

RUSSIAN-ESTONIAN CONVERSATIONAL CODE-SWITCHING IN STUDENT INTERVIEWS*

Zabrodskaia Anastassia, Tallinn University

Aims and methodology of the study

This study defines code-switching as any mixing of two languages within a single conversation: a continuum of phenomena from code-alternation (intentional switching of languages) to mixed code (languages blended together). I have chosen to narrow the approach and focus on a qualitative analysis of individual code-switching patterns. The general aim of this research is to study the code-switching functions of Russian-speaking Tallinn University students living in the Estonian capital city of Tallinn.

Since I taught them courses on *Introduction to Linguistics* and conducted seminars, I had a number of advantages in my fieldwork. As a teacher, I had access to the casual speech behaviour of the students. Twice I recorded the whole seminar. In my case, the informants – students – were selected on the basis of membership in some kind of social network. The University setting has been chosen as the main source of data collection. Studying and living in the dormitory together, they know each other well. This increased the likelihood of informal speech and free behaviour during the recording.

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The languages involved are Estonian, the single official language as the language of the majority group; and Russian, the largest minority language, as the language of the minority group here.

Informants and data collection

In this section I present a brief outline of the informants' sociolinguistic profile, followed by a description of the interview setting.

Table 1. Participants in the study

Participant / Place of birth	Age	Gen- der	Specia- lity	Mother tongue	Home langua- ge	Language choice		
						at univer- sity	with friends	at work
1 / Tallinn	23	F	Russian as foreign language	R	R	R, Est, Eng	R, Est	R, Est, Eng, F, G
2 / Tallinn	19	F		R	R	R	R, Est	–
3 / Narva	19	F		R	R	R, Est	R	Est
4 / Narva	19	F		R	R	R, Est	R	R, Est, Eng, G
5 / Rakvere	19	F		R, Est	R, Est	Est, R	Est, R	Est, R
6 / Narva	21	M		R	R	R, Est, Eng, G	R	Est, R, Eng, G
7 / Tallinn	18	F		R	R	R, Est, Eng	R	Est
8 / Sillamäe	21	F		R	R	Est, R, Eng	Eng, R, Est	Eng, R, Est
9 / Maardu	18	F		R	R	Est, R	R	–
10 / Narva	20	F		R	R	Est, R, Eng	R	R, Est, Eng, F
11 / Kuressaare	20	F		R, Est	R, Est	R, Est, Eng	Est, R	Est, R
12 / Tallinn	19	M	Russian philology	R	R	R, Est	R	R, Est
13 / Tallinn	19	M		R	R	R, Est, Eng	R, Est	R, Est
14 / Kohtla- Järve	23	M		R	R	R, Est, Eng	R, Eng	R, Eng
15 / Tallinn	19	F		R	R	R, Est	R	–
16 / Sillamäe	19	F		R	R	R, Est	R, Est	R, Est, Eng
17 / Tallinn	22	F		R	R	R, Est	R	–
18 / Tallinn	19	M	French philology	R	R, Eng	Est, F, Eng, R	R	R, Est

I collected the students' personal data (birthplace, date of birth, occupation, Russian and Estonian language choice patterns, etc). Table 1 gives some information on the students. The abbreviations of languages used there are as follows: Russian – R, Estonian – Est, English – Eng, German – G, Finnish – F.

There are 18 informants. The division by sex is unbalanced among the student group because there are not enough men among philologists. The average age is 19.8. Table 1 also shows the major subject of the students: 10 females and 2 males study Russian as a foreign language, 3 females and 2 males study Russian philology and 1 male studies French philology.

There are 17 respondents who declare that they speak Estonian at university and, at the same time, only 7 have friends among Estonians and communicate with them in Estonian. So students use the Estonian language in the university environment and mostly Russian in casual speech. The difference in numbers is obvious. There is a connection between language choice in everyday life and the students' birth places: 3 from Tallinn, 2 from Sillamäe, 1 from Rakvere and 1 from Kuressaare speak Estonian with friends. In addition, two females from Rakvere and Kuressaare claim that Estonian is one of their mother tongues and home languages. The students are born in different language environments. These are the predominantly Russian-speaking North-East (the towns Kohtla-Järve, Narva, Sillamäe), the mainly Estonian-speaking Western, Central and Southern Estonia (towns Rakvere, Kuressaare), and the capital Tallinn, where the size of the two speech communities is approximately equal (Statistikaamet 2001). As a result, the students are not similar, as far as their usage of Estonian in daily life is concerned.

Another interesting difference appears in language choice at work: out of 14 working students, 13 use Estonian and only 1 does not. In addition, 7 speak English, 3 German and 2 Finnish. This fact characterizes Tallinn as a multilingual town, where the Estonian language is needed in places of public service and shows that Estonian is highly used.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the surrounding sociolinguistic environment influences the language choice. These students are typical examples of bilinguals, who use one language at home and another at work (or at university). In Sarah Thomason's (2001: 136–139) terms this phenomenon is called *code alternation*.

During the interviews the informants were asked to speak about their childhood, hobbies, families, family life, friends, and work; the reasons for choosing their future professions and their first impressions in Tallinn Uni-

versity. Interviews were mostly individual; however, in order not to rule out possible participant-related switches, student groups (5–7 persons at once) were interviewed during one session as well. Before the interviews the informants were told that the choice of the language of the conversation is free (Estonian, Russian or both).

The total number of recorded hours of conversation was 20. Episodes in which informants were intensely engaged in conversation on certain issues (and thus much less aware of the recorder) and where they used code-switching often, were given priority and transcribed. This is why the final number of audible and workable hours of recordings was 10. In addition to the reason mentioned above, this was also caused by attempts to avoid background noise. As most researchers are aware, the exclusion of some data is controversial, since the decision of what to transcribe can affect the final analysis. But, to my mind, it is unavoidable that the parts selected for transcription are arbitrary.

Analyzing the data

The corpus consists of recorded data from 18 students: 5 young men and 13 young women. Since the study focuses on the pragmatic-functional model of code-switching, longer stretches of talk were transcribed. To ensure the anonymity of the informants, their personalities are coded. Thus, the abbreviation 1987N/F/T/RR shows that we deal with a female student (F) who was born in 1987 in Narva (N), and currently lives in Tallinn (T), both her mother tongue (R) and home language (R) are Russian.

Pragmatic-conversational model of code-switching

A fundamental starting point for conversation analysis is that no feature of talk can be regarded as irrelevant, because every speech event contains a structure rather than being accidental. Auer (1984) has used the theoretical approach of conversation analysis to further develop Gumperz' (1982) interactional perspectives on code-switching in conversation. His continuum model is based on conversational analysis of code-switching (Auer 1999). For Auer, code-switching is first and foremost a conversational event and it is mainly guided by discourse factors. The starting point of the model is that even bilingual speakers have a preference for one language inter-

action until certain circumstances force them to use another language. In earlier versions of the model Auer (1984) distinguishes between two main types of language alternation: *code-switching* and *transfer* (which has later been called *insertion*). *Transfer* refers to the alternation of a unit of speech “with a structurally provided point of return into the first language” (Auer 1984: 26), whereas *code-switching* entails alternation at locations in the unfolding exchange that do not allow for projection of the point of return to the language of previous talk. Both alternations are further divided into *discourse-related* and *participant-related alternations*. The former term focuses on instances of code alternation that “cue” the unfolding interaction, while the latter refers to alternation that pertains to language preferences by participants (speakers or recipients). In Auer’s publications in 1995 and 1998, participant-related alternation is renamed *preference-related*. In Auer’s terms, *insertion* means intrasentential switching or a switch which takes place within a sentence or, rather, within a clause. In Muysken’s (2000: 3–10) terminology, *insertion* is a term for using lexical items or entire constituents from one language in another.

The most frequent functions of Russian-Estonian code-switching

Auer (1984, 1998) argues that there is always a preference for one language of interaction even in bilingual settings and that this preference is maintained until other conditions exert pressures and change the language of interaction. Auer (1995: 121) also gives a list of the typical conversational functions of code-switching: (1) reported speech, (2) change of participant constellation, (3) parentheses or side-comments, (4) reiteration, (5) change of activity type, (6) topic shift, (7) puns, language play, shift of ‘key’ and (8) topicalisation, topic/comment structure.

In what follows I will give an overview of the different types of Russian-Estonian code-switching found in the data. The immediate impression that arises from analyzing the bilingual practices of the Russian-speaking informants is that most code-switchings are of intrasentential type, i.e. they take place within a sentence or rather within a clause. In the case of insertional code-switching, Russian is the matrix language and Estonian is the embedded language. Both types are equally presented in the data.

In the next sections I will review the different types of code-switching found among the Russian-speaking conversationalists recorded. The main reason for this is to offer a general picture of their bilingual practices.

Reported speech

Reported speech is a phenomenon that has been widely reported in code-switching studies. A situation in which a speaker repeats another person's words at a latter time is generally referred to as „reported speech”.

Mark Sebba and Tony Wootton (1998: 273) link code-switching more directly to questions of identities, or „personae”. Personation is, as Sebba (1993: 131) puts it, „creating or evoking a character by the use of a particular style embedded in talk in another style”. The evocation of a persona is to some extent dependent on the existence of shared stereotypes among the speakers. As a speaker switches from animating one person to animating another, the effect at the linguistic level for a bilingual speaker may be a code-switch. For a monolingual speaker, it may mean a shift of style within what is perceived to be the same language. Tannen (1982) defines the same phenomena labeled *persona* by Sebba (1993) as *voice*, and animation of voices.

My data show that speakers animate a *persona* for narrative purposes. Consider the following example (1). After the first part of the lecture the lecturer says twice that the break will be 20 minutes long. One of the students was speaking on a mobile phone and had not paid attention to the information. He asks another student who answers rather emotionally (Russian in italics and Estonian in bold italics):

- (1) 1985N/M/T/RR: *Tebe že skazali, čto vaheaeg on kakskümmend minutit.*
‘You have just been told that the break is twenty minutes.’

The student is not only simply answering the question but also animating the teacher's voice: Estonian words sound stricter and more official than the Russian beginning of the sentence. The speaker's tone rises and the whole Estonian phrase is pronounced very clearly and smoothly. An explanation for code-switching is that the student repeats the instructor's words and wants to be more authoritative. Another reason could be a matter of expressivity: he was nervous that the co-student had not listened properly and was asking him to repeat.

The next example (2) illustrates an imitation, realized through Estonian-Russian code-switching and changing the quality of voice through speech-style shifting: the student is animating her mother. In a group of seven students present, the interviewer (I) is talking to one of them (1983T/F/T/RR). The Estonian part of the transcription is in standard typeface and Russian part is given in *italics*.

- (2) I: Mis on sinu jaoks õppimine? ‘What does learning mean to you?’

1983T/F/T/RR: *Õppimine on uute teadmiste saamine, silmaringi laienemine. Minu ema ütleb, et õppimine – eto realizacija v dal'neishem svoih celei, vozmozhnostei.*

'Learning is getting new knowledge, the enlargement of horizon. My mother says that learning *is the realization of your own aims and possibilities in the future.*'

The answer uttered by the student contains no pauses. From her comment (*minu ema ütleb* 'my mother says'), we can see that the girl is initially referring to her mother's words, first in Estonian (*et õppimine* 'that learning') and then in Russian (*et realizecija v dal'neishem svoih celei, vozmozhnostei* 'is realization of your own aims and possibilities in the future'), giving the interviewer the answer to her question. The answer in Russian may reflect its serious nature. Here code-switching is we-code: it is informal and intimate. The speaker emphasises familiarity with co-students within an in-group.

In the case of Russian/Estonian, we have seen that the distinction between direct and indirect speech is distinguished in spoken language. It has been shown that the reported speech repeats the exact wording of its original occurrence. The linguistic means of changing footing by imitating or impersonating somebody is realized by voice style variation in combination with switching the code.

Topic shift

Switching caused by a change of a topic occurs quite often in the data. Example 3 is a good example. The main topic is payment for the dormitory. Then, after a pause, a new topic is introduced in Estonian.

(3) I: *I skolko vy platite za obshsezhitiye?* 'How much do you pay for the dormitory [per month]?'

1988N/F/T/RR: *Chetyresta.* 'Four hundred.'

1984T/M/T/RR: *Ne mnogo.* 'Not much.'

1988N/F/T/RR: *Mozhet dlja tebja i malo.* 'Maybe it is a few for you.'

1984T/M/T/RR laughs.

1988N/F/T/RR: *Chego smejoshsja?* 'Why are you laughing at?'
silence.

1988T/F/T/RR: *Mis oli homseks seminariks teha?* 'What do we have to do for tomorrow's seminar?'

Somebody begins explaining in Estonian.

As we see, student 1988T/F/T/RR changes the topic consciously because of the inappropriate laughter of the male student. It is important that seminars are always held in Estonian. Thus, their connection with the Estonian language choice is obvious. All the participants present are well aware that their co-student behaves unethically. After a pause, 1988T/F/T/RR switches the codes, “making a suggestion” to change the topic. Code-switching rather functions as a vehicle to ease tension in the conversation.

Another example (4) is very telling, as it shows how much the language choice is connected to the university domain.

(4) I: *Pochemu ty vybral imenno etu special'nost'?* ‘Why have you chosen this speciality [Russian as a foreign language – A. Z.]?’

1984T/M/T/RR: *Hochu byt' perevodchikom.* ‘I want to be an interpreter.’ *Tol'ko mne istorija ne nravitsja.* ‘Only that I don’t like history.’

I: *Pochemy?* ‘Why?’

1984T/M/T/RR: *V škole tože ne ljubil. A v ülikool opjat ona.* ‘I didn’t like it at school either. At university it is the same.’

I: *I kak?* ‘And how is it going?’

1984T/M/T/RR: *Terplju. Teoreetiliste teadmiste omandamine vazhno tozhe.* ‘I am tolerating it. Acquisition of theoretical knowledge is important, too.’

As for the language-choice patterns found in the example (4), the speaker sticks to the individually preferred language in the specific setting. Only when the degree of university involvement arises in the conversation, Russian-Estonian code-switching is used to differentiate the topics of the discussion.

The general picture we get from the examples (3) and (4) above indicates that code-switching is also used for distinguishing a topic. The speakers may feel that the original terms in the embedded language are more suitable, for example, in the case of conversation (4). Another example (3) contains Russian-Estonian code-switching when one of the interlocutors would like to put an end to the conversation.

Expressivity

Expressive function is present in the data to a great extent. Russian-speaking students emphasize their emotions through their alternation between the two languages. The interviewer asks about the coming exam in the subject she taught.

(5) I: *Kas olete juba valmis?* 'Are you already ready [for the exam – A. Z.]?'

1987N/F/T/RR: *Oi, mne tak hirmus.* 'Oh, I am so scared.'

In this stretch of conversation, the interviewer wants to know whether students are ready to do it next week. The student 1987N/F/T/RR uses an unexpected language and answers in Russian, which corresponds to her preferred language.

The instances of code-switching by the interlocutors in example (6) are discourse-related as well as participant-related. The students are sitting and reading newspapers or magazines. They are waiting for the seminar to begin. The teacher comes in and asks her question in Estonian:

(6) I: *Mida loete?* 'What are you reading?'

1986T/F/T/RR: *Postimees, Cosmopolitan, Stiina.* 'Postimees, Cosmopolitan, Stiina.'

1984/M/T/RR: *Praegu või?* 'Just now?' [astonished]

1986T/F/T/RR: *Chto praegu?* 'What is now?'

1984T/M/T/RR: *Seichas vse tri chitaesh?* 'Are you reading three [magazines/newspapers] now?'

1986T/F/T/RR: *Da.* 'Yes.'

Student 1986T/F/T/RR names two Estonian papers (one is a newspaper, the other is a magazine). Probably student 1984T/M/T/RR is astonished that his co-student is reading three papers at the same time. The question produced by him is in the Estonian language, and therefore discourse-related. The next switch by 1986T/F/T/RR is an echoing of the partner's previous turn, and is participant-related and marked choice in Estonian. 1984T/M/T/RR makes a repeated comment in Russian. His effort seems to work, as 1986T/F/T/RR answers the question.

Conclusions

The application of the sequential type of analysis developed by Auer (1984, 1995) has been shown to be useful in revealing how Russian-Estonian bilingual students from Tallinn employ code-switching to structure their discourse.

This is a qualitative study on code-switching based on participant observation, self-report of language use and recordings of informal conversations. The data is analysed from the conversational analysis point of view. The main findings are summarized in the following. Code-switching is quite a frequent and natural part of the students' speech. However, the status of Estonian as the designated language of instruction at Tallinn University is very salient, a fact which led to increasing code-switching in spontaneous speech data. Most switches are intrasentential (intraclausal).

Code-switching is a functional discursive resource which participants make use of to pursue interactionally motivated actions. In the analysis we have seen instances of Russian- or Estonian-speaking people being imitated. The Estonian language seems to be associated with official situations, while Russian is more intimate and close. Bilingual students do not code switch solely because of certain values attached to the particular languages involved. They code-switch because the alternation itself signals to the co-interactants how they want their utterances to be interpreted on that particular occasion. Russian-Estonian code-switching can be used as a device for changing the topic, animating reported speech and expressive reasons. The results show that reported speech is combined with code-switching to create contrast or emphasis.

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