

Multilingual Code-Switching in Digital Discourse: A Sociolinguistic Perspective on Human Linguistic Uniqueness

Abstract:

This study examines multilingual code-switching in digital vlogs as a communicative practice that offers insight into what makes human language unique. This study argues that code-switching exemplifies key traits of human linguistic uniqueness: creativity, adaptability, and reflexivity, which are not observed in non-human communication systems. While earlier approaches to linguistic uniqueness have emphasized formal properties such as recursion, displacement, and generativity (Hockett, 1960; Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch, 2002), recent sociolinguistic approaches have shifted attention toward language as a socially embedded, multimodal, and adaptive practice (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Canagarajah, 2013; Mondada, 2016), whereby language is a resource for constructing identities, managing interaction, and adapting to diverse communicative contexts.

This paper investigates how vloggers use code-switching in their online content to serve multiple social and pragmatic purposes. The dataset consists of 20 video excerpts (3–5 minutes each) sampled from the YouTube channels of 10 vloggers who switch between languages. The analysis draws on Poplack's (1980) typology of code-switching and the research on multimodal interaction (Norris, 2019; Jewitt et al., 2016), focusing on how language interplays with non-verbal cues, including gesture, facial expression, intonation, and on-screen text.

In the context of vlogs, code-switching is used to establish a bond with the audience, create cultural affiliation, and shift between topics and communicative styles. Such practices are integrated with multimodal features, reflecting communicative flexibility and audience responsiveness. As a result vloggers shape meaning across semiotic modes, responding to their audiences in real time. Audiences actively engage with code-switching by emulating multiple languages discourse.

Keywords: code-switching, multilingualism, digital discourse, human linguistic uniqueness

References:

- Blommaert, J., & Rampton, B. (2011). Language and superdiversity. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*, 70.
- Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge.
- Hauser, M. D., Chomsky, N., & Fitch, W. T. (2002). The faculty of language: What is it, who has it, and how did it evolve? *Science*, 298(5598), 1569–1579.
- Hockett, C. F. (1960). The origin of speech. *Scientific American*, 203(3), 88–96.
- Jewitt, C., Bezemer, J., & O'Halloran, K. (2016). *Introducing multimodality* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Mondada, L. (2016). Multimodal resources and the organization of social interaction. In A. de Saint-Georges & J. Weber (Eds.), *Multilingualism and multimodality: Current challenges for educational studies* (pp. 32–56). Sense Publishers.

Norris, S. (2019). Systematically working with multimodal data: Research methods in multimodal discourse analysis. Wiley Blackwell.

Poplack, S. (1980). Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish y termino en español: Toward a typology of code-switching. *Linguistics*, 18(7–8), 581–618.