Blogging in Two Languages: Code-Switching in Bilingual Blogs

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1. Introduction

Code-switching, a natural phenomenon that consists of alternating two or more languages in bilinguals' discourse, has traditionally been examined in its oral production. Much attention has been devoted to its form, meaning, and grammatical patterns. However, very little research has focused on code-switching in writing. After the turn of the millennium, it seems obvious that technology has rapidly transformed the more traditional means of communication and written expression. More specifically, blogs (short for web log) now serve as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual. Typically updated on a daily or weekly basis, blogs often reflect the personality of the author.

Montes-Alcalá (2000) analyzed a bilingual individual's journal and examined code-switching in a private diary. The author found that code-switching in a personal manuscript was not uncommon, perhaps due to its confidentiality. How has the Internet affected this type of bilingual texts? Do we encounter language switching in public journals as well? Due to the relative novelty of this mode of communication among bilinguals and monolinguals alike, research on code-switching in the Internet is quite scarce to date. This paper analyzes bilingual blogs in an attempt to take a further step in the less-investigated area of Spanish-English written code-switching.[1]

The research question is twofold. First, I inquire whether bilingual individuals would freely switch languages when writing in a public journal. Then, I attempt to explain when and why they do it. The underlying hypothesis is that their writing will display social functions similar to those found in oral code-switching research, given that this type of text serves as a means of interaction among bilingual individuals. Furthermore, I intend to expose the cultural nature of code-switching, a component that has often been overlooked in the search for grammatical and pragmatic constraints. The analysis includes data from several Spanish-English bilingual blogs where the language choices reveal how bilingual individuals live in between two worlds, two cultures, and two languages they can and must use to fully express themselves.

2. Blogs and code-switching

The term "weblog" was first used by Jorn Barger on his website in 1997 (Blood 2000) and is now used to describe a personal website that offers "frequently updated observations, news, headlines, commentary, recommended links and/or diary entries, generally organized chronologically" (Werbach 2001). Weblogs, more commonly known as blogs, are essentially public diaries published in the Internet whose posts range from random rambling about the blogger's personal life and events (free-style blogs) to serious political or social analysis of local or world news (filter-style blogs). From ego gratification to personal venting to wanna-be journalists, there are many reasons to keep a blog.

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[1] I am most grateful to Michelle Dion for pointing me in the right direction and helping me find the data needed to conduct this study. ¡Mil gracias, Michelle!

Blogs have become an interesting and fairly recent phenomenon from a sociological standpoint but here I will be strictly concerned with the linguistic perspective. Generally speaking, the language used in blogs is more informal and thus blogs are a quite democratic form of expression. Communication is usually direct, casual, and uncensored. Posts do not go through editors or spellcheckers necessarily and hence bloggers may take the liberty to freely use language as they wish. Consequently, it is not uncommon to find ungrammatical sentences, spelling mistakes, swear words, lack of accent marks, and… code-switching.

In fact, bilingual bloggers are faced with the choice of two languages for their posts. While some prefer to keep them separate, others choose to write in both languages. In the case of Spanish-English blogs, the issue of mixing languages does not come without some controversy. A case in point, this trilingual (English, Spanish, and Basque) blogger proposes ten commandments for bilingual blogs in an attempt to answer the question "Is it possible, bilingual blogging?":

> So, the good, true and faithful bilingual blog should have:
>
> #1. Language change. There should be a button, link, or pulldown menu to click or select, present in every page. That's the way to turn from reading content in one language to the other in a bilingual blog. Mixtures of languages in individual pages, no, that's not OK. Langauge [sic] change behaviour could vary: the distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical blogs that I describe here is a key issue. (Fernández 2004)

Although Elenamary's blog usually sticks to one language (English) she is well aware of the so-called *Spanglish* issue. The following post about "rooferos" triggered 13 responses from her readers, all of them passionately defending the mix of Spanish and English:

> When coming back from Northern Ohio to visit my mother in Central Ohio, I said something to my mother about closing the window. I said it in Spanglish. My mother went to slap me, I dodged. "In this house you either speak English or Spanish, you do not mix the two." To her it was a matter of education and class level. Those who speak Spanglish were uneducated and could not speak either well and therefore butchered both…that was her view.
>
> Recently, my mother made a comment about how she was going to have some work done on the house "Elenamary, will you be home? I need you to be home to let the rooferos into the garage." I looked at her blankly "The what?" without a moments hesitation she said "The rooferos." "What are rooferos?" I still had no clue what she was talking about. "You know the rueee-feerrrrr-os. The Mexicans who fix the roof!"
>
> I laughed. Ahh my mother in the process of Chicanization and she doesn't even know it. So this morning after a brief fright that someone was ripping open the ceiling I put my head back on my pillow and let out a sigh of relief it was just the rooferos. (Elenamary 2005)

Some bilingual bloggers apologize for this kind of mix. Yonder Lies It (2005) states: "I usually don't mingle my spanish [sic] and english [sic] though am known by my most fervent reader, editor, proofreader, slacker, güevón [sic], patron (that is, me) to occasionally indulge in doing so." Others even ascribe the lack of readership in their blog to their use of *Spanglish*: "Tho [sic], admittedly, it's my infrequent posting y el uso bien heavy del spanglish that is perhaps more responsible for keeping readership down, but no bother really." (Textaisle, 2005b)

However, not all bilingual bloggers are as rigorous when they need to express themselves in two languages. Colón-Bilbraut (2005) warns the readership about what to expect in her first post and opening statement: "Como soy de Puerto Rico, mi idioma es el 'spanglish,' not to mention that since kindergarten I attended an all amercian [sic] school, por lo que mis blog are going to be tanto en espanol [sic] or in English [sic]. It all depends in which language me resbale la tongue." Along the same lines, this blogger seems not only acquiescent but also proud of her language use:

> Which all brings me a este blog. My English is always gonna run laps around my ability to speak Spanish, tho it's gettin better, and honestly, that's a huge part of why this blog is English-dominant. However, I also quiero demostrar que spanglish es más que una amenaza contra el español. It's a means of resistencia, or, in sunshiney terms, an opportunity for cultural contact, mutual understanding, and peaceable mingling. In short, I ain't gonna sit idly by and see only Spanish altered por el espanglish. (Textaisle 2005a)

At any rate, it seems clear that the rapid proliferation of blogs now offers a whole new field of study in the area of code-switching very much unexplored to date. Thus, the first question regarding whether bilingual individuals would freely switch languages when writing in a public journal has been answered. Yes, bilingual bloggers switch between (in this case) Spanish and English. Let's now proceed to the second part of the question, concerning when and why this is done.

3. Methodology and subjects

For the purposes of this study I analyzed the posts of the 15 Spanish-English bilingual blogs listed below over the course of one year, from January 2005 to January 2006. While some bloggers are more prolific than others and the frequency of the posts is quite irregular, the amount of data analyzed was roughly 150 pages. I only considered blogs where there was actual code-switching, i.e. alternation of both languages within the same post. I excluded from the analysis those bilingual blogs where the Spanish and the English versions appear in two separate pages or where the same post is translated in both languages. These are the blogs I analyzed:

1. http://thealbinobean.blogspot.com
2. http://carnepicada.blogspot.com
3. http://universa.blogspot.com
4. http://soulmusings.blogspot.com
5. http://alegrecita.blogspot.com/
6. http://www.yonderliesit.org/blog/
7. http://trescaminos.blogspot.com/
8. http://www.guiams.blogspot.com/
9. http://mimenteypensamientos.blogspot.com/
10. http://florycanto.net/#blog
11. http://humbertave.blogspot.com/
12. http://dailytexican.blogspot.com/
13. http://linensandshit.blogspot.com/
14. http://msestrella-duran.blogspot.com/
15. http://withduerespect.blogspot.com/

As regards the profiles of the blog writers, despite the wide variety of tone and topics addressed in their blogs and their different occupations, there seems to be homogeneity at least in terms of age and

origin.[2] Therefore, these are mainly female bilingual bloggers (10 women and 5 men), fairly young (5 of them in their twenties, one in her thirties, one still a teenager), and mostly from Mexican origin (all but three Puerto Ricans). Another common denominator is that all but one tend to write in English and switch to Spanish. Table 1 below summarizes the profiles of the subjects.

Table 1. Profiles of the bloggers.

Blog #	Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Location/ Origin	Switches from
1	Aislinn	27	Female	Assistant/Translator	Rosarito, MX/ Mexican	SP > EN
2	Julissa	---	Female	Transportation	Detroit, MI/ Mexican	EN > SP
3	Universa	28	Female	---	Chicago, IL/ Mexican	EN > SP
4	Alma	---	Female	Business Services	Dallas, TX/ Mexican	EN > SP
5	a.ro	29	Female	Communications	Los Angeles, CA/ Mexican	EN > SP
6	Yonder Lies It	---	Male	---	Sweden/ Mexican	EN > SP
7	Xavi	---	Male	Student	Puerto Rico/ Puerto Rican	EN > SP
8	guiam	---	Female	Education	Chicago, IL/ Mexican	EN > SP
9	Diana	19	Female	Student	Texas/ Mexican	EN > SP
10	Agustín Palacios	---	Male	---	--- / Mexican	EN > SP
11	Lucio Rodriguez	28	Male	---	El Monte, CA/ Mexican	EN > SP
12	Daily Texican	28	Male	Student	Seattle, WA/ Mexican	EN > SP
13	Textaisle	---	Female	Librarian	Chicago, IL/ Puerto Rican	EN > SP
14	Coco	48	Female	Elementary School Teacher	California/ Mexican	EN> SP
15	Julizzette Colón-Bilbraut	33	Female	Law	Puerto Rico/ Puerto Rican	EN > SP

4. Discussion of the results

For several decades, researchers have pointed out a number of different socio-pragmatic functions present in code-switched speech. Valdés-Fallis (1976), Poplack (1981), McClure (1981), and Gumperz (1982), among others provided several classifications of these functions, such as direct quotations, emphasis, clarification or elaboration, focus/topic constructions, parenthetical comments, tags, contextual switches, lexical need switches, triggered switches, linguistic routines and/or idiomatic expressions, stylistic switches, etc. Along the same lines, more recent works such as Zentella's (1997)

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[2] The information for the demographics of the subjects was obtained from the "About Me" section of each blog, which was not always complete. Therefore, there might be missing data from some individuals who do not post personal information about themselves. Likewise, the accuracy of such volunteered information could not be personally verified.

distinguish three main categories of communicative strategies accomplished by code-switching: footing, clarification, and crutch-like mixes.

As far as bilingual writing is concerned, Montes-Alcalá analyzed, among other manuscripts, code-switching in a bilingual's journal (Montes-Alcalá 2000) and the author found that most of those functions typically manifested in the literature of oral code-switching were also present in the private diary. Therefore, my underlying hypothesis was that public journals such as blogs would display similar types of socio-pragmatic functions. The classification I offer here groups switches in seven categories that will shortly be discussed and illustrated with examples. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the number and percentage of switches present in each blog analyzed for each category.

Table 2. Number of switches per blog and category.

Blog	Total # switches	Lexical items	Trigger	Quotes	Elaboration	Tags	Emphatic	Free
#1	38	17	1	1	11	7	-	1
#2	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
#3	3	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
#4	2	-	-	1	1	-	-	-
#5	8	6	-	1	1	-	-	-
#6	62	18	5	4	3	13	13	6
#7	6	5	-	-	1	-	-	-
#8	4	1	1	-	1	1	-	-
#9	54	23	4	11	9	2	5	-
#10	7	2	-	1	2	-	2	-
#11	19	11	-	6	1	-	1	-
#12	54	21	-	17	9	3	4	-
#13	364	70	27	7	21	33	123	83
#14	4	-	-	-	-	-	4	-
#15	2	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
Total	629	174	39	54	60	59	153	90

Table 3. Percentage of switches per category.

Blog	Lexical items	Triggered	Quotes	Elaboration	Tags	Emphatic	Free
#1	44.7	2.6	2.6	28.9	18.4	-	2.6
#2	-	-	100	-	-	-	-
#3	-	-	100	-	-	-	-
#4	-	-	50	50	-	-	-
#5	75	-	12.5	12.5	-	-	-
#6	29	8	6.4	4.8	20.9	20.9	9.6
#7	83	-	-	16.6	-	-	-
#8	25	25	-	25	25	-	-
#9	42.5	7.4	20.3	16.6	3.7	9.2	-
#10	28.5	-	14.2	28.5	-	28.5	-
#11	57.8	-	31.5	5.2	-	5.2	-
#12	38	-	31.4	16.6	5.5	7.4	-
#13	19.2	7.4	1.9	5.7	9	33.7	22.8
#14	-	-	-	-	-	100	-
#15	-	50	-	-	-	50	-
Totals	27.6%	6.2%	8.5%	9.5%	9.3%	24.3%	14.3%

As we can observe, the distribution of switches is not even across all the blogs or within a single blog. While certain bloggers switch only as few as twice or three times (#2, #3, #4, or #15), others display a humongous amount of switching (#13). There is also a disparity in the percentage of switches across categories as we will see.

4.1. Lexical items

This category was the most prolific of all with 27.6% of the switches. It has been traditionally labeled "lexical need" but is also the most ill-defined of all. The issue of a real need is relative since roughly each and every switch fulfills a need, although under no circumstances should this be interpreted as lack of language proficiency, but rather as the lack of an exact equivalent in the other language. Other explanations might be a momentary gap in the lexicon of the individual or simply a higher frequency of exposure of an item in a specific language. In my corpus, I found a great number of switches for kinship and family terms, such as in examples 4-5 below. Furthermore, I claim that switching for lexical items (whether single nouns or complete noun phrases) is closely related to the biculturalism of the subjects rather than to the lack of proficiency in any of the languages involved—see examples 1-3, all of which are culturally bound words either to the Spanish or the English worlds.[3]

1) AYER ME LLEGÓ LA roomie NUEVA, ES FRANCESA Y SE LLAMA Celine.
2) ... PERO ES UNA limo party, Y NO ME LA PUEDO PERDER.
3) We had a kick-ass PACHANGA for my great grandmother Tala in Mexicali.
4) It was really nice to have gone and spent some time with LA FAMILIA...
5) Remember when your ABUELITA would get all mad at you for getting PRIETITA during the summer?

4.2. Triggered switches

This was, at the other end of the spectrum, the least productive category with 6.2% of the total number of switches. The literature has pointed out that sometimes a switched word or expression may trigger a switch in what follows or precedes it. I found examples of triggers in both languages, as in the examples below. I have represented the triggering word(s) in bold face:

6) VOY ANOTANDO IDIOTECES QUE SE CONVERTIRÁN EN FUTUROS **posts** for your reading enjoyment…
7) I was going to be **MADRINA** DE REGALO SORPRESA for my neighbor.
8) My big brother was all excited and he told us that the truck was outside and my **HERMANILLO** Y YO NOS SALIMOS A MIRARLA.
9) FRECUENTAMENTE [sic] USO LA PALABRA **"confessional"** in disparaging terms.
10) Los Angeles and Colorado will be the only **RECUERDOS** DE LO QUE HUBO ANTERIORMENTE.

4.3. Quotes

Switching languages to quote someone else's words is a typical reason for oral code-switching although in my corpus this category only represented 8.5% of the total number of switches. I found examples of both direct and indirect quotations. In some cases the base language was Spanish and the quotations were in English (examples 11 and 14). Some other cases were the opposite, quoting words in Spanish (12, 13, and 15).

11) ENTONCES LE HABLÉ AL Tigger: Hi J, you need to give me your last name so I can sign you in...

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[3] For easier visual identification, I have represented in small capitals the Spanish utterances, and with regular font the English ones.

12) I was saying good night to her, when she asked me "QUÉ TE PASA, HIJA, ESTÁS TRISTE?"

13) She asked me, "Y TIENES HIJOS?" I replied, "NO." And without missing a beat she replied, "QUÉ BUENO."

14) YA ESTÁN DECIENDO [sic] QUE they don't understand us and the like.

15) Our readership went down since we opened this yonderliesit offices dialogue window, QUE ES PURO CUENTO DICEN.

4.4. Elaboration

This was the fourth most productive category with 9.5% of the total number of switches. In the following examples, code-switching is used to elaborate or further explain an idea. To achieve this end, sometimes the switched phrase or sentence appears as a parenthetical comment (examples 18 and 19) or between dashes (example 20). In other examples (16 and 17) it is simply a sentence added to the previous one in the other language. At any rate, all of these cases serve primarily as an elaboration of an idea without distorting the flow of the sentence in the other language.

16) But we will have to get back to her in another post, because I have to go now... SÓLO TE DAN 30 MINUTITOS EN EL DLC.

17) NO SÉ QUÉ PENSÉ QUE IBA SUCEDER EN UN AÑO… well whatever it was it sure as hell didn't happen…

18) EN EL TRABAJO NO PUDE HACER NADA POR LA CRUDA (that's my excuse), MÁS QUE HACER REÍR A MIS COMPAÑEROS CON LAS IDIOTECES QUE DIGO.

19) A couple of them were my cousins (PRIMOS SEGUNDOS) who I didn't know.

20) The woman with hands of steel and a metaphorical 2nd heart – EL MÍO.

4.5. Tags

Very close to the previous group, in fifth place with 9.3% of switches, this category includes a wide range of examples where code-switching obeys linguistic routines or idiomatic expressions. Again, biculturalism plays an important part in this behavior. In some of the examples (such as 25), finding an accurate translation for an idiomatic expression is more difficult than rendering the term in the original language. Many swear words were delivered in a different language, such as example 24. I also found many switches for either discourse (example 23) or identity markers (example 22). Finally, others are purely linguistic crutches—also known as sentence fillers—of which the writer might be unconscious (see example 21).

21) So... AQUÍ DE NUEVO EN EL Disney Learning Center...

22) HÍJOLE MANO, remember he borrowed that cd too del Flaco Jímenez?

23) However, ESTOY DE ACUERDO CON ESO.

24) CHINGADO, I don't have a job right now and I've been traveling across the state like a madman.

25) NADA QUE HACER MÁS QUE EJERCITARLO PARA QUE VUELVA A ESTAR EN tip top shape.

4.6. Emphatic

Code-switching for emphatic reasons was widely found in the blogs. It was in fact the second largest category with 24.3% of the total number of switches. At times, foregrounding occurs merely by switching languages (examples 26-28) whereas in other cases emphasis is accomplished by repeating the same or a similar sentence in both languages (see examples 29 and 30).

26) I have been doing so for the past DIEZ O QUINCE AÑOS or so.

27) SOY MEXICANA, and I was taught never to talk back, but now that I think about it, its [sic] fun!

28) Similarly, NO SE PUEDE INVADIR UNA ISLA, call its population citizens and not expect that they're bringin their whole cultural shebang to the table.

29) "AHORA ME DIERON 250 PAPELITOS Y SE LOS TUVE QUE PONER A LOS 250 ABRIGOS QUE MANDARON POR LA LINIA." She was attaching labels on 250 coats that flew through the line.

30) It is at this time when I question God- Why?! ¿POR QUÉ DIOS NO NOS DIÓ LA BENDICIÓN DE UN NIÑO? ¿POR QUÉ?

4.7. Free

Despite what we have seen thus far, not each and every switch produced always performs a specific function. As Zentella (1997) suggests, "pinpointing the purpose of each code switch is a task as fraught with difficulty as imputing the reasons for a monolingual's choice of one synonym over another, and no complete accounting may ever be possible" (99). In this group, the third most prolific one with 14.3% of the switches, I listed all the cases where either there was no obvious single reason to switch codes or where code-switching constituted an eclectic combination of other functions. It could also be argued that the reason behind these switches is entirely stylistic. The individual might merely be suggesting his/her competence in the use of two languages and two cultures.

31) Y NO TE forgets about those damn soap operas, PURO whity on the top homes.

32) I liked *La Mala Educación* a whole hell of a lot better, AUNQUE TAMBIÉN it unfortunately brushes over the theme of raping unconscious people, but it's not a central plot point, so I'm VAGAMENTE MENOS pissed off.

33) Way back CUANDO ESTUVE at the ALA convention, I'd said QUE HUBO a great small press called Soft Skull from whom I'd gotten UN MONTÓN DE LIBROS.

34) EN EL MUNDO HISPANOHABLANTE we have a very similar debate SOBRE LA INFLUENCIA DEL INGLÉS on other languages.

35) Again tho [sic], SI TIENEN suggestions for how UNO PUEDE best remember Dr. King on Monday, leave 'em in the comments.

5. Conclusions

In analyzing Spanish-English bilingual blogs a few evident conclusions surface. First, and answering the former research question posed at the beginning, yes, bilingual bloggers switch languages when writing these public journals. I speculate that while code-switching has often carried a social stigma in oral production, such stigma does not seem to obtain in informal written expression, especially in such a democratic forum as the Internet.

The second part of the question was twofold. To answer when bilingual bloggers switch languages, it has been proved that their writing exposes specific social and stylistic functions similar to those attested in oral code-switching, being switching for lexical items and for emphatic reasons the two most productive categories in the corpus. The answer to why they do it seems straightforward: because they can. In fact, code-switching emerges as a valid strategy to communicate in writing. Despite the different backgrounds of the subjects analyzed, a common feature in all of them was their sufficient linguistic and cultural knowledge of the nuances of both Spanish and English in order to manipulate the two languages for both stylistic and communicative effects. Code-switching is a rather complex and meaningful strategy that many authors perceive as a superior expressive repertoire, as opposed to a sort of limitation or lack of familiarity with the language.

Thirdly, we have seen how biculturalism plays a central role in code-switching for idiomatic expressions and linguistic routines in bilingual blogs and it also shows the degree of familiarity that the individual possesses with both Hispanic and Anglo worlds. Thus, code-switching represents a way of expressing one's cultures as much as one's languages. For these bilingual *blogeros y blogeras* code-

switching is, using Zentella's (1997) words, "a way of saying that they belonged to both worlds, and should not be forced to give up one for the other" (114).

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