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Foreign-Language Quotations and Code-Switching: the Grammar Behind

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In this paper, I wish to look into a minor language-contact phenomenon — foreign-language quotations — and explore its connections to a widely studied language-contact phenomenon — code-switching. Rather than focus on the sociolinguistic dimension of these phenomena, I concentrate on the issue of their grammaticality. I start from the widely accepted assumption that code-switchers are competent bilingual speakers and that there is a grammar underlying code-switched utterances. I then turn to a variety of cross-linguistic quotations and examine its connections to code-switching. My hypotheses are (i) that the use of quotations from other languages is also grammatically constrained, (ii) that the grammar governing it is similar (the same?) as that behind code-switching.

1. Quotations in a different language vs. code-switching

Sometimes speakers of a given language will pepper their speech or writing with quotations in a different language. These sorts of quotations are another language-contact phenomenon, albeit one that has been less extensively studied than code-switching. At first glance, foreign-language quotations have a lot more to do with a theory of quotation than a study of code-switching. Such is the impression that prevails if we consider examples like:

(1) a. Then Lucien exclaimed, “Mais où va le monde!”

b. “Pero” is the word Spanish speakers use to contradict you.

If we avail ourselves of the well-worn distinction between the ‘use’ and the ‘mention’ of a term (Quine 1940: 23-26), the following descriptions can be given: in (1a) the sequence *Mais où va le monde!* is mentioned, not used. This means that, from a semantic point of view, it stands for (refers to) an utterance (i.e. an instance of language use), not for a particularly worrying state of the world, as it would if *Mais où va le monde!* had been used. From a grammatical point of view, the structure of the quoted sequence plays no part at the level of the embedding sentence: at that level, the quoted clause is an unanalysable DP/NP, the quotation has been ‘syntactically recruited’ in that function (Recanati 2001: 649). A similar account can be given for (2): Here *pero* is a referential expression: it denotes a Spanish word-type (when used, *pero*, being a conjunction, has no reference). Besides, *pero* does not function syntactically as a conjunction in (2); otherwise the sentence would be ungrammatical. Instead, the quotation of *pero* is recruited as a DP/NP.

The above is a far cry from the situation that obtains in code-switching, where all sequences, regardless of the language they belong to, are used ordinarily — namely to denote the objects, properties, relations, concepts they are conventionally associated with, or to perform their standard grammatical function.¹ Thus, in:

(2) Sometimes I’ll start a sentence in English y terminé en Español (Poplack 1980),

¹ Unless, of course, the code-switched utterance further includes an instance of quotation.

the Spanish sequence is used, not mentioned: *y* functions as a coordinator; *terminó* heads a VP whose coordinate VP is *'ll start*; *in Español* functions as an adjunct exactly like *in English* in the first coordinate.

2. Other varieties of quotation

Thus far, the feeling is that foreign-language quotations have little in common with code-switching. This, I argue, is only true as long as we confine ourselves to the canonical examples of direct speech (1a) and pure quotation (1b). Our impression changes as soon as we look at other types of quotations, which involve no syntactic recruitment, such as so-called scare quoting and 'mixed quotation' (Cappelen & Lepore 1997; Stainton 1999). Consider the following:

- (3) This is the France that has fueled the politics of “la fracture sociale” and of urban “insécurité”.
(Webpage)
- (4) Stendhal writes [...] that she was “amoureuse de l’amour”, being an enchanting and passionate actress [...]. (Webpage)
- (5) If you were a French academic, you might say that [the parrot] was *un symbole du Logos* [...].
(Julian Barnes)

The utterances above contain instances of what I will henceforth call 'non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations'. They have a lot more in common with code-switching than (1a) or (1b) does: although arguably mentioned — the hearer/reader's attention is drawn to the linguistic material — the sequences in quotation marks or in italics are also simultaneously used. In (3), which illustrates scare quoting, both *la fracture sociale* and *insécurité* function grammatically exactly as if they were the ordinary English phrases *social division* and *insecurity*. Besides, they both have their ordinary denotation: they do not refer to phrases, as they would in pure quotation, but to social phenomena. As for (4) and (5), both exemplify 'mixed quotation', i.e. a mix of direct and indirect speech. In (4), *amoureuse de l'amour* is an Adjective Phrase that denotes the same idea as would be denoted by *in love with love*; in (5), *un symbole du logos*, though it occupies a DP-position is not 'recruited' in that function: it is analysable (Det + NP, etc.) and hence is part and parcel of the syntactic structure of the reported clause. Moreover, it denotes a symbol of Logos (whatever that is), not a French expression.

Now I do not want to play down the differences between, on the one hand, (2) and, on the other, (3) to (5).

-For one thing, the highlighted strings in the latter utterances are presented as mentioned, unlike *y terminó* etc., which is just used (this is an issue I return to below).

-For another, it is likely that most native speakers of English would agree that (3) to (5) are English sentences which happen to contain a few French words. To put it differently, there is a recognisable embedding (or 'matrix') language (English) and an embedded language (French).² Things are less clear-cut in the literature about code-switching: while some authors defend the matrix/embedded opposition (Joshi 1985; Myers-Scotton 1993), others take it that

² Perhaps not all cases are so uncontroversial. Take the following, by an Australian academic:

Foucault writes that “le vrai sens historique reconnaît que nous vivons, sans repères ni coordonnées originaires, dans des myriades d'événements perdus” and argues strongly against the imposition of a logic and teleology on history.
[Webpage]

code-switched utterances ‘are in two languages’ (Bentahila 1995; MacSwan 1997, 2000). Note, however, that the very existence of a debate about the matrix/embedded opposition in code-switching suggests that the difference with (3) to (5) may not be radical.

-A third difference is pointed out by Aravind Joshi, who argues that code-switchers are competent, balanced bilinguals and stresses that therefore “[i]ntrasentential code switching is sharply distinguished from other interferences, such as borrowing, learned use of words, and filling lexical gaps, all of which could be exhibited by monolingual speakers” (1985: 190; emphasis mine), i.e. by people much less in contact with the other language than code-switchers are. Here again, however, some scholars have put forward dissenting views, notably Auer (1998).

-A fourth difference is the fact that code-switching is above all a spoken discourse phenomenon (but not exclusively...), whereas ‘learned’ quotations are more prevalent in writing (though they pop up here and there in speech as well).

Thus, we have four typical differences between code-switching and non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations. However, most of them cannot be regarded as defining a necessary condition for code-switching: in the end, it is not clear that code-switching *must* be a spoken performance, produced by a balanced bilingual and involving no dominant/dominated hierarchy of languages. As it turns out, only the question whether the ‘foreign-language’ sequence we are looking at is mentioned or not (on top of being used) might well be a discriminating factor. If there is mention, we are dealing with non-recruited quotation; if there is not, we are dealing with code-switching.

3. Is mention the distinctive feature?

The question deserves some more attention. First, I need to explicitate the distinction between use and mention. I adopt the description offered by Paul Saka (forthcoming):

- (u) Speaker S uses an expression *x* if and only if:
 - (i) S produces a token of *x*,
thereby ostending an open-ended number of items associated with *x*; and
 - (ii) S intends to refer to the extension of *x*.

- (m) Speaker S mentions an expression *x* if and only if:
 - (i) S produces a token of *x*,
thereby ostending an open-ended number of items associated with *x*; and
 - (ii) S intends to refer to something associated with *x* other than its extension.

By ‘ostends’, Saka means ‘makes manifest’ or ‘draws the attention to’. In other words, when a speaker ostends something associated with an expression (its extension, but also its spelling, phonetics, the lexeme that it is, its morphology, syntactic category, etc.), the speaker draws her addressee’s attention to this something. When what the addressee’s attention is drawn to is some (broadly speaking) linguistic aspect of the expression, the expression is said to be mentioned. What happens in cases like (3) to (5) is that the addressee’s attention is drawn *both* to the extension of the quoted expression (use) and to one or the other linguistic aspect of it (mention).

In what sense can we say that the quoted sequences in (3) to (5) are mentioned? (4) and (5), which are cases of mixed quotation, are easiest to deal with. The mentioning dimension here is a matter of ‘speech attribution’: the addressee’s attention is drawn to the fact that the sequence in question is a (more or less) verbatim rendition of an utterance produced (or producible) by another speaker. This mentioning dimension is therefore essentially the same as that of direct speech reports, and is heavily dependent on the semantics of reporting verbs like *say*. Now, to what extent can *la fracture sociale* and *insécurité* also be regarded as mentioned in (3). Speech attribution is less evident than in (4) and (5), as there is no reporting verb (hence no subject of this verb). Still, scare quoting can usually be paraphrased as *as X says/used to say/might say/would say* (here: *as French politicians say*, for example). In other words, the addressee’s attention is drawn to a group of speakers’ choice of words, to their manner of speaking, and therein lies the mentioning dimension of (3).

I wrote above that no such mention occurs in code-switching. This perhaps needs qualifying. It is likely that certain shifts to ‘the other’ language are deliberately meant to highlight the significance of the words that follow (this is an issue that genuine specialists of code-switching certainly have views on). Still, what the literature evinces is that most run-of-the-mill instances of code-switching involve no such ostension of words as such, that the words are mostly simply *used*. Thus, even though it might seem to the diehard monolingual who’s never heard of code-switching that the very shift to another language is a way of drawing attention to ‘something about’ the words that follow, there does not appear to be any intention to perform a metalinguistic ostension in most of the everyday practice of code-switchers.

In conclusion, it does appear that mention is the discriminating factor. The utterer of (3), (4) or (5) does something more than the utterer of (2): she draws attention to ‘something about’ some words. However, speech attribution and distancing are part of the pragmatics of (3)-(5), not, I argue, of their semantics.³ My position is this: the mentioning dimension does not directly affect the semantic proposition expressed by utterances containing non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations: this semantic content is basically the same as it would be if no metalinguistic ostension were intended. The idea is that the semantics of (3) to (5) are the same as the semantics of their ‘disquoted’ variants:

(3’) This is the France that has fueled the politics of *la fracture sociale* and of urban *insécurité*.

(4’) Stendhal writes that she was *amoureuse de l’amour*, being an enchanting and passionate actress.

(5’) If you were a French academic, you might say that the parrot was *un symbole du Logos*.

These examples may look odd. Some people may even find them ungrammatical. But note that the same might find my presentation of (2) equally odd. Whereas it is standard to highlight code-switching by means of italics, I purposely chose not to, because italics are just a means of making things easier on readers and may not reflect any actual marking in spoken instances of code-switching. By the same token, the argument might go, neither the quotation marks nor the italics are essential to (3)-(5) and can affect their grammaticality status.

I must acknowledge that all this is conjectural. There is so far no consensus on whether punctuation (in general, or markers of quotation) affects grammaticality (and there is already

³ This is currently a hotly debated issue; cf. Benbaji (forthcoming) and Gomez-Torrente (forthcoming).

a problem with grammaticality judgments concerning written utterances). However, I believe that a thorough comparison with the grammar of code-switching would advance my case. In code-switching, as far as I know, no special marking of shifts is necessary for well-formedness. If it turns out that the grammar of non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations is the same (or a subset of) that of code-switching, then the positions I defend are strengthened: the conclusion would be that quotation marks and italics are just a reader-friendly device, with no impact on well-formedness.

4. Does the same grammar underlie code-switching and non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations?

How can a comparison be undertaken between the grammar of code-switching and that of non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations? This can be done in two ways, which correspond to the two manners in which the linguistic literature has made the point that code-switching is a grammatical form of performance. Taking what I'll call an 'explanatory' perspective, I can make use of those *general* grammatical principles which are presented in the literature as underlying code-switching, and find out to what extent they are respected by non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations. Taking what I'll call a 'descriptive' perspective, I can compare those *particular* positions in an utterance where code-switches and non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations are allowed to occur.

4. 1. Explanatory approaches

Since the early eighties, several broad principles have been put forward to capture the constraints on code-switching. Some writers have posited a control mechanism, a sort of 'third grammar' governing the ways in which the grammars of the two languages used by the code-switcher would mix. Some others have thought it more fitting to make use of no principle that did not already apply to monolingual sentences. In other words, they have preferred to explain the data of code-switching by appealing to theories of grammar that had been designed for monolingual sentences (if necessary, by improving them). A fine representative of the second option is Jeff MacSwan (1997, 2000), who has presented arguments in favour of a Chomskyan minimalist account of code-switching relying exclusively on mechanisms already required by the grammar of monolingual sentences.

There is a practical reason why I cannot make use of MacSwan's account in this study. In accordance with minimalism, MacSwan assumes that surface-structure differences observable between languages result from language-specific features encoded in the lexicon. Thus, the lexicon becomes the main source of language variation. But, absent an extended description of the lexicons of English and French, I cannot fruitfully exploit MacSwan's insights as yet. That is why I will now have a look at two 'third-grammar' principles that were presented by Poplack and Sankoff in the early eighties. Though these constraints are not 100% empirically adequate, they certainly reflect pervasive tendencies, especially the second one.

The two principles I will briefly discuss are the 'Equivalence Constraint' and the 'Free Morpheme Constraint'. The first states that "switched sentences are made up of concatenated fragments of alternating languages, each of which is grammatical in the language of its provenance [...]. The boundary between adjacent fragments occurs between two constituents that are ordered in the same way in both languages [...]" (Poplack 2001). The second can be formulated as: "a switch may occur at any point in the discourse at which it is possible to make a surface constituent cut and still retain a free morpheme" (MacSwan 2000: 38).

In a mini-corpus of (written) non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations that I have compiled, I have noted no violation of the Equivalence Constraint: the onsets of non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations occur only at points where the phrase structures of each language are identical, where there are no conflicts of word order.⁴ Thus, my mini-corpus exhibits no examples like:

?? I wonder who he is going out *avec*. [in French, prepositions (= *with*) are never *postposed*]

?? This is probably *bien trop pénible* a treatment, especially for a child. [in French, the adjective phrase (= *much too painful*) in this construction must come after Det + N]

?? The Website must *gegangen sein* online in 1970. [in German, the non-finite part of the VP (= *have gone*) must come at the end of the clause]

?? The Website must online in 1970 *gegangen sein*. [In English, the non-finite part of the VP cannot come at the end of the clause if the clause contains other constituents]

In each of these made-up examples, a quotational switch takes place within a constituent that has different word-order requirements in each language.

As for the Free Morpheme Constraint, I have not found any infringements upon it either. The more ‘radical’ examples that come up in my corpus never go so far as to exhibit switches at bound-morpheme boundaries, witness this rather unusual sentence from a novel by Julian Barnes:

(6) You recall that I was *un peu* hyper about the wallpaper?

However peculiar, the sentence does not violate the principle. Note, in passing, that it is hard to tell whether (6) is a non-recruited cross-linguistic quotation or an instance of code-switching, which suggests that there may be no well-defined boundary between the two phenomena.

Of course, these findings are at best indicative, given the partial empirical inadequacy of the constraints. But they point in the right direction, as (i) they suggest it is wrong to assume that ‘anything goes’ in the realm of non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations; (ii) there is no evidence, so far, against the assumption of a large degree of overlap between the switching positions available for code-switching and those allowed for quotational switches.

4.2. Descriptive approaches

Since explanatory principles are still very much under discussion and theory-dependent, it is certainly practical to supplement them with existing descriptions of the grammar of code-switching. MacSwan (1997: 68) provides a useful recap of the “basic findings in code-switching corpora”. The comparison between MacSwan’s list of various acceptable positions and the data in my mini-corpus of non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations is informative, though not conclusive. Even in my tiny corpus, there are several cases of quotations beginning at boundaries not recorded in MacSwan’s table. Here are a few examples of matches and then mismatches between the table and my own data. (In the notation used below, “+” indicates a code-switch or the onset of a quotation):

⁴ I cannot comment on a significant asymmetry between code-switching and non-recruited quotations, namely the fact that every code-switch is an ‘onset’, i.e. the beginning of a shifted sequence, whereas for quotations a distinction should probably be made between an onset and an offset (i.e. a return to the embedding utterance).

My corpus: [...] alliances with the disparate factions of the “gauche plurielle”.

MacSwan: article + NP

My corpus: Foucault writes that “le vrai sens historique reconnaît que nous vivons [...]”.

MacSwan: conjunction + Complementizer Phrase

My corpus: Each tablet would commemorate Monsieur Un Tel, *lâchement assassiné par les Allemands*, or *tué*, or *fusillé*, [...]

MacSwan: [no mention of appositives]

My corpus: She followed me out to the car, screeching like a crow. [...]. Top of her voice, accusations of, as they say, a personal and professional nature, *mit* everyone looking. (Barnes 1992: 271; this English-German example because I found no typographically marked examples with French *avec*, which therefore seems to have become a (rare) English preposition)

MacSwan: [no mention of shifts on either side of a preposition]

My corpus: [...] the Irishman liking to turn a small bit of food around in his mouth “de la même façon qu’il retenait les mots, pour en méditer le goût”. (TLS, 03/05/02: 11)

MacSwan: [no mention of shifts at the boundary between a VP and an adjunct-PP]

Interestingly, though the last three examples have no counterparts in MacSwan’s table, they comply with the two principles briefly reviewed above (and with others found in the literature). This suggests that the table, though helpful, is incomplete. Note in passing that some examples found in Bailey & Zapata (1993) bear out this impression:

Bailey & Zapata: No traffic problems, yet, ahh, traffic is moving steady *sobre* Four-Ten, ah-*entre el* airport *a* Perrin Beitel.

Bailey & Zapata: Don’t forget, coming up *a las siete-diez*, more on the mystery song of the morning.

To conclude this section, I wish to point out some real difficulties raised by the examples above. First, descriptions of valid switching positions are only meaningful with respect to pairs of languages. Indeed, depending on one’s theory of grammar, those positions are constrained by the language-specific features encoded in the lexicon of each language or by the specific syntax of each language. The descriptive approach sketched here could only be fruitful if I could draw on empirical studies of English/French code-switching. I have not so far found any that dealt with the grammar of English/French code-switching, although several deal with its sociolinguistic aspects. Second, the question arises if all of my examples of non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations are what they are made out to be. In particular, cross-language scare quoting can often pass for either code-switching or simple lexical borrowing, witness (6) and the *mit* example. Though a serious question that needs to be settled, this does not basically affect the point I am trying to make. Rather the opposite, in fact. In the case of code-switching too, there is a fuzzy boundary with lexical borrowing, and there has been a long-standing debate in language-contact literature as to whether a sharp distinction could be drawn between these two phenomena. Therefore, examples like (6) certainly do not deepen the gap between code-switching and non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations.

5. Temporary conclusions

This research is still very much a work in progress. However, I hope soon to lay hands on descriptive studies of the grammar of English/French code-switching, and to extend my corpus of cross-linguistic quotations, both of which developments should significantly buttress (or weaken) my claims. In any case, this research has this merit at least that it brings the much neglected cross-linguistic quotations under the attention of language-contact specialists. Here are several reasons why it is risky to disregard them altogether in this field of research: (i) if there is a continuum between several language-contact phenomena (code-switching and borrowing, notably), then the pursuit of comprehensiveness requires that a place be allotted to cross-linguistic quotations on that continuum; (ii) if the ‘grammar of cross-linguistic quotations’ (if such a thing exists) turns out to be similar to/the same as that of code-switching, then both forms of language use are probably underlain by one and the same linguistic competence, the description of which therefore requires that allowances be made for quotation; (iii) although I have stated a series of typical differences between the two phenomena, I was also able to show that only the ‘mentioning dimension’ proved to be a discriminating factor. But, in turn, I suggested that mention only affects the pragmatic level of content. If that suggestion is correct, then code-switches and non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations are likely to be semantically equivalent, and can also prove to be syntactically equivalent (though that, for course, remains an empirical question).

I am aware that all of the above are still conjectures. But the analogies between code-switching and non-recruited cross-linguistic quotations are too numerous to be dismissed out of hand. It is important for linguists to gain a better understanding of the latter phenomenon, in order eventually to be in a position to adopt or reject – as the case may be – the hypotheses put forward in this paper.

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