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Code-switching Among Bilingual Beginner Learners of German: a Functional Pragmatic Analysis

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In Canadian post-secondary educational settings, most language learners possess a high proficiency level in at least one foreign language, mainly French. As a consequence, code-switching in these settings often includes three languages. These switches are not only a manifestation of participant-related linguistic deficits but fulfill certain pragmatic functions and, by doing so, provide valuable insight into the cognitive processes involved in language production. However, research so far has dismissed the value of early code-switches of bilingual learners as an insightful resource. This study aims to fill this gap. Nine beginner learners of German, who speak English as an L1 and French as an L2, were video-recorded during an oral exam. The occurring switches were approached from a functional-pragmatic perspective by using Field Theory to describe and categorize the switches. It was found that switches to the L1 occurred on a semantic or content level whereas switches to the L2 were a manifestation of (subconscious) cognitive processes that were related to the organization of knowledge. Pedagogical implications will be discussed.

1. Introduction

In the age of globalization, knowing more than one language has become the norm for most people in most countries. A remarkable number of learners now even know more than one foreign or second language (Stavans & Muchnik 2007). Bi- or multi-lingualism is a contributing factor to crossing borders both geographically and culturally and thus to a constantly more accessible world ‘within reach’.

While many countries are clearly ‘divided’ not only by geography but by the language they speak, others have such a boundary within, e.g. Canada. Officially, Canada is a bilingual country; however, both French and English are associated with individual provinces, e.g. Quebec is officially French-speaking, whereas most provinces in the Western part predominantly use English. Consequently, living in an officially bilingual country does not necessarily mean that its speakers are bilingual too. In order to achieve the goal of “fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society” as formulated under Section 41 of the Official Languages Act, the Canadian Government has taken a number of measures. In English-speaking provinces, French immersion programs are one example. As a result, more and more teenagers graduate

from high school with the ability to “converse both in English and French” (Official Languages Act 1985/2016). Consequently, learning a language in post-secondary settings such as universities often means that the students learn a third language and are not unfamiliar with language learning environments. While there is little data available on the type of language education that these students receive, e.g. immersion in high school settings (Official Languages Act), the predominant approach in university settings is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with a strong focus on the monolingual use of the target language (Brandl 2008, Wona 2010) and very little room for acknowledging the pre-existing bilingualism of the learners, especially in a setting like Canada.

While this monolingual approach is supposed to create an ‘immersive’ environment for the language learner, it does not account for the fact that switching codes is a natural phenomenon in conversations among bilingual speakers, especially those raised bilingually (Myers-Scotton, 1993, 1997). Speakers – purposefully – switch codes for numerous pragmatic, discourse-related and social reasons. Certainly, the code-switching behaviour of language learners in really early stages needs to be viewed from a different perspective since most of the above-mentioned research focuses on advanced learners or those who grew up bilingually. In very early stages, a lack of proficiency and the struggle to get meaning across account for many switches to the speaker’s native language. These switches are usually described as “requiring little or even no productive knowledge of the other language such as tags, routines or frozen phrases” (Poplack 2004: 594). However, very little research has so far contrasted switches to previously learned languages by multilingual speakers and the (pragmatic) functions they fulfill – even and especially in early stages of language learning.

In what follows, instances of code-switching by beginner learners of German will be described. They are native speakers of English but have learned French in high school, mainly through immersion programs. Oral communication data, recorded during an oral exam, will serve as the setting for the analysis of the switches. In order to categorize and interpret the switches, functional-pragmatic discourse analysis (see Ehlich 2010 for an overview) will be used to shed light on the differences between the switches that learners made to English and French. So far, existing models have failed to combine different aspects and can either be considered to be part of the sociolinguistic (pragmatic), the structural (grammatical) or the psycholinguistic streams of research. Within this project, the first two are covered by the model in question while it further touches upon findings

from psycholinguistic research. Although the languages in question here are relatively close typologically, the model could be used for switches between languages that are more distant from each other. Due to its universal categories, the functional pragmatic approach allows for a comparison of languages that do not share typological features. Ehlich (2010: 220) describes how languages that do not use articles—such as Latin and Russian—“function”, on a communicative level, in a similar way as those that do, for example German and Greek. Not only does this introduce an entirely new field of research, it can also be used in the foreign language classroom to help students better understand certain concepts.

By understanding the functions of the switches, the current tendency to ‘ban’ the use of more than the target language in learning environments could be re-considered, which leads to relevant pedagogical implications.

2. Functional Pragmatics and Field Theory

The functional pragmatic approach (Funktionale Pragmatik/FP) was developed in the early 1970s in research projects conducted by Konrad Ehlich and Jochen Rehbein. Their research revolved around instructional discourse in schools (for an overview see Ehlich & Rehbein 1986). Initially, FP was understood as a comprehensive language theory that sees a strong connection between language and social actions with the former being a manifestation of the latter. However, the theory enforced its claim to be comprehensive by going beyond the pragmatic level and also including syntax, grammar, semantics, phonology and script (Weber & Becker-Mrotzek 2012). At the heart of Functional Pragmatics is the interest to discover and describe connections between society, linguistic action and linguistic form. For this project, none of these broad categories is in direct focus but rather a subcategory of linguistic action that is located “below” (Ehlich 2010: 219) speech acts – so called *procedures*. Procedures received major attention in the early 1930s by Bühler who, in an attempt to systematically categorize and identify their purpose, identified the symbol field and the deictic field. While the symbol field mainly serves to activate the listener’s knowledge (i.e. it mainly consists of content words such as nouns, adjectives etc.), the deictic field focuses on directing the interlocutors’ attention in a way that allows for a “shared and synchronous organisation of both the speaker’s and

the listener's attention within a shared multisensory space"¹ (Ehlich 2010: 220). Given the high complexity and plethora of functions that a language contains, this dualistic categorization soon called for a complementation by more fields. Field Theory now consists of five fields that were mainly the result of Ehlich and Rehbein's research. In addition to the symbol and the deictic field, the operative field, the tinge field and the incitement field have been identified.² The incitement field (Lenkfeld) consists of procedures that aim at directly influencing the listener, i.e. making him/her do something. The linguistic realization can mostly be found in the form of imperatives. The tinge field (Malfeld) is less relevant to this project because it can hardly be found in the language families that are of interest here. It mainly relies on paraverbal communication, i.e. intonation. The last field, the operative field, can best be contrasted with the symbol field – instead of content words that serve to activate knowledge in the listener, the operative field includes language features that do not bear much meaning on their own and leave the knowledge core untouched. Examples are connectors such as “because”, particles, or articles.

Initially, Field Theory was developed to describe the functions of the German language, but through its detachment from syntactic categories, individual fields can even be applied to those languages that are linguistically distant from German and do not have comparable features such as articles (Ehlich 2010). It is that very universality that allows for a comparison of languages across different language families, which is of particular interest to research on code-switching that involves more than one language. Using Field Theory thus enables researchers to consider learners' interlanguage from a holistic perspective, i.e. it views codes in other languages as part of the interlanguage and at the same time offers a fine-grained analysis of how these codes differ in terms of their functions. Not only does this approach offer valuable insights into the speaker's language processing, it also comes with a number of pedagogical implications that are valuable for both the learner and the teacher of a language. All of these implications will be discussed in detail in section 4.

¹ Translation from German to English provided by the author.

² The translation of the terms was taken from the English/German/Dutch glossary provided by Ehlich et al. (2007).

3. Background

While the term ‘code-switching’ itself is intuitively understood by everyone, its technical definition is subject to high inconsistency and little agreement. Most of the confusion can be attributed to the constituent ‘code’, which can refer to various meanings. Poplack (n.d.: 1) describes code-switching as “the mixing, by bilinguals (or multilinguals), of two or more languages in discourse, often with no change of interlocutor or topic”. An equally neutral position is offered by Gumperz et al. (1982: 59), who define the switching of codes as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two [or more] different grammatical systems or subsystems.” For this project, code is understood as language in the sense described by Poplack and the switch is considered to be nothing but a juxtaposition as described by Gumperz et al. In classrooms, however, the prevailing notion of code-switching seems to be in line with earlier definitions like the one by Grosjeans (1982: 157) who considers code-switching to be a “grammarless language mixture and gibberish of semilingual speakers” or Weinreich (1953: 73) who describes the successful language learner or bilingual respectively who switches codes in accordance with the requirements of changing settings “but not in an unchanged speech situation, and certainly not within a single sentence.”

Within the SLA environment in general, code-switching was long deemed an unwellcome phenomenon (Wona 2010), as most institutional settings call for a monolingual approach, e.g. Communicative Language Teaching. Numerous researchers supported that approach theoretically, e.g. Cummins (1981), Krashen et al. (1998) and, more recently, Canagarajah (2005) and Lin & Martin (2005), who all agree that code-switching in institutional language learning settings is usually considered to have a participant-related function and, thereby, indicates a deficit, whereas it can be categorized as a discourse-related function in non-institutional, ‘natural’ bi- or monolingual settings. Probyn described code-switching in an educational context as a “struggle to learn” (2005) and a way of “smuggling the vernacular into the classroom” (2009). Within the context of advocating a strictly monolingual approach to language-teaching, (explicit) contrastive approaches have often been dismissed as outdated and not as beneficial as (implicit), monolingual ones. Building on Lado’s work, *Linguistics across cultures* (1957), a plethora of research was conducted to prove (or reject) the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which stated that those languages (or elements of a language) that are similar to the L1 (or its elements) are easier to learn than those that are different. While research

on contrastive approaches was extremely *en vogue* in the 1970s, it gradually disappeared with the rise of CLT. Only relatively few studies have argued in favour of contrastive approaches in this century (e.g. Konjevod Ikeda 2010, 2012; Belmar 2014) in spite of the language learning success that had previously been observed.

In regard to pre-existing bi- or multilingualism and code-switching (in the classroom) more and more research has been conducted that leads to the acknowledgement of switching codes. It is no longer considered to be a manifestation of a low proficiency level but serves numerous communicative, pragmatic and social functions (e.g. Munhoa 1997, Shin & Milroy 2000, Dailey-O’Cain & Liebscher 2005, Shin 2010). Reyes (2004) observed that switches strategically occur when speakers are confronted with challenging tasks, and Kramsch & Whiteside (2007) have demonstrated that the conscious or targeted use of specific codes aims at creating a cultural identity in discourse. Consequently, first attempts have been made to include these benefits in curriculum development. Creese & Blackledge (2010) argue for a classroom that leaves behind the monolingual doctrine and instead demand the strategic and conscious use of two languages alongside each other: Chinese and Gujarati, in this case. While this approach of ‘translanguaging’ has long only been a theoretical request, now more and more studies are available which assess the effectiveness of such approaches. Moreno (2015), for example, employed the use of both English in Spanish in the setting of Middle School English language learners and found that both the level of participation as well as the ability to actively reflect upon language use have drastically increased. Mazak & Herbas-Donoso (2015) observed a university professor systematically using translanguaging (English and Spanish) to convey scientific contents. They found that the implementation of this technique resulted in an increased use of English for scientific purposes by those students who are usually more prone to using Spanish.

Although research does seem to be moving away from the monolingual approaches and is starting to recognize the benefits of bi- and multilingual settings instead, most of the above-mentioned studies have a few things in common and thereby contribute to a significant gap: They either focus on the implementation of the L1 in an L2 learning environment or on the use of two languages with which the learners grew up, i.e. they learned two languages simultaneously and are highly fluent in both codes. Little to no research exists that focuses on code-switching among learners who have not been raised bilingually, but have only one L1 and are not highly proficient in their L2 or their L3.

Furthermore, data collection predominantly takes place in everyday classroom discourse without taking into account assessment situations. With monolingualism still being the prevalent model, assessment settings are of particular interest because they represent an intersection of communication, i.e. ‘natural’ speech behaviour and assessment, i.e. the doctrine to use the target language only.

In addition to the implementation of a language other than the target language, more general research on code-switching is of relevance for this paper.

In general, three major streams can be identified when dealing with code-switching in research: the structural stream, the sociolinguistic and the psycholinguistic stream. The structural stream has mainly been influenced by the work of Poplack (1979/81, 1980), who has demonstrated that switches do not occur randomly but are subject to specific constraints, i.e. the equivalence constraint, the size-of-constituent constraint, and the free-morpheme constraint. Relevant for this project is only the size-of-constituent constraint, which describes the switches as either intra- or inter-sentential or a tag-switch. While Poplack associates certain levels of proficiency with this constraint, they here only serve as a means to locate the switch. Sociolinguistic research on code-switching mainly focuses on switches in natural speech communities with an increasing number of studies focusing on the classroom (for a comprehensive overview see Lin 2013). Research on the psycholinguistic dimension mainly revolves around the cognitive system of bi- or monolingual speakers, especially regarding their mental lexicon and the processing of languages (e.g. Levelt 1989, deBot 1992, Green 1998, Jackendoff 2002, Paivio 2010). As is true for the above mentioned studies, research in these streams mainly takes into account highly proficient or native speakers of more than one language and seldom focuses on learners in early stages of acquisition and even less often on assessment settings. Furthermore, the streams are usually clearly distinct from each other and barely combine structural and pragmatic functions, for instance, which would allow for a more holistic approach. This, in turn, could eventually lead to a broader understanding of cross-linguistic phenomena. Therefore, this project employs an approach which is pragmatic in nature but also takes into account structural qualities of the switches – the Functional Pragmatic Approach as described above. Although this approach lends itself perfectly to comparing and contrasting languages that are both linguistically close and/or different from each other, no research has applied this model to the analysis of code-switches.

For these reasons, this project is driven by the following research questions:

1. Which types of code-switching occur in oral exams of bilingual beginner learners of German and which pragmatic functions do they fulfill?
2. Do differences exist regarding the switches to the speakers' L1 and the L2?

3. The Study

3.1 Participants and setting

The data sample consists of nine beginner learners of German at the end of their first semester at a university in Western Canada. All participants are native speakers of English and learned French in high school, mainly through immersion programs. Hence, German was the 3rd language for all participants. None of the participants considered themselves as very fluent in French, and they all learned and used it as a second or foreign language to various extents. The oral exam was conducted by the instructor of the course at the end of the term and was part of the course requirements. It was initiated by a family photograph that the students were asked to bring to the exam. The conversations were 7-10 minutes in length. The corpus of transcripts is 29 pages in length ranging from two to four and a half pages. The average word count is 300 per page. The students were expected to use the basic structures that were taught in the course, e.g. word order in dependent and independent clauses, subject-verb agreement and negation, using the accusative for direct objects as well as prepositions. Students received a holistic oral assessment scale for the exam and were, therefore, aware of the expectations. While the above mentioned structures were part of the categories *accuracy* and *language*, other categories that were included in the assessment were *content/task completion*, *comprehensibility*, *fluency*, *pronunciation*, *vocabulary* and *interactive skills* (e.g. negotiation of meaning, turn taking, use of correct register). Ethics consent was obtained for the recording, analysis and publication of the data. Students also provided consent for being contacted by the researcher after conduction of the study if any questions occur.

3.2 Methodology

The exams were video recorded and transcribed using GAT 2 (Selting et al. 2009). The data was categorized in three different ways. In a first step, Poplack's (1980) size-of-constituent constraint served to localize the switches, i.e. their position within an utterance. This approach has been used in a major body of research, which makes it

possible to compare and contextualize the results. For the second step, the switches were divided according to parts of speech (*Wortarten*), which Hoffmann (2007) describes as an “intersection between grammar and the lexicon that play a crucial role for both describing and teaching language”³ (Vorwort). Since lexical gaps are the focus of this project, the parts of speech in question will be described as *lexical categories*. These categories form a crucial part of the terminology that is used for both language learning and teaching. Paired with the fact that this project is partially driven by pedagogical motives, they lend themselves very well to analysis. This step led to the functional-pragmatic analysis of the switches using Field Theory as developed by Ehlich & Rehbein (1986) for the reasons described above.

3.3 Results

Types of switches

In the transcriptions of the recordings, 80 instances of code-switching were identified in a corpus of 29 pages in length with an average word count of 300 per page. Of these switches, 54 were to English and 26 to French. In the following chart, the switches are presented in accordance with Poplack’s size-of-constituent constraint.

	Tag-switching	Inter-Sentential	Intra-sentential
English	13	11	30
French	3	0	23
Total	16	11	<u>53</u>

Table 1: Switches according to Poplack’s size-of-constituent constraint

Poplack (1980) describes intra-sentential switches as those that require a high proficiency level because they are syntactically embedded in the sentence. For this study, the above-mentioned categories are only used to localize the switches within an utterance without providing evidence of a specific proficiency level. This constraint does become relevant, however, when contextualized further in terms of turn-taking. Intra-sentential switches almost all indicated the end of a turn, i.e. the speaker did not use any scaffolding to get meaning across but waited for the assessor to do so as the following examples show:⁴

³ Translation from German to English provided by the author.

⁴ Although the GAT basic transcript was used, only those features are indicated here that are relevant to the analysis. Furthermore, the numbering is continuous although the utterances were taken from more than one dialogue. A continuing numbering was considered to be more

- 01 I: hat ihre mutter hobbies?
 02 S: ah ja::: aeh sie macht? sie macht ehm (1s) sie spielt
 03 aehm **roller derby**? <<looks puzzled> >
 04 I: ja (.) roller derby is ok
 05 S: aeh (5s) er ist (.) bald? er ist **bald** (2s) **is that right?**
 06 I: keine haare?
 07 S: hm=hm

In both (representative) examples, we have instances of intra-sentential switches. The speaker indicates insecurity about his/her switch to English in both cases by either looking puzzled (and thereby asking for the assessor's scaffolding and/or feedback) or by formulating a sentence to check whether his/her use of the word is correct. For most of the intra-sentential switches to English, the speaker thus ended his/her turn and asked for affirmation of the assessor. However, the following example shows that not all intra-sentential switches to English can be classified as an 'interruption' as indicated above. In the following example, the switch to English also indicates the end of a turn but no reaction from the assessor is required, i.e. the end of the turn is congruent with the end of the proposition. The assessor's comment can be viewed as an instance of repair in the form of translating or recasting, but her involvement was neither required for the flow of the conversation nor by the student. However, since it was not a standardized assessment context and the assessor was also the instructor of the group, it can be assumed that the recast used here was more of an automatic response than a strategic or targeted one.

- 08 S: ((...)) mit meine freundin in muenchen (2s) ae:::hm (3s) wir
travelled <<fluestert> >
 09 I: sie sind gereist

For French, the switch almost never resulted in the end of a turn but triggered either self-repair or remained entirely unnoticed as the following examples show:

- 10 I: woher kommt die familie?
 11 S: **ils (1s) aee:h (.) sie** kommen aus deutschland
 12 I: hm=hm
 13: S: **mais (1s) nein (1s) a:::ber** sie ist ((...)) fuenfvierzehn?

consistent and reader-friendly. The relevant switches are bolded. I stands for instructor, S for student.

In these two examples, the switches are noticed post-production and the speaker immediately repairs (successfully) and used the German equivalent of what he had previously said in French.

While all switches to English were noticed without an exception, numerous switches to French seem to have gone unnoticed, as the following examples show:

- 14 I: mein cousin ist ein (.) undzwanzig jahre alt
 15 S: einundzwanzig (2s) **et wo wohnt er?**
- 16 S: **et jocelyn** wohnt aus edmonton
 17 I: ah=ok
- 18 S: wo ((...)) kommt ((...)) deine familie her? **de (.) de (1s)**
 19 **duesseldorf?**
 20 I: aus duesseldorf ja

Although we do have a pause following the preposition *de*, it can be assumed that the pause was used to remember the name of the city instead of reflecting upon the use of French during the interaction. The fact that the French preposition is used twice supports this assumption.

The observations in terms of turn-taking and noticing will be addressed further in the discussion.

Types of switches according to syntactic categories

For English, the following chart provides an overview of the syntactic categories the switches could be divided into:

Category	Number
Nouns	22
Adjectives	5
Verbs	4
Adverbs	3
Particles	2
Interjections	7

Table 2: Switches according to lexical categories English

For French, the lexical distribution is as follows

Category	Number
Connector	13
Personal pronoun	6
Interjection	3
Preposition	2
Article	2

Table 3: Switches according to lexical categories French

These tables clearly show that what can be classified as content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are strongly predominating the switches to English whereas functional or structural words are dominant in French. Not a single instance of what can be described as a content word was observed among the switches to French. This observation becomes even more striking when the switches were divided into their function according to Field Theory as demonstrated below:

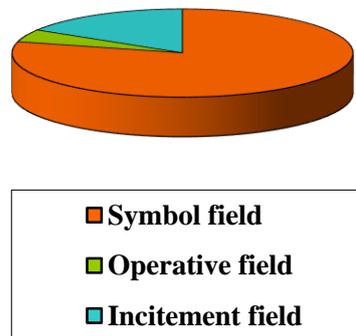


Figure 1: Functions of switches to English according to Field Theory

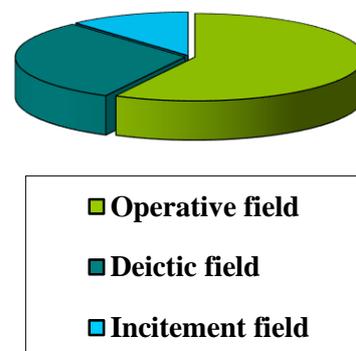


Figure 2: Functions of switches to French according to Field Theory

In these diagrams, the switches were categorized as follows: Switches within the symbol field were nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs, the deictic field contains pronouns and the operative field consists of articles, connectors, prepositions and particles. Interjections were considered to be part of the incitement field. One switch to French occurred that contained a numeral (Zahlwort), i.e. the speaker used the French word for ‘four’ in his speech but corrected himself immediately. Interestingly, this switch was within a word because four was part of a larger number (fourteen) that contained four. This switch is counted as part of the operative field instead of the symbol field because it is considered to be a relational procedure rather than a symbolic one.

In terms of overlaps, interjections were the only category where switches occurred to both French and English in the operative field. The following example shows a switch to English. The noun ‘Jesus’ (pronounced in English, not in German) is used as an interjection in this case, that is as a form to express emotions. In this particular case, the student was struggling to find a way to form a question and expressed his frustration by switching to English.

21 S: philosophie (.) oh (.) ok (2s) oh? <<laughs> >
 22 das ist deine bruder
 23 <<points at picture> >
 24 aeh er (3s) **jesus** (2s) was was was heisst (.) ja was heisst
 25 ja was heisst er?

Unlike most of the intra-sentential switches to English as described above which marked the end of a turn, this tag-switch did not, but the student kept going and tried to scaffold.

For French, the following example presents a typical occurrence of an interjection.

26 S: aber=aehm aber seine familie? **non=ihre** familie aeh wo:::
 27 wohin aus calgary
 28 I: wohnt in calgary ok
 29 S: wohnt in calgary ja

Although other categories are thinkable for ‘non’ it was considered to be an interjection because it was the manifestation of a monitoring process and both the intonation and the speaker’s volume rose when saying ‘non’, i.e. the utterance was perceived as emotional.

Furthermore, the transcript shows that ‘non’ and ‘ihre’ were directly linked to each other with no pause in between.

Except for interjections, there is no interface between English and French in terms of the fields and their functions. All other fields were part of either English or French exclusively and did not occur in the other language.

In addition to the 56 switches to English, many of which occurring as a ‘strategy’ when a student was facing a lexical gap, the students showed a remarkably limited set of resources to compensate for these gaps. The recordings show that students frequently hesitated when they were uncertain about the use of a specific word and they either paused, whispered, repeated words, or showed a rising intonation to request confirmation from the assessor. The example below is a representative instance of such hesitation or insecurity:

30 I: ok und wie lange brauchen sie von zuhause zur uni?
 31 S: aehm ich ufuf ok (2s) ich ich ich <<whispers> >
 32 aeh (2s) ich gehe hm? <<looks puzzled and laughs> >
 33 ich gehe (1s) an die uni? <<whispers> > zu:::r uni?
 34 <<looks puzzled, intonation is rising> >
 35 I: <<nodds> >

While these confirmation requests or manifestations of insecurity are related to a lexical gap, they cannot be considered to be one. The students have the means to get meaning across (even if preceded by pauses and repetitions) but are uncertain as to whether their means are correct.

As far as actual lexical gaps are concerned, a total of only two instances could be observed in a transcript of 29 pages in length.

In the following example, the student makes use of body language to compensate for not knowing the German word for ‘together’. Since the assessor interpreted this attempt correctly, it can be considered a successful strategy.

36 I: was macht dein bruder?
 37 S: aehm (2s) er arbeitet aehm (4s) er und mein vater arbeitet
 38 <<presses thumb against the other four fingers> >
 39 I: zusammen?
 40 S: ja (2s) zusammen

The only other instance that occurred was the following:

41 S: property management (2s) ja aehm sie aeh sie sie sie sie
 42 <<speaks really fast> >
 43 I: <<laughs> >
 44 S: <<laughs> > aeh das ist mein bruder <<points at picture> >

Here, the student keeps repeating the personal pronoun “sie” instead of completing the sentence. The fact that the student speaks increasingly faster seems to make the assessor laugh, which makes the student laugh too. In the next turn, attention is directed at another family member, i.e. the topic is changed. It is not possible to say whether we have an actual gap or if the student simply does not have enough time to think of the correct word because the assessor started laughing.

Given the number of switches in the transcript, the occurrence of other ‘strategies’ is remarkably low. The results will be discussed in the following section.

3.4 Discussion

Within the switches to English, 79% were part of the symbol field, for French 65% were part of the operative field. Consequently, these two fields form the most frequent and thus the most relevant switches for the two languages. For English, it soon became obvious that most changes that were part of the symbol field (mostly nouns, verbs, and adjectives) were a manifestation of a language deficit – the German word was simply unknown to the speaker. Students lacked individual words as well as strategies to compensate for them. Consequently, most of the intra-sentential switches marked the end of a term with very few exceptions. However, a complete communicative breakdown was avoided by switching to the target language for ‘content’ words of the symbol field – they assured that knowledge in the hearer is activated and meaning is ‘created’. Given the context of an oral exam setting, the students were very aware that English was not welcome, which they indicated in the form of whispers, pauses, gazes, etc.

For French, on the other hand, not a single switch occurred that aimed at (obviously) fulfilling a function for the listener. It was, rather, a manifestation of the cognitive processes in the speaker and, hence, part of the operative field. Out of the 65%, 74% of the switches to French in the operative field were connectors like “et” and “mais”, which can be seen as a structural tool in the speaker’s mind. However, unlike English, where switches were used as a strategy in the absence of a better one, French was not consciously

used or instrumentalized by the speaker, but rather the instances of French offered a window into his/her cognitive actions. The organization and structuring of knowledge seems to be exclusively the domain of French, i.e. another foreign or second language and not English, their L1.

Another interesting observation was the difference in noticing regarding the switches to English and French. While all switches to English were noticed by the speaker and addressed (usually in the form of a request for scaffolding or translation), about 70% of the switches to French remained unnoticed. More interestingly, the switches to English were noticed (since they were planned) prior to the utterance, whereas French was perceived as a ‘slip’ – if speakers were aware – and noticed upon the actual articulation, i.e. post-production. Both the video-recording and the transcripts support this hypothesis. When French output was produced, the students (who noticed) immediately self-repaired their utterance and sometimes even added a meta-comment in English such as “Oh this is French stuck in my head”. The utterance itself, however, did not show any indication that the student was aware of the switch prior to the articulation. For English, the case is clearly different. Even during the articulation of the word, the above mentioned indicators such as pauses or changes like whispering or rising intonation indicated that the ‘choice’ to use an English word instead of a German one was both conscious and ‘planned’. The fact that switches to French were either not noticed or repaired (i.e. translated to German) upon use further shows that they were not the result of a missing word in the target language. For English, in contrast, this certainly was the case.

The recordings further indicate that speakers were very uncomfortable with the use of English because they were probably aware of the fact that the switches were necessary to get meaning across but at the same time not welcome because of the setting of an oral exam in German. Furthermore they often indicated the end of a turn because the student’s reaction both verbally or paraverbally asked for intervention of the assessor. The use of French either remained unnoticed or was repaired immediately without being a major interruption in the conversation or being perceived as such. It almost appeared as if students realized that French was the ‘wrong’ code but it was not perceived as unwelcome as English.

Another interesting finding was the interjections – the only interface between the switches to English and French. Since interjections are strongly related to the speaker’s emotions, it can be assumed that whether switches occurred to English or French is strongly tied to

how the languages are used in the students' lives. If French is more than just a foreign language but spoken more frequently and, therefore, more relevant to the speaker, it can be assumed that the likelihood of a switch to French in this field increases. However, the biodata form, used for this project, does not allow for such a fine-grained analysis and, therefore, needs to be part of a future project.

4. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

These findings provide interesting insights into the speaker's cognitive action when producing (spoken) output. While English clearly is used as a 'strategy' to avoid communicative breakdown, switches to French occurred without (obvious) pragmatic reasons, i.e. with no relevance for the listener. Instead, they provided access to the speaker's cognitive actions in speech production. While French did not present a major interruption for the conversation, the same is not true for English, at least on the side of the speaker because scaffolding from the assessor was asked for. The observations in terms of how the use of English and French were perceived, as described in the previous section, further lead to the assumption that students were more comfortable with the switch to another foreign/second language than with a switch to their L1, which was clearly perceived as a manifestation of 'failure' or weakness in the assessment setting. If taken further, students seem to create a 'hierarchy of welcomeness', within which another foreign or second language is clearly positioned above the use of the learner's native language.

In conclusion, English and French serve entirely different purposes in oral assessment settings and it can be argued that, in the production of an L3, switches to the L2 are not perceived as a major source of disturbance – either due to the fact that the native language is not welcome in an assessment context or because the switches clearly were a manifestation of a deficiency on the semantic level.

Either way, these findings have pedagogical implications, which need to be addressed.

Most prominently, the students did not show any strategies other than switching codes when they struggle to get meaning across, with the exception of one student, who made use of body language instead of resorting to code-switching (see above). Therefore, both vocabulary-learning and communicative strategies need to be more in the focus of instruction. While both the assessor and the learners shared a language other than the target one, the switching of codes can be considered as successful in terms of negotiating

meaning. However, in situations where the speakers do not share a language, other strategies need to be used instead.

Especially regarding the switches to French, it becomes clear that switching codes, even in a usually monolingual foreign language teaching environment, should not always be unwelcome but, rather, serve as a valuable source for both assessing the speaker's cognitive actions as well as designing pedagogical interventions. The de-stigmatization of code-switching has already been mentioned. Teachers should be trained to develop an alertness to switches and reasons for them to occur. In regard to French, it would be interesting to find out whether the observation that was made here – that switches to French remained mostly unnoticed – can be confirmed in a post-test. While students might not be aware of the switches to French during production, they might become aware post-production or upon confrontation with their output. If it turns out that students are aware of their use of French and might even be able to explain their reasons for doing so, more precise interventions can be suggested. If the use of French serves as a facilitator to produce output in German, for example, contrastive approaches might be beneficial for multi-lingual learners despite of their reputation of being outdated, as it was described earlier. This approach might be particularly fruitful for the languages in question. English and German are closer to each other than German to French in many regards. French and German, however, share numerous morphological features that often causes significant problems in the learning process because there are no equivalents in English: conjugation of verbs as well as inflection of nouns, pronouns, adjectives etc. for person, gender, number or case.

Due to its universality, it is further possible to consult and make active use of Field Theory in the teaching of certain concepts, especially for languages that are linguistically distant from each other. While they may differ in details such as the existence of articles or the concept of gender, the implementation of Field Theory, i.e. explaining the idea of the different fields and how it applies to both the target and previously learned languages, might be a useful source for demonstrating that certain ideas and concepts do have an equivalent in all languages involved. Both teaching practice and research on learning have shown that linguistic proximity and, even more importantly, the perception thereof are a strong indicator for language success (e.g. Han 2004)

In sum, learner groups that consist predominantly of speakers who have learned foreign/second languages before provide a plethora of ways to both make use of pre-

existing knowledge and to serve as a resource for understanding cognitive processes throughout the language learning process.

5. Outlook

Clearly, the small sample size calls for a repetition of the project with a larger group of participants. Furthermore, the languages English, French and German are typologically relatively close, so future research should include languages that are more distant from each other and do not have obvious form- or function-related equivalences. It would also be interesting to see how these switches may or may not differ for speakers with different proficiency levels, especially since English seems to be used to compensate for the lack of vocabulary.

Habits of use for languages other than L1, especially in regard to interjections, would be another interesting field for investigation. It can be assumed that speakers who use French (or any other L2) more frequently show different code-switching behavior compared to those who have little to no exposure to the language. Hence, a more fine-grained analysis of the speaker background is in order.

The level of awareness post-production, as described in the previous section, presents another interesting field for future research and the design of pedagogical interventions in particular.

Since the assessment setting both implicitly and explicitly established that only the target language is welcome, it would be interesting to apply Field Theory to the switches among these learners in everyday classroom discourse.

Finally, applying Field Theory and the Functional Pragmatic approach to speakers who speak more than two languages when learning yet another language could be part of a further interesting and insightful future research project.

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