Chicano English Code-Switching

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What is code-switching?

- “Code-switching is the alternating use of two languages at the word, phrase, clause, or sentence level.” (McKay and Wong 1988: 125)
- Either single words can be replaced or even whole phrases or sentences
What is code-switching?

• “Code-switching is the use of words and structures from more than one language or linguistic variety by the same speaker within the same speech situation, conversation or utterance.” (Callahan 2004: 5)

→ Refers to individual speakers in specific situations
Who does code-switching?

• Bilingual people

→ They have to be highly proficient in both languages to be able to do code-switching

• Some critics: low proficiency in one language may also cause code-switching
Reasons for code-switching

• Sometimes code-switchers are not even aware of doing so → it happens unconsciously
• More suitable in specific situations
  – In jokes/songs:
    “You are trying to act cool, but you should know
    You are so cool that I am calling you culo.”
  – In speeches:
    “Si se puede.” (Slogan Obama → strategy to indicate solidarity or support for Latino voters)
Reasons for code-switching

• May function as a strategy where proficiency is missing
  – Not familiar with a particular topic in one language, e.g. school subjects (mathematical terms, etc.), sports (because learned in a different country), etc.
Code-switching vs. borrowings

• Borrowings: elements of one language are adopted into another language system
  → Yiddish: *bagel*, *Hanukkah*
  Italian: *cappuccino*, *piano*

• Difference to code-switching: elements of one language are used in their original form in another language
  → Bilingualism is **not** required for borrowings; everybody could use these words
Code-switching vs. borrowings

- Examples

  Estábamos *jenguiando* allí en la esquina.
  (We were hanging out there at the corner.)

  No tengo tiempo ni para estar *hanging out* con los amigos.
  (I don’t even have time to be hanging around with friends.)

  ➔ Which one is code-switching and which one is borrowing?
References

