A Universal Explanation for Code-blending and Code-switching (Presentation in English)

Statement

Code-blending and code-switching data from native deaf signers and child language acquirers of HKSL and Cantonese show that these processes share the same underlying linguistic constraints as exemplified in the code-switching of spoken languages, namely functional heads determine the head-complement order. Based on the data, we argue for a universal explanation for code-switching and code-blending based on the Null Theory originally adopted to account for code-switching in spoken languages.

Abstract

Code-blending, the simultaneous articulation of sign and speech, is not restricted to hearing sign bilinguals such as CODAs. Deaf bilinguals, including both adults (Fung 2010, 2012) and children (van den Bogaerde 2000; Fung 2012), also code-blend and this is independent of whether or not they have achieved a native-like competence in a spoken language. In this project, instead of using data generated from CODAs, as reported in previous studies (c.f. van den Bogaerde and Baker 2005; Emmorey et al. 2008; Donati and Branchini 2009; Lillo-Martin et al. 2010), we examine code-blending between Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL) and Cantonese in deaf bilinguals. The data came from (i) a longitudinal study involving interactions between a deaf child acquiring HKSL and native deaf adults; and (ii) spontaneous conversations between native deaf signers.

In spoken language research, proponents of the Null Theory argued that code-switching of bilinguals should observe the same set of linguistic constraints as monolinguals (Mahootian 1993; MacSwan 1997, 2000; Chan 2003, 2008). They found that the language of the functional head determines the head-complement order of a code-switched phrase. Assuming that unimodal and bimodal bilinguals do not differ in their abstract architecture of language, we want to testify whether the Null Theory is applicable to code-blending between HKSL and Cantonese. To examine whether head-directionality interacts with code-blending, we focus on the TP and NegP of HKSL and Cantonese because HKSL has head-final TP and NegP while the Cantonese TP and NegP are head-initial. Similar to spoken languages, the head-complement order of a code-switched or code-blended phrase in HKSL and Cantonese is consistently determined by the functional heads, as shown in (1) and (2) below. When the head is not code-blended, the language of the functional head determines the head-complement order. In (1), the non-blended head (i.e. auxiliary *jau5* 'have') is from Cantonese while the blended element, the VP, follows the T. The T-Comp order results because Cantonese TP is head-initial. In (2), the negative auxiliary *NOT-HAVE* 'not have' in HKSL is head-final and hence its code-blended complement, the NP, is on its left. This Comp-Neg order follows the HKSL grammar. These two patterns conform to our predictions that the head determines the complement order in code-switching as well as code-blending, as part and parcel of the Null Theory.

The only difference between unimodal and cross-modal language mixing is that when the functional heads are code-blended, the complement order may follow that of either language. In (3), the Cantonese modal *ho2ji5* 'can' and the HKSL modal *CAN* 'can' are blended. This TP adopts a T-Comp (i.e. Cantonese) order, presumably determined by Cantonese *ho2ji5*. On the other hand, in (4), a Comp-Neg order results when the HKSL negator *NOT* 'not' is blended with Cantonese *m4-hai6* 'NEG.be'. In this example, this Comp-Neg order follows HKSL grammar.

To examine whether the Null Theory can account for code-blending in child language development, we also analyze the longitudinal data of a deaf child. Due to cross-linguistic influence during bilingual development, the child data reveal violations of the code-blending constraints. Example (5) shows that the HKSL modal *CAN* 'can' precedes its blended complement, violating the HKSL grammar, hence the code-blending constraints. These violations accord with the findings of code-switching acquisition studies in spoken languages. During the stages of language acquisition, different factors might arise and affect early mixing (c.f. Cantone 2005, 2007). We argue that language dominance might be one such factor affecting head-directionalities of code-blending in sign bilingual child development.

Examples

(1) T-Comp order with Cantonese T

		T	Comp		
Can:	… ,	*jau5*[@nv]	gin3[@nv] dou3[@nv]	faa1[@nv]	.
		have	see/look ASP	flower	
HKSL:	…,		SEE_b	FLOWER-2 IX_{obj}:pic_b	.
			SEE.SP	flower that	

'(She) has saw flowers over there.' (CC 5;0.8, HKSL-*Cantonese*)

(2) Comp-Neg order with HKSL Neg

		Comp		Neg	
Can:		lou5si1[@nv]	naam4[@nv]		, …
		teacher	male		
HKSL:	ges:attn ,	TEACHER	MALE	NOT-HAVE	, …
	hey	teacher	male	not have	

'Hey, there is no male teacher. (Let me go there to teach.)'

(Signer B, HKSL-Cantonese)

(3) T-Comp order with blended T

		T	Comp	
Can:	zi6gei2[@nv]	ho2ji5[@nv]	waak6waa2[@nv]	.
	self	can	draw	
HKSL:	SELF	CAN	DRAW	.
	self	can	draw	

'(I) can do drawing by myself.' (CC 6;0.28, HKSL-Cantonese)

(4) Comp-Neg order with blended Neg

		Comp	Neg	
Can:	… ,	sung3[@nv]	m4-hai6[@nv]	.
		give(as a gift)	NEG.be	
HKSL:	… ,	GIVE	NOT	.
		give	not	

'… (Mr. Sam) did not give (it) as a gift.' (CC 6;6.26, HKSL-Cantonese)

(5) T-Comp order with HKSL T

		T	Comp			
Can:		tai2[@nv] haa3[@nv]		,	tai2[@nv] haa3[@nv]	.
		see ASP			see ASP	
HKSL:	CAN	&SEE		,	SEE	.
	can	see			see	

'May I take a look?' (CC 5;0.8, HKSL-Cantonese)

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