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AN ANALYSIS OF CODE-SWITCHING OR MIXING IN CANTONESE BUSINESS MEETINGS

INTRODUCTION

Code-mixing and code-switching are commonly observed phenomena in all societies where more than one language is used. The use of two codes simultaneously in a speech event is found to be extremely common among Hong Kong bilingual individuals. Research has examined code-mixing from different perspectives. Sanchez (1987, p.88) argued that code-mixing may "take away the purity of the language", whereas Yau (1993, p. 31) considered that the use of two codes in Hong Kong not only served the more "common purpose of extra-linguistic emotional appeal, but it also served a useful communicative purpose." Consistent with Yau's result, Pennington (1995) concluded that "...the nature of Bilingualism in Hong Kong and of the different types of forces pressuring towards the development of its particular linguistic profile and that the mixed Cantonese-English code in providing an alternative to English which bridges to varying degrees between the Cantonese and English language ..." (p. iii)

With English being the international business language, there is an additional influence on the use of code-mixing in professional business communication. The purposes of this paper are to examine: (a) the extent that the level of second language proficiency affects the frequency of using code-switching or code-mixing and (2) the extent that the individuals who used more English codes felt more influential on group decision makings. An extract from a strategy formulation meeting is also included to elaborate the use of code-mixing.

METHODOLOGY

Third-year business school students attending the Strategic Management course offered at a Hong Kong tertiary institution were involved in this study. Sixty-six students enrolled in two sessions of the Strategic Management module were chosen to participate in this study. Although the random assignment was not possible, the participants were comparable in the subject matter. The present data consists of transcripts of the decision-making dialogs of 11 groups (made up of five to six persons per group) of Hong Kong Chinese bilinguals as they
took part in a computer based simulation. The work experience of the participants varies from part-time summer employment to full-time low level managers in both governmental and private firms. Typical employers included ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption), Hong Kong Housing Authority, American Standard, Hongkong Bank, and various small-to-medium size firms.

The simulation (Cotter & Fritzsch, 1991) is a computer-based replication of a manufacturing industry producing and selling consumer goods. The student teams assumed the role of the top management of individual companies in an industry. Although not formally required by the simulation, all groups designated roles for individual members which consisted of: president, finance manager, marketing manager, human resource manager, and sales manager.

The competing teams held a series of meetings to develop and execute corporate strategies. Quarterly decisions were made in the following areas of: (1) price and advertising, (2) salespeople, (3) finance, (4) product models, (5) research and development, (6) production scheduling, (7) plant construction and expansion, and (8) sales (Cotter & Fritzsch, 1991, pp. 11-26).

Four out of eight group decision-making meetings were held and videotaped in videotaping studios equipped with professionals facilities. To create a comparison of first-and second-language communication environment, the groups used English (designated as a second language) in two meetings and Cantonese (first language) in two meetings. The meetings held in English were transcribed verbatim in English and the meetings in Cantonese were transcribed in colloquial Cantonese. The data for the study is derived from 19 one-hour Cantonese meetings. The transcripts for the Cantonese decision-making meetings ranged between 30 to 50 pages. Both English and Cantonese meetings focused on a common theme: the development and implementation of a corporate strategy. This allows a systematic comparison.

Questionnaires were also administered to capture participants’ impressions and feelings about communication process. The questionnaire data provided additional texture and insights in comparing the first- and second-language communication. To answer the research questions in relation to the communication dynamics attributable to the factors that affect the use of first-language (Cantonese) and second language (English), the participants were asked to rate their degree of felt influence in English and Cantonese meetings.
The data gathered from 19 Cantonese meeting transcripts is categorized accordingly and analyzed. The analysis of data consisted of two parts: (a) a quantitative analysis of the three research questions and (b) a qualitative analysis of the use of the code-mixing, and explanations for the code-mixing.

In the quantitative analysis, three research questions were formed and statistically analyzed for significance. These research questions are described as follows:

Research Question 1:
Are there any significant differences in the frequency of using English code in the Cantonese meetings among individuals who possess high English proficiency as compared to those possess low level of English proficiency?

Research Question 2:
Do individuals who possess high L2 proficient use more English codes in the Cantonese meetings?

Research Question 3
Do individuals who use more English code in the Cantonese meeting self-rate high in their felt degree of influence in the group decision-making meetings?

To answer Research Question 1, an independent sample t-test was performed to measure the different English code used between those self-rated high in second-language (English) proficiency and those with low second-language proficiency. To facilitate comparisons the respondents were grouped into two categories on a 7-point Likert scale: low (4 and below) and high (4.1 and above). The results of Leaven’s test for equality of variance showed that there was a significant difference in using English code in the Cantonese meetings between high proficient and low proficient second-language individuals at the .05 level (X = 76.39 and 48.09; t = 2.1). That is, individuals with high level of English proficiency mixed more English codes in the Cantonese meetings than those with low English proficiency individuals.

Research Question 2 examines the correlation between the second language proficiency and amount of code mixing. This research question is tested by measuring the frequency and amount of code switching and mixing in each of the Cantonese meetings and statistically comparing the results with their self-reported level of second language proficiency. Pearson Correlation Coefficients statistical procedure was run to determine the extent to which
second-language proficiency levels affected the frequency of mixing English code in Cantonese meetings. The result ($r = .3013$, $p < .05$) indicated that individuals who self-rated higher in their English proficiency switched or mixed English code more frequently in the Cantonese meetings than those who self-rated low in second-language proficiency. The result of Research Question 2 is consistent with Research Question 1, indicating that the level of English proficiency affects the frequency of using English code in the Cantonese meetings.

Research Question 3 examines the extent to which the use of code-mixing correlates with the individual felt degree of influence in the group decision-making meetings. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was performed to measure its significant level. The result reveal that the amount of code-mixing does not strongly correlate with the degree of felt influence in Cantonese meetings but positively correlates with the felt degree of influence in English meeting ($r = .329$; $p < .05$). The factor attributing such a conflicting result can be due to a carryover of the use of English code onto the felt degree of influence in the English meeting. The insignificant correlation between the felt degree of influence and the frequency of mixing English code in the Cantonese meetings is likely the result of stronger perceived felt degree of influence in Cantonese meetings. Data from questionnaire revealed that individuals felt they had more influence in the Cantonese meeting than in the English meeting ($t = 2.91$; $p < .05$).

In close examination of 19 Cantonese transcripts, an interesting code-mixing patterns emerge. They are (a) nearly two-third (64%) of the English code were functional related and (b) 48 percent of the code-mixing are in single words that were surrounded by Cantonese and that took place at the level of individual lexical items. These “English elements” are in one or two words in length, and are mostly in the forms of Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives, and Adverbs. Consistent with studies by Gibbon (1987), Chan (1993), and Pennington (1995), this study reflects that the mixing of English code in the Cantonese utterances is an inevitable phenomenon in Hong Kong daily business operation. The mix of the English code in the business genre promotes the level of understanding from the communicative competence standpoint.

To further elaborate the use of code-mixing, an extract of deliberation and translation (see Table 1) in discussing issues of overtime, inventory level are included for analysis. From the text, it can be concluded that the English code is mixed or embedded in the Cantonese utterances in single or two-word form (i.e., production, keep, stock level, rather risk) and that
the majority of code-mixing are functional area related (production line, quarter four, overtime, production capacity).

Table 1: Deliberation of Strategy Formulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese Deliberations</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...this quarter 呢，就會係剩余13个k既stock level 啰，係係Ơ rather risk既。</td>
<td>...this quarter, we will have 13k stock level left which is rather risky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>唔如果我地OT既情况呢，啲我地剩番既stock level 将会係75个k既，啲呢個就必需同啲我地</td>
<td>If we add in OT, our stock level will be at 75k. Then we should consider whether we would like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>去考慮下我地keep唔keep一個個低既stock level。</td>
<td>to keep such a low stock level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>唔至於coming 個quarter 呢就要對我地個production放有幫助，因我地呢，就新加左兩條既production line，換句說話講呢，我係正常</td>
<td>The coming quarter will be very helpful to our Production Department because we have just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>既production既...既情況底下呢，啲係唔著加</td>
<td>added two production line. In other words, under normal production, i.e., we do not add in OT and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT而8線一齊開啲話呢，個production既capacity係會去到416個k架，啲呢，就再加埋如果我地...假設我地係到到幾個最minimum既</td>
<td>operate eight production lines, we will have 416k production capacity. If our minimum stock level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lev...stock level呢，就會係450 k既呢，in fact就</td>
<td>is 430k, in fact 429k, then we have to consider the projection next quarter, i.e., quarter 4. If the sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>應該429個k既，啲就要視乎下一個季，啲係quarter four果個sales既projection會係點樣，如果</td>
<td>projection is around 400k, then our production capacity is still a bit lower. I am not quite sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sales既projection係 eh 400個k既啦，啲個我都</td>
<td>about this. I think we should leave the sales projection to our Marketing Manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>唔清楚，我聽啲個留番等同marketing果邊既同事解答啦，啲我地依然既production個...個個情 况</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To amplify the reason for code-mixing, Table 2 lists examples of selected individuals who responded “Yes” to “In the Cantonese meetings did you use English at all?” and their explanations.

Table 2:
Selected Yes Response to In the Cantonese meetings did you use English at all? Please give examples or situations as well as reasons for using English code.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Rationale(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using Sales turnover&quot; instead of Cantonese Term</td>
<td>□ We were not aware of being bilingual, speaking “Chinglish” is Hong Kong culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ It is difficult to use all Cantonese when presenting ideas that involve English business jargon or terms. Although we can translate those terms in Cantonese, some translation may not be exactly the same as the original meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ The terms learnt are most in English. Sometimes it is difficult to translate or think of the Cantonese version. Also my partners can understand well what I meant too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanations of the financial performance, i.e., balance sheet, profit &amp; loss A/C etc.</td>
<td>□ Since the medium of instruction is English, these management terms were learnt in English form and it becomes easier to retrieve in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some business terms: marketing strategy, dividend, mission, objectives, etc.</td>
<td>□ These terms are learned in English form and it is quite difficult to translate into Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/E ratio, earning per share</td>
<td>□ Since the terms in the game menu are written in English, I will use these English terms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The selected examples reflect that the code-mixing phenomenon is existed and two factors that contribute to such results are (a) the use of Western textbooks, (b) the influence of advanced Western business concepts or terms, and (c) lack of direct or equivalent Chinese translations.

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