

College Students' Attitude toward "Chinese+English" Code Mixing

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Abstract: Code-mixing is a natural phenomenon in multilingual and bilingual communities. As a result of language contact in China, code mixing is on the rise. This paper is devoted to exploring the attitude of contemporary college students towards the linguistic phenomenon of code mixing of Chinese and English. Through online survey and data analysis, this paper finds that the need to speak expressively, to bring forth humorous effect and use euphemism to avoid awkward situation are the first three factors accounting for code-mixing. As speakers, they tend to use code mixing of Chinese-English in informal situations with more intimate people; as listeners, they hope such expressions can make humor and make the topic easy. In terms of usage, they are more willing to accept English expressions to avoid some disadvantages. Most of them are remaining neutral on supporting or opposing the code mixing of Chinese and English.

Keywords: Code-mixing; Code switching; Language attitude

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1 Introduction

Code, as a sociolinguistic term, refers to any symbolic system that people use for communication. It can be a language, a dialect or a variety^[1]. The practice of shifting from one language to another is considered to be code switching, which is getting more and more common in many multilingual or bilingual societies nowadays. These common phenomena have aroused great interests from academic research, but most of their

studies are focalized around its linguistic feature and social function, the issue of listeners' attitude toward code-switching is limitedly discussed. To further this question, we conduct an empirical study to investigate college students' attitude toward code-mixing.

2 Code Mixing

2.1 Definition

Code is "a term which is used instead of language, speech variety or dialect^[2], anyone who speaks more than one language chooses between them according to circumstances^[3,4], the alternative use by bilinguals between one or more languages or dialects concurrently is called code switching. In code-switching, language change usually corresponds to situation change, however, when the speakers communicating with each other are fluent bilinguals, they might shift to another languages without any other changes in the situation^[3]. This kind of concurrent switching within the same sentence is called code-mixing, which is viewed by some researchers as intra-sentential code-switching.

Many scholars hold different views about code-switching and code mixing. Some argue that code-switching has no significant difference from code-mixing, while others hold the opposite view. Pfaff (1979)^[5] use the term mixing to cover both code-switching and borrowing, while Verschauer (1999:119)^[6] use "code-switching" to include both "inter-sentential code-switching" and "intra-sentential code-switching". Singh (1985)^[7] use the term code-mixing for intra-sentential switching and code-switching for diglossic situations, Muysken (2000)^[8] uses the term code-mixing for the combination of lexical items and grammatical features of two distinct languages in one sentence, while the term code-switching for the occurrence of

two languages in a single interaction. We agree with Muysken in that L1-L2/L2-L1 switching differs a lot from L2+L1 switching, namely, code-mixing.

In China, with the promotion of English education, language contact is inevitable, the mixed use of two languages between English and Chinese in the same sentence is of a common practice.

2.2 Status Quo

The term switching was first proposed by Hawken in 1953, which aroused great concern from many researchers, who employed different approaches to deal with code-switching. Among them, the most prevailing are linguistic and sociolinguistic approaches.

The sociolinguistic approach focuses on social functions, effects and motivation of/for code-switching. Gumperz^[9] is one of the representative scholars who divide the code combination into two categories according to different functions: situational code mixing and metaphorical code mixing. Situational code-mixing means that the communicator adapts to the change of the situation by changing the code. The mixed-use code means that the communicator expresses a certain communicative intention^[9]; The linguistic approach mainly focuses on the the internal constraints and structural characteristics of language in the 1970s and shifted to characterizing the morph syntactic constraints on intra-sentential switching in 1980s; Other approaches from the perspective of pragmatic, psycholinguistic and functional linguistics are also applied in this field^[10-12].

Switching is natural and inevitable in multilingual, bilingual communities. It occurs either deliberately or randomly and the choice of code by the speakers can be conscious or unconscious as long as language contact exists. Crystal^[13] noticed that when speakers had trouble in expressing themselves adequately in one language, they would switch to the other to make good the deficiency. The switch between languages can signal the speaker's attitude towards the listener, if two bilinguals normally talk to each other in one language, the choice of another language is bound to create a special effect.

In the past, the public have given code switching mixed reviews. Some code is reviewed as high context, while some are reviewed as low, some are labeled noble, and some rustic. One prevailing view in the past holds that the speakers who switch code in communication are often "deficient, and bastardization blend", they are forced to switch code due to the limited ability of the languages in command. Code switching and code mixing are played down as illegal communicative

pattern. Gumperz^[9] challenged that view by pointing out that only a few speakers in code-switching have language problems in expressing themselves. In most cases, the words with two codes can be perfectly expressed in one single language. Some speakers in code-switching are well educated, the labels like low IQ, illogic and poor wording are in hot air. Some people worry about language purity and cultural collapse, and some viewed various bilingual practices as their overt feature representing their community identity.

The history showed us that language develops and changes with the development of the society. In China, with the advancement of society and English education, the number of bilinguals of L1 Chinese and L2 English is on the rise. College students, as a representative group with a command of two languages, are not only speakers but also listeners in code-switching. Do listeners share the same feeling as speakers? Do L2 level determines the choice of code? These questions remain unanswered yet. To bridge this research gap, we conduct an online survey to find out the answers.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

To find out whether listeners and speakers hold different attitudes toward code switching, three specific questions are listed below.

- (1) What makes college students switch code in communication?
- (2) What is college students' attitude toward code-mixing as a speaker?
- (3) What is college students' attitude toward code-mixing as a listener?

3.2 Subject

The subjects of the research were college students from different universities. They are asked to finish the questionnaire online via So Jump. The reason for choosing college students as the subjects in this research is because they are generally well educated and have more or less some mastery of English as a foreign language. They are more likely to be exposed to code-mixing.

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire consists of three types of questions, that is, multiple choice, matrix scale and general scale. The whole survey is conducted online via So Jump. The collected data are analyzed with the help of SPSS 19.0.

4 Data Analysis

The survey is conducted in May 2019. 230 college students from various colleges participated in the online survey. Among them, 227 questionnaires are valid. All the data are analyzed by SPSS 19.0.

4.1 Factors triggering code-mixing

In the questionnaire survey, to speak expressively, bring forth humorous effect and use euphemism to avoid awkward situation are the first three factors accounting for code-mixing. 66.81% prefer to switch code when they are unable to find the right word to express themselves clearly; 66.50% mix Chinese and English to bring forth humorous effect and 66.37% of college students use euphemism in another language to avoid awkward situation, such as taboo, as perfect semantic mapping between different languages is impossible. Another factor is the mentality to keep in fashion and to show off they are superior to others with a good command of two different languages, according to the statistics, 50.66% answers fall into the factor of following the herd, and 43.22% for showing off their superiority.

From the survey, we find that college students consider more of the language's functionality and use in language communication. Researchers generally agree that college students in post-90s generation have rational emotional characteristics, which are also reflected in their attitudes toward language. Some researchers find that compared with the post-80s generation, the post-90s generation are more rational, their expressions are more direct, and they think more highly of the spirit of innovation. According to the characteristics and the use of language, students choose different languages in different contexts in order to achieve satisfactory communicative effects. It is undeniable that under certain circumstances, code mixing of Chinese and English does have irreplaceable functions, such as euphemism and exact meaning, like sexy and some humorous expression, like hold(zhu).

4.2 Language attitudes toward code mixing

First, more than 32% of college students believe that the current mixed use of Chinese and English has become a

common phenomenon in college life, with nearly 27% of students opposing it, and the 38% of them remain neutral.

When asked about how they look at mixing English and Chinese in communication, most students expressed their neutrality. Some of them admit that English has a certain role in promoting Chinese, but they do not want excessive mixed use of Chinese-English, worrying about the Chinese purity. Some people also think that language life has nothing to do with the mindset. They think that language is a communicative tool and a product of social conventions. It does not require people to intervene. There are still some people who are unaware of this change, but are passively influenced, and they have no particular point of view.

On the other hand, it also shows that some students think that the non-standard language mixed with Chinese and English is not a problem worthy of discussion. Nearly 34% of students believe that they have certain obligations and responsibilities in Chinese heritage, and 27% of students believe that English is not conducive to the purity of Chinese. Most students believe that the language they use every day is not related to Chinese language norms. Obviously, a considerable number of students do not have a serious rational understanding of the use of language, and they lack a sense of sociality, responsibility and mission in their heritage of language and culture. One of the implications of this survey for language research cannot be ignored: modern college students' evaluation of their mother tongue needs to be improved, that is, the language use attitude. The survey shows that the reason why students choose to mix Chinese and English is partly because the universities or colleges attach more importance on the command of English language rather than Chinese, as English is a compulsory course in the syllabus and has much to do with their bachelors' degree. To meet the requirements of higher education, many college students make efforts to receive more input and produce more output of English rather than Chinese, thus the mixed use of Chinese and English together in their communication is quite natural(Figure 1).

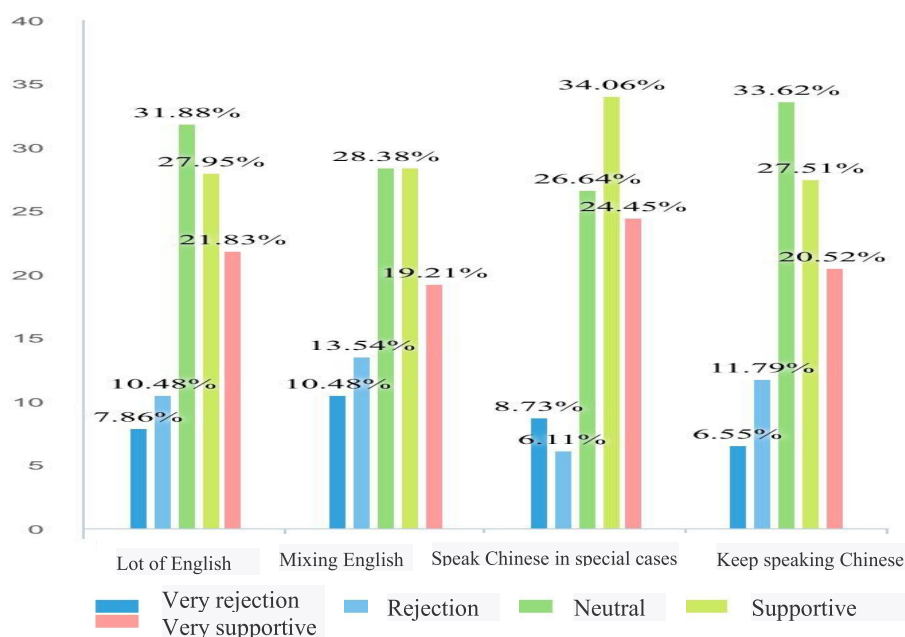


Figure 1. The proportion of different languages

5 Reflections and Conclusions

From the research, we find that not all college students hold positive attitudes toward mixed use of Chinese and English in communication worrying about the losing of traditional Chinese culture. Some Students think that language life has nothing to do with the mindset viewing language as a communicative tool and a product of social conventions.

Theoretically speaking, code-mixing is a natural phenomenon derived from language contact^[14,15]. Language contact is inevitable between nations with different languages as a result of trading, cultural communicating, migrating, and colonialization. There is no language or dialect without any experience of mixing and integrating in the world. But it doesn't mean we have to accept and implant other language and culture. What college students should do is to keep their national culture attractive by learning from the essence in other cultures.

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