Abstract

This thesis examines the patterns of code-mixing in the speech of Mandarin-English bilinguals in Singapore, which has an environment propitious to the use of both languages. While code-switching is often used as the cover term for the language contact phenomena of "juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems" (Gumperz, 1982), an attempt is made in this study to distinguish between code-switching and code-mixing with the latter used as the cover term instead.

In the 9 hours audio-recorded corpus of 17 young Chinese speakers, Mandarin is the predominant Matrix Language with English, dialectal and Malay code-mixes, code-switches and borrowings interspersed in-between. A detailed statistical survey reveals that code-mixed turns take up a sizable proportion of the conversations under examination and the question of how much of these code-mixes are in realism borrowings is raised. However, an initial analysis reveals that the present day typology in the literature of code-mixing is inadequate in fully distinguishing the wide range of language contact phenomena encompassed in code-mixed speeches. Upon further investigation, the mechanisms of activation and triggering are identified as responsible in part for the obscuring of distinction between the various language contact phenomena.

While the identifying of borrowings has shown ambiguity using present criteria in the literature, a proposal is made based on the originally conflicting criteria to come up with a typology of two types of borrowings namely the established loans and the widespread habitual loans to resolve some of the dubiety between borrowings and code-mixes.