identified: *kūls* (cool), *filings* (feeling), *lūzers* (loser), *feiss* (face), *tops* (top), and *čats* (chat).

[15] I am not a *loser* [*lūzers*] or a dead loss when I am experiencing fear.

[Es neesmu nekāds *lūzers* vai zaudētājs, kad es izjūtu bailes].

In utterance [15], the user has employed the adapted form *loser* followed by the noun with the same meaning in Latvian *zaudētājs*, which is likely to be used to make sure that the interlocutor understands the message.

[16] To make cocktails – *welcome drinks*. [Sataisīt kokteiļiņus – *welcome drinks*].

[17] *Wine gums*. I know that these are *wine gums* in English. [*Vīna konfektes*. Es tik zinu, ka angļiski ir *wine gums*]. Now we can play *Whisper Challenge*. [Tagad varam spēlēt *whisper challenge*].

Code-switches [16] and [17] were used because the words *Wine gums* and *Whisper Challenge* do not exist in the Latvian language, or the speaker was not aware of or did not remember the words in Latvian. This may have happened because the concepts these words describe originate from the English culture.

Recurrent findings to emerge from systematic analyses of the tokens of spontaneous bilingual production data on the social media sites TikTok and YouTube are as follows:

- 1) The majority of all instances of language mixing are single English language items.
- 2) Nearly all of them are immediately integrated syntactically into the Latvian language.

Based on the observations, it can be assumed that the language users have code-switched due to the following reasons:

- a) switched to the English language because it offers words and expressions that do not exist in the Latvian language,
- b) did not remember a word or expression in the Latvian language,
- c) switched to Latvian because they could not find an appropriate word to express themselves as well,
- d) code-switched when they were emotionally affected,
- e) code-switched to emphasize the point the speaker was making,
- f) code-switched spontaneously,
- g) showed personal and group identity,
- h) wanted to attract reader's or listener's attention.

CONCLUSIONS

The samples extracted from the data collected are consistent representations of speech behavior of bilinguals or multilinguals in Latvia on two social media sites YouTube and TikTok. It has been observed that Latvian-English language users tend to evolve a conversational mode where elements of Latvian and English appear in the same utterance.

Extra-sentential switching or inserting tag elements from English into Latvian, inter-sentential switching characterized by a switch from Latvian to

English outside the sentence or the clause level, and intra-sentential switching or switching from Latvian to English at the clause, phrase, or word level were observed. The most typical linguistic manifestation of code-switching was the insertion of single words.

It may be argued that code switching between the Latvian and the English languages may point at the social status of English among young people, arising from (1) the large number of English speakers in the world; (2) its wide geographical spread; (3) its importance in the fields of culture, international diplomacy, economics and business, science, technology, and politics; (4) its linguistic prestige as English is used by powerful social groups globally in the countries which currently dominate world affairs economically, politically and culturally; (5) the dominance of English on social media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the National Research Programme project *Diversity of Latvian in Time and Space* (No. VPP-LETONIKA-2021/4-0003).

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