The Hows and Whys of "Spanglish"

On the street and at home, multiple activities and channels of information in English and Spanish enveloped the children of el bloque. Radio, TV, telephone, juke box, older and younger siblings, adults’ conversations—all in two languages—crowded in on the children’s activities, talk, and daydreams. As Paca, Isabel, Lolita, Blanca, and Elli added their voices to those of their community, they made choices as active agents constructing their own social identities in ways that simultaneously reflected and resisted their position as members of an ethno-linguistic minority. Of particular significance was their choice of English or Spanish or both languages together, and the ways in which they used them.

All native speakers demonstrate a tacit cultural knowledge of how to speak their language appropriately in different speech situations, in keeping with their community’s “ways of speaking” (Hymes 1974). Whereas monolinguals adjust by switching phonological, grammatical, and discourse features within one linguistic code, bilinguals alternate between the languages in their linguistic repertoire as well. Children in bilingual speech communities acquire two grammars and the rules for communicative competence which prescribe not only when and where each language may be used, but also whether and how the two languages may be woven together in a single utterance.

Uriel Weinreich’s contention that “the ideal bilingual switches from one language to the other according to the appropriate changes in the speech situation (interlocutors, topic, etc.), but not in unchanged speech situations, and certainly not within a single sentence” (Weinreich 1968: 73) has not been borne out as universal. In some bilingual communities each code is restricted to specific settings and/or purposes, as in diglossia (Ferguson 1959), but in others, including immigrant communities in the US like el bloque, codes are switched by the same speaker in the same setting. Gumperz defines a code switch as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems.” (1982: 59). Code switches can occur at the boundary of complete sentences (inter-sententially), as in 1 or within sentence boundaries (intra-sententially), as in 2:

1 Sí, pero le hablo en español.
   (“Yes, but I talk to her in Spanish.”)
   When I don’t know something I’ll talk to her in English.
2 You know they walk que ellas se comen el aisle completo.
   (“in such a way that they take up the whole”) aisle

Code switching is characteristic of many parts of the world where two or more speech communities live in close contact, but often it is misunderstood. Sometimes code switching is confused with the historically recurrent process of word borrowing. For example, English loans like londri (“laundry”), lonchar (“to lunch”), biles (“bills”), el bloque (“the block”) regularly appear in the Spanish of monolinguals in NYC, and they have been adapted phonologically and morpho-syntactically to such an extent that members of the second generation think they belong to the Spanish lexicon (Acosta-Belén 1975; Zenetella 1981b). Because other non-adapted words like “aisle” in 2 above may be on their way to becoming similarly integrated, it is not always easy to distinguish loans from code switches, and some researchers believe “that efforts to distinguish codeswitching, code-mixing and borrowing are doomed” (Eastman 1999b: 1). In this study, popular loans that appear in monolingual speech (like londri, etc., above) are not counted as code switches. In any case, as this chapter makes clear, most of the children’s code switches were not single words.

More serious than confusing code switching with loans is the charge that code switching represents language deterioration and/or the creation of a new language—called Tex-Mex or “Spanglish” in US Latino communities, Japlish, Chinglish, etc. in others. The pejorative connotations of these labels reflect negative evaluations of the linguistic and/or intellectual abilities of those who code switch:

Speakers of the non-defined mixture of Spanish and/or English are judged as “different,” or “sloppy” speakers of Spanish and/or English, and are often labelled verbally deprived, bilingual, or deficient bilinguals because supposedly they do not have the ability to speak either English or Spanish well (Acosta-Belén 1975: 151).

To counteract such charges and the “hate literature campaign being conducted against the Spanish spoken by our New York City Puerto Rican community,” Milán (1982: 202–3) urged that “both the researchers studying contemporary Puerto Rican speech in New York City and the practitioners
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Striving for an equal educational opportunity for the city’s Puerto Rican population make a truly concerted effort to avoid using the term “Spanglish.” He favored “New York City Spanish” as less misleading and more scientifically sound” (ibid). My initial support for Milán’s position was based on similar concerns—and members of el bloque did not use the term anyway—but it has been modified by the recognition that more NYPRs are referring to “Spanglish” as a positive way of identifying their switching. Just as the African American community transformed “Black” into a proud racial designation in the 1960s, members of the second and third generations of NYPRs are rehabilitating “Spanglish,” along with their unembarrassed adoption of “Nuyorican” as an identity label.

This chapter presents quantified evidence that the young have reason to be proud of their ability to switch languages. Their communication in English, or Spanish, or both, responds to complex social and linguistic variables and demonstrates a skill that challenges Weinreich’s definition of an “ideal bilingual.” I begin by presenting a framework that encompasses both language alternation, that is, when a speaker changes languages for a change in addressees or a new turn at speaking, and code switching, a change in languages that occurs within a speaker’s turn with no change in addressee, and then I indicate how language alternation sets the stage for code switching.

Analyzing Language Choices

Repeated observations of various networks in similar situations revealed community patterns of choice in who spoke what to whom, and when to change languages. In the process of acquiring those patterns and adapting them to their reality, children made their own contributions to el bloque’s linguistic and cultural norms. At any given moment numerous factors combined to determine a bilingual’s choice of one language or another, but for the sake of analysis, it was necessary to tease them apart. I found it helpful to separate what could be observed, what must be interpreted as having been in the knowledge of the speaker, and what could be analyzed with precision in their individual utterances.

The “observables” of the interaction in el bloque included the physical setting as well as the linguistic and social identities of the participants, principally speakers and those they were addressing as well as other listeners. The particular location and the people involved existed together outside the specific stretch of time, but the specific mix of the components on the occasion in question, and the language which preceded the moment of choice helped determine the children’s choice of language(s). This part of the interaction is, in a catch phrase, “on the spot.”

In the heads of the speakers is the shared knowledge of how to manage conversations, how to achieve intentions in verbal interaction, and how to show respect for the social values of the community, the status of the interactants, and the symbolic value of the languages. Both choice of language and of switches between languages are made in anticipation of some outcome of each selection. Moreover, speakers not only anticipate an outcome and select among appropriate means for achieving the desired end, they also monitor the responses of the person(s) they are speaking to in relation to the anticipated outcome. They can alter their language choices or vary the style and purpose of the discourse accordingly, and offer a substitute for a previously-made choice. This social and linguistic knowledge is built up over years of participating in interactional activities in their cultural setting. “In the head” factors are not meant to be psychological or cognitive processes, but communicative knowledge not directly observable in each speech situation.

The third set of factors is more linguistic, more anchored in the structure of the languages themselves and in the individual’s knowledge of the languages. I call these, for the purpose of symmetry with the first two categories, what is “out of the mouth,” the rubric for what influences a speaker to produce a particular word or expression in one language or the other, including lexical limitations and syntactic constraints. The analysis of this third category—the grammar of “Spanglish”—is the topic of chapter 6.

The discussion of the on the spot and in the head variables in this chapter combines ethnographic analysis with the quantification of 1,685 code switches produced by the five principal children in 103 hours of tape recordings during the first 18 months of the study. Combining qualitative and quantitative efforts amplified the portrait of el bloque’s code switching and revealed in addition to recurrent group patterns—individual differences in code switching styles that constituted each child’s unique way of being bilingual. The children’s code switching emerges as a complex social, interactive process that stemmed from their multiple relationships in el bloque’s networks, which required multiple re-negotiations of their verbal behavior. There was no mechanistic linking of on the spot, in the head, and out of the mouth variables, but a creative and cooperative meshing with other speakers in ways that simultaneously took into account the communicative demands of the immediate situation and the subordinated position of children in a subordinated community.

On the Spot

The most important on the spot observables that guided children’s language choices were the linguistic proficiency of the person to whom they were speaking (also called “hearer,” “addressee,” or “interlocutor”), and
the language requirements of the setting. The children of el bloque were most responsive to the dominant language of their addressee, in accordance with a general norm that they speak the language that was spoken to them, if possible.

Community norms and language alternation

The role of code switching as an in-group phenomenon has its origin in community expectations regarding the language that children should choose for addressing others. Parents were very clear about their conviction that children should speak the language their addressee could understand best. When asked whether or not there were any times when the children should speak only English or Spanish, parents were nearly unanimous in stressing the presence of monolinguals as the determining factor. Locales were mentioned only as corollaries, that is, some teachers and students at school might be English monolinguals; mothers and other Spanish-monolingual relatives were at home. Activities or topics were never mentioned in relation to either language; any task or discussion could be carried out in either Spanish or English, depending on the language proficiency of participants.

Since most families consisted of caretakers who spoke and understood more Spanish than English and children who spoke and understood more English than Spanish, children changed languages every time they addressed elders in Spanish and siblings in English. Language alternation for a change of addressees such as the following was commonplace:

[Context: Lolita (eight years old) pushes Timmy (five years old) off her bike, and Timmy tells the adults nearby.]

\[
\begin{align*}
L \text{ to } T: & \quad \text{Get off, Timmy, get off.} \\
T \text{ to adults:} & \quad \text{Ella me dio! ("She hit me.")} \\
L \text{ to } T: & \quad \text{¡Porque TU me diste! ("Because YOU hit me!")} \\
T \text{ to } L: & \quad \text{Liar!} \\
Adult \text{ to } L: & \quad \text{¿Por qué – [interrupted by L] ("Why?")} \\
L \text{ to adult:} & \quad \text{Porque él me dio, por eso. ("Because he hit me, that’s why.")} \\
& \quad \text{El siempre me está dando cuando me ve.} \\
& \quad \text{("He’s always hitting me whenever he sees me.")}
\end{align*}
\]

Lolita and Timmy always spoke English to each other and did so in this exchange, except when Lolita addressed him in Spanish for the adult’s benefit: ¡Porque TU me diste! Both she and Tommy had the ability to speak entirely in English or Spanish throughout the incident, but they alternated languages in accordance with the language dominance of those they were addressing. Such alternations were most likely to go from English into Spanish at turn points in the conversation when children interrupted their activities to speak to older community members. Rapidly alternating languages to accommodate people who were dominant in one language or the other accustomed the children to juxtapose the distinct phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon of Spanish and English with ease. In families with members of two or more generations, this process begins in infancy (see chapter 11, Controlling, Teaching, and Facilitating Understanding via Code Switching).

Most of the Spanish monolingual adults on the block who provided regular opportunity for inter-turn changes from English to Spanish were women, either recent migrants or older homemakers. They included a few men who had limited contact with the children. Don Luis, in his seventies, spent long hours sitting with Armando and the other domino players. The use of Don before his name was a reflection of his respected senior status; he was the only block resident so honored. The elderly man did not speak fluent English although he had lived in NYC for twenty years. He complained bitterly about young Latino social workers whom he believed lied when they denied being able to speak Spanish. Because the selection of English for Don Luis would have constituted a clear lack of respeto ("respect"), children who were not confident of their Spanish ability avoided him. Those who had to approach the domino-players frequently, like Armando’s daughter Lolita, always spoke to Don Luis in Spanish.

Determining the addressee’s dominant language

In general, children tried to start out in Spanish to anyone known to have limited comprehension of English, and to any newcomer who greeted them in Spanish. If a child initiated an interaction with someone new to him/her, the usual procedure was to greet Latino women of his/her mother’s age and older in Spanish; young people and men of all ages were expected to be able to understand English. As described in chapter 4 (see Profile II), physical features, gender, and age were the decisive factors that determined the language dyads at home and they were extended, usually successfully, to account for new situations. If their initiation was met with a blank stare, they switched to the other language.

Children were likely to speak English to people they did not know who had status or business connections. When Isabel entered a candy store on another block she asked a Latino-looking male behind the counter the price of a candy in English:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Isabel:} & \quad \text{How much this cos? How much this cos?} \\
\text{[no response]} \\
\text{Isabel:} & \quad \text{You ‘stand Spanish?} \\
\text{Storekeeper:} & \quad \text{[no response]} \\
\text{Isabel:} & \quad \text{¿Cuánto vale esto? ("How much does this cost?")}
\end{align*}
\]
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The storekeeper had not answered Isabel right away because he was busy, but Isabel and others often interpreted a lack of response or a questioning look as a request to switch to the other language. Many “What?”s and “¿Qué?”s were answered with a translation, a habit which underscored the power of code switching for purposes of clarification. It was logical to extend the clarifying function of language alternation from turn-taking points to intra-turn and intra-sentential code switching (see Conversational strategies section, below).

The predominance of Spanish-dominant adults in el bloque’s close-knit networks and the proximity of English monolinguals—primarily African Americans from the projects—made situational language alternation to conform to the dominant language of different interlocutors a predominant characteristic of communication on the block. Language alternation at turn points became more frequent when elders spoke in Spanish and children responded in English; non-reciprocal conversations of this type are discussed below. Gradually, switching between Spanish and English in the same sentence became part of everyone’s informal speech. New migrants began by inserting English loans into their utterances, for example within a few months of arrival in the US, Dylcia used “appointment,” “el housing” (the public Housing Authority), “face to face” (the Social Services welfare interview), “interview,” and “la head nurse.” Immigrant mothers who knew a little English heard many code switches from their children and produced a few of their own, for example, in one two hour recording Lolita changed languages 57 times with her Spanish dominant mother, and her mother switched twice to her. As parents learned more English, they became the object of more—and more varied—code switches, and learned to participate in the practice.

Follow the leader

Adherence to the community norm implied that children should switch if an adult switched the language of the conversation, resulting in a “follow the leader” type of language alternation. The following interaction, recorded in the bodega, demonstrates this point and also shows how Spanish-dominant adults like Bolo, the bodeguero, eventually accommodated the children by changing to English:

[Context: Lolita put 25 cents on the counter for a bag of chips she had selected, unaware the price had gone up.]

L: Bolo, cobra esto. (“ring this up”)
B: Eso vale treinta centavos. (“That costs 30 cents.”)
L: ¿Eso? (“This”)
B: Sí, treinta centavos. (“Yes, 30 cents.”)

In this exchange Lolita followed the bodeguero’s lead into English; in the earlier one she and Timmy had switched into Spanish to address Timmy’s parents. Both constituted voluntary alternations in code; in each interaction the children had the option of addressing the adults in Spanish or English because they knew how to say what they wanted to say in both languages and they knew that the adults understood both. The choice of Spanish honored the community norm that they speak the language that their addressee knew best.

If the children had chosen to speak English there would have been no significant change in literal meaning but several other meanings might have been conveyed, for example, it might have been interpreted as reflecting a poor command of Spanish. More critically, if the children spoke English to older females and to other Spanish-dominant adults of special status who were not well known to them like Timmy’s caretakers or Don Luis, it might suggest a lack of respeto. But speaking English with adults who were intimates tended to convey a naturalness and informality—a relaxing of the constraints of the norm instead of disrespect—so parents did not scold children for this practice.

The choice of language in a particular situation depended on a myriad of factors involving the participants, the setting, and the social and communicative goals, but the overall pattern of each girl’s choices was related to her language proficiency. The only girl who rated herself an “excellent” speaker of both Spanish and English was Blanca. The others, including Spanish-dominant Isabel and Paca, evaluated their Spanish as “good.” The latter, who were the youngest, thought their English was weaker than their Spanish, but Eli and Lolita thought their English was better than their Spanish. Support for the accuracy of their self evaluations appeared in the extent to which they honored the community norm. Invariably Blanca responded in the language she was addressed in, but the others might not if it was their weaker language and they knew that speaking their dominant language would not constitute a hardship for their addressee. On two occasions Blanca and Lolita answered my Spanish questions at the same time; Blanca answered in Spanish and Lolita answered in English:

1 [Context: The two girls came out of the pizza shop, where they made their purchase in English, each with a piece of pizza, and walked towards ACZ.]
Non-reciprocal conversations

Often children did not “follow the leader,” but spoke in English to adults who kept up their end of the conversation in Spanish, participating in what Gal (1979) calls “non-reciprocal” bilingual conversations. Usually neither party judged themselves proficient enough to be able to favor the dominant language of their addressee, but since each understood the language of the other, the arrangement was mutually advantageous. On those occasions, the speakers seemed to be agreeing on a revised version of the community norm: “I speak what I speak best and you speak what you speak best.” On other occasions, however, non-reciprocal conversations could signify a more formal and distancing type of discourse. Consider the following conversation in which 12 year old Barbara speaks with two people in different languages — Spanish (S) with Dylcia (D) and English (E) with me (ACZ):

[Context: ACZ is talking in Spanish to Dylcia when Barbara joins them with a toddler, Cynthia.]

ACZ to B: S ¿Es e/hi tu primia? (“Is that your cousin?”)
B to ACZ: E Yeah, isn’t she cute?
ACZ to B: S ¿Cómo se llama? (“What’s her name?”)
B to ACZ: E Cynthia.
D to B: S Barbara, ¿es e/n/a e/hi de Bobi?

(“Is that Bobby’s little girl?”)
B to D: S Si, ¿què linda, verdad? Se parece a Julie.

(“Yes, how pretty, right? She looks like Julie.”)
ACZ to B: S Lo único que no tiene los ojos como Julie.

(“Only — her eyes aren’t like Julie’s.”)

[Julie is also Bobby’s daughter, from his latest marriage.]
D to B: S No se parece a Julie.

(“She does not look like Julie.”)
B to D: S Se parece a Julie, lo único que no tiene los ojos como Julie.

(“She does look like Julie, only she doesn’t have eyes like Julie’s.”)
D to B: S No se parece a Julie porque ella es mas cabezona que Julie.

(“She doesn’t look like Julie because she has a bigger head than Julie.”)
B to D: S Empués. Pero cuando Julie sea mas grande va(a) ser cabezona también.

(“Lies. But when Julie gets bigger she’s gonna have a big head too.”)

ACZ to B: S ¿Quién es Julie? (“Who is Julie?”)
B to ACZ: E Um this — [interrupted by Dylcia]
D to ACZ: S Una neta chiquita bien linda.

(“A really pretty little girl.”)

ACZ to both: ¿Cuánto cobran? (“How much do they charge?”)
Lolita: Fifty cents.
and
Blanca: Cincuenta centavos.

2 [Context: The two girls were talking in English about the death of a neighbor.]
ACZ to B: S ¿Era un hombre joven? (“Was he a young man?”)
Blanca: No, viejo.
and
Lolita: No, old.

Lolita was proud of her above grade-level Spanish reading and writing scores, but she was more at ease speaking in English. Because she knew that I spoke English well and was a teacher, she always spoke to me in English, even though I belonged to her mother’s generation and often spoke Spanish to everyone. Blanca, in contrast, did not have any siblings to speak English with at home, and her parents spoke Spanish to her and to each other. The exposure she had to Spanish in the family, in five years of bilingual classes, and during her two week summer vacations in Puerto Rico, made her feel equally at ease in Spanish or English. This was evident when she first took the microphone to introduce herself and said, “Mi nombre es- (“My name is”) — Spanish or English,” willing and able to continue in either language.

Unlike their parents, for whom Spanish was the intimate language and English the language of the outsider, most of the children were on their way to favoring English as the more intimate language. This transition was apparent in their habit of beginning conversations with their intimate elders in Spanish and switching to English soon after. Understandably, children who had weak Spanish skills preferred to speak their dominant language and reverted to English when they could, but the practice was so widespread that Spanish-dominant children learned to start out in Spanish and move to English with bilinguals, even though it was their weaker language. Paca alternated in this way at age six:

Paca: Dame una cura. (“Give me a bandaid.”)
ACZ: ¿Pa(-ra) qué? (“For what?”)
Paca: For my hand.

Perhaps Paca switched to English for emphasis, or in recognition of my US-born identity, or to show off her increasing command of the prestige language. In any case, it was not unusual for children to change languages upon resuming their turn at speaking to another bilingual. Paca’s adoption of the practice identified her as a second-generation member of el bloque, and she learned to extend the practice to accomplish the intra-turn switching that characterized her community.
B to ACZ: E Yeah, and she got a beautiful baby brother, he's so cute.
D to ACZ: S Tiene – [Dylcia turns to B]
    (“She’s”) –
D to B: S Julie tiene tres años, verdad?
    (“Julie’s three years old, right?”)
B to D: S Va a tener tres años.
    (“She’s going to be three.”)
ACZ to both: S ¿Ellos son hermanos?
    (“Are they siblings?”)
B to ACZ: E No, they’re not brothers – [interrupted by Dylcia]
D to ACZ: S De parte de padre.
    (“They have the same father.”)
B to ACZ: E – by father but not by mother.
ACZ to both: S ¿Y todos viven aquí juntos?
    (“and they all live here together?”)
B to ACZ: E No, they [Cynthia’s family] live in the Bronx.

[The conversation ended when someone else joined the group.]
Barbara was quite capable of carrying on the entire conversation with
Dylcia and me in Spanish, having attended school in Puerto Rico for
several years, but she preferred to speak English to anyone who was fluent
in that language. In the above excerpt she always responded to my Spanish
in English (seven times), but she answered Dylcia in Spanish (four times).
Barbara’s choice of Spanish for the recent migrant and English for the
researcher can be interpreted as an instance of alternating languages to
accommodate the dominant language of the participants; in this instance
it also served to distance the speakers. Normally, non-reciprocal conversa-
tions tended to force one of the bilinguals to switch to the language of the
other if they went beyond a few sentences. Since Barbara knew that I spoke
Spanish well, her insistent dual track conversation had the effect of for-
myly separating the adults in the conversation, and of isolating Dylcia, the
only member of the group who did not know both languages. No other child
was as rigid about compartmentalizing her languages as Barbara, and her
behavior in this regard was part of the process which eventually led her to
prefer English when she raised her son (see chapter 7, Barbara: “I gotta
let some of it go”).

In contrast to Barbara’s use of language separation, in the following
excerpt Isabel code switches from English>Spanish> English>Spanish>
English when she responds to me, but she addresses her peer in Spanish:

[Context: Isabel comes over to me after talking to Felicita (seven years old)
and her mother in Spanish.]

ACZ to I: ¿Esa ehi la mamá de Felicita?
    (“Is that Felicita’s mother?”)

I to ACZ: Yeah, me regañó y todo. I hate her.    Ella ehi mala.
    (“She scolds me and everything.”) (“She’s bad.”)
[Felictia approaches with Isabel’s bike; Isabel whispers.]  
Wait, lemme don’t talk now. I tell you the rest later.
I to F:     [bending over the bike]
¿Qué es esto? Toma, toma. [She has F hold the bike.]  
    (“What is this? Take this, take this.”)
Me tengo que ir pa(-ra) casa. Te veo dehipuahl.  
    (“I have to go home. I’ll see you later.”)

Isabel knew how to say everything in this excerpt in both languages and,
as we shall prove below, the same was true for most of the 1,685 intra-
turn switches made by the five principal subjects. Linguistic gaps in the
knowledge of the switchers were not the principal reason for code switch-
ing, and neither was the language proficiency of their addressees. Other
“on the spot” variables like setting could not explain why Isabel switched
with me but not with Felicita in the above example, but setting did play
a role in the amount and type of code-switching that children produced.

Settings
The bulk of the recordings were made during spring, summer, and fall
months when the children spent most of their free time outdoors. As a
result, 81 percent (n = 83) of the 103 hours of audio tapes recorded in
1979–80 were made outside the home, primarily on the block, where
82 percent of the five girls’ 1,685 (n = 1383) switches were recorded. The
area in front of the tenements was a preferred locale over the shadier play
area of the projects across the street, even during the hot summer months,
because it was livelier and because children required permission to play
across the street. Six hours of visits to the play area were recorded; only
2 percent of the switches were generated in that setting. Trips to the
bodega were more frequent than trips to the play area, but briefer. They
also provided less than 2 percent of the code switching data. A rough
calculation of the number of switches per hour of recording in each setting
indicated that between two and four times more switching was done at
home and on the block than in the bodega or play area.6

The most intriguing way in which locales were implicated in switching
was related to the kind of discourse that conventionally took place in them.
The more predictable, formulaic, and shorter interactions which were char-
acteristic of the physical activity in the play area and of purchases in the
bodega were less conducive to code switching than the more informal and
open-ended discussions that took place on the block. Children followed
regular routines as they climbed the jungle gym and took turns on the slide.
and running about limited their interactions. Similarly, several tape recordings of bodega purchases were blank; often children selected their favorite item and left the exact change on the counter without saying anything, particularly if the bodeguero was busy with another customer. Most exchanges with him were short and in one language or the other; when language change did occur, it generally occurred at turn changes. Non-elaborated service transactions were the rule on the block, although they might be interpreted as rude, peremptory, or even hostile in another community. Code switching was more likely to occur among the children’s primary networks, and when they were free of the more formulaic discourse constraints of games and shopping.

**In the Head: Communicational Factors**

Alternations at turn points helped pave the way for intra-turn code switches. Knowledge of how to manage a conversation – the factors “in the head” – enabled children to employ code switching for greater communicative power and social bonding.

**Conversational strategies**

The smooth integration of switches in NYPR bilinguals’ speech led Poplack and Sankoff (1988: 1,176) to conclude that “it could be said to function as a mode of interaction similar to monolingual language use... and no special rhetorical effect is accomplished thereby.” They contrast this with other communities, for example, French-English bilinguals in Ottawa-Hull, Canada, in which “the use of virtually every switch serves a rhetorical purpose” (ibid: 1,177), presumably because they “flag” their switches with pauses and other hesitation phenomena. Yet, el bloque’s switching suggests that while hesitation phenomena may provide a salient rhetorical flourish, a smooth switch does not necessarily mean a non-purposeful switch. Even young bilinguals who were still learning both languages usually did not interrupt their flow of speech or otherwise call attention to their switches. They switched not only because it was the community “mode” – switching undoubtedly was a hallmark of community membership – but also because they shared with peers and adults “in the head” knowledge of how to use switching for particular communicative purposes.

Code switching performed important conversational work for the children, only some of which was an extension of the functions of language alternation at turn boundaries. As they went about co-constructing a NYPR identity with other community members, they used code switching to accomplish at least 22 conversational strategies, including and beyond those noted in previous research. Three major categories distinguished themselves: Footing, Clarification, and Crutch-like code mixes.

**I Footing**

Goffman’s concept of Footing provides the principle that underlies a broad variety of switches: “A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance” (Goffman 1979: 5). The children of el bloque used code switching primarily to signal a change in footing, via two approaches; they switched languages to underscore or highlight the re-alignment they intended (Realignment), or to control their interlocutor’s behavior (Appeal/Control). Among the eight Realignment strategies, for example, a change in the speaker’s role – from speaker to quoter of another’s speech, from friend to protector, or from narrator to evaluator of the narration – could be accompanied by a code switch. Also, children sometimes interrupted themselves with a switch to check for approval, attention, or the interlocutor’s knowledge of what they were about to refer to. If children asked a question and then answered it themselves, their answer might be in the other language, mirroring the opposition of interrogative and declarative stances. In this instance, switching allowed the children to keep control over their turn, with a shift in language indicating momentary departure and re-alignment.

A shift in topic represented the most popular type of change in footing; switches that re-directed listeners’ attention away from the topic at hand amounted to 27 percent of the category. The leading role played by code switching for topic shifts within a bilinguals’ turn at speaking was a logical extension of the community practice of alternating languages for different interlocutors, which was often linked to a shift in topic. For topic shifts and seven other changes which constituted the Realignment sub-category of Footing, children shifted away from their initial focus or role, and the code switch served to highlight the re-alignment.

Quantification helped underscore the variable nature of code switching, for example, not every attempt to realign a conversation was accompanied by a switch because switching was optional, not obligatory. Also, for reasons discussed in Assigning Conversational Strategies (below), only 48 percent of the switches were attributed to the strategies listed here. The name of each conversational strategy is followed by the number (n) of occurrences in the data and the proportion the strategy represents in the corpus of strategic switches (803). The following examples are only some of the ways in which code switching carried out communicative functions in the everyday talk of el bloque’s children:
Realignment

1. **Topic shift** (n = 73, 9 percent)
The speaker marks a shift in topic with a shift in language, with no consistent link between topic and language.
*Example:* “Vamo/hi a preguntárle. It’s raining!”
(“Let’s go ask her.”)

2. **Quotations, direct and indirect** (n = 70, 9 percent)
The speaker recalls speech and reports it directly or indirectly, not necessarily in the language used by the person quoted.
*Example:* “El me dijo, ‘Call the police!’ pero yo dije,”
(“He told me”)
(“but I said”)
“No voy a llamar la policía na(-da).”
(“I’m not going to call the police nothin’.”)

3. **Declarative/question shift** (n = 29, 4 percent)
The language shift accompanies a shift into or out of a question.
*Example:* “I wiggle my fingers, ¿qué más?” (”what else?”)

4. **Future referent check and/or bracket** (n = 27, 3 percent)
The speaker makes an aside, marked by a shift in language, to make sure that the listener knows her next referent.
*Example:* “Le dió con irse pa(-ra) – you know Lucy? –
(“She up and decided to go to – ”)
pa(-ra) la casa del papá de Lucy,”
(“to Lucy’s father’s house.”)

5. **Checking** (n = 19, 2 percent)
The shift seeks the listeners’ opinion or approval, usually in the form of a tag.
*Example:* “¿Porque estamos en huega de gasolina, right?”
(“Because we are in a gas strike”)

6. **Role shift** (n = 17, 2 percent)
The speaker shifts languages as s/he shifts role from actor to narrator or interviewer, for mothering, etc.
*Example:* Interviewer [speaking into the recorder’s microphone]
“My-mi nombre es Lourdes. Now we’re going to my sister.”
(“My name is Lourdes.”)

7. **Rhetorical ask and answer** (n = 16, 2 percent)
The speaker asks a question and immediately follows it with the answer, in the opposite language.
*Example:* “You know what my cousins do? [to cockroaches]”
Los agarran por la/hi patita(-s) y lo/hi ponen en la estufa pa(-ra) achicarrarla/hi.
(“They grab them by their little legs, and they put them on the stove to burn them to a crisp.”)

8. **Narrative frame break – evaluation or coda** (n = 10, 1 percent)
The speaker departs from the narrative frame to evaluate some aspect of the story, or to deliver the punch line, or ending.

Example: “Charlie tried to push Gina in and, bendito, Kitty fell on her head.
[bendito is a Puerto Rican lament, literally ‘blessed’]
Y eso e/hi lo que le pasa a lo/hi presenta(-d) o(-s) como tú.
(And that’s what happens to busybodies like you.”)

Realignment strategies were employed in nearly one-third (32 percent) of the switches identified by strategy. This category was more varied and prevalent than others, except for Clarification, which included the most favored strategy (see section II below).

**Appeal and/or Control**

Appeal and/or Control switches are a sub-type of Footing, but they deserve separate consideration because they sought to direct the addressee’s behavior by means of imperatives tinged with threats or entreats. Often, they were accompanied by appropriate changes in intonation and other signs of aggravation or mitigation.

1. **Aggravating requests** (n = 37, 5 percent)
The switch intensifies/reinforces a command.
*Example:* “Ella tiene – shut up! Lemme tell you!”
(“She has – ”)

2. **Mitigating requests** (n = 26, 3 percent)
The switch softens a command.
*Example:* “Victoria Jenine go over there! Jennie vete pa(-ra) (a)-llá.”
(“Jennie go over there.”)

3. **Attention attraction** (n = 17, 2 percent)
The language shift calls for the attention of the listener.
*Example:* “El/hi se está llenando, lookit, Ana.”
(“This one is filling up.”)

The low proportion of Appeal and Control switches (10 percent) may be due to community inhibitions against children’s impromptuing more than to their lack of centrality. Early studies of code switching singled out their significance in adult speech; Gumperz (1976) cited examples of attention attraction in four language groups around the world. Valdés (1981) was the first to point out the role of switching for the aggravation and mitigation of requests. Members of el bloque acknowledged their use of these strategies when they cited “getting mad” as a reason for switching languages.

**II Clarification and/or Emphasis**

Most of the community ignored the multiple functions that code switching served in their discourse; they attributed it to language deficiency rather
than to discourse needs or language skill. Yet the most favored strategy, translation, honed a valuable skill. The use of code switching for translations was a natural extension of its prevalence at turn points when community members answered each other's “What’s?” and “¿Qué es?” with a repetition of what they had previously said, translated into the other language. What monolinguals accomplish by repeating louder and/or slower, or with a change of wording, bilinguals can accomplish by switching languages. Children learned to use translation for clarification within their turn at speaking, and also tapped into the emphatic power of repetition. A related focus on explanation and stress was present in the children's efforts to expand on their subject via appositions, to account for a request, and to highlight the second part of a double subject.

1 Translations (n = 113, 14 percent)
   The speaker shifts to the opposite language for the translation of a statement, command, question, etc. The translation may be exact or slightly changed.
   Example: “¿No me crees? You don't believe me?”

2 Appositions and/or apposition bracket (n = 76, 9 percent)
   The code switch marks the introduction of an appositional phrase that adds subject specification, and/or the bracket that returns to the subject.
   Example: “She have (sic) a brother in the hospital, en el Bellevue, ("in Bellevue")
   and he was crazy.”

3 Accounting for requests (n = 62, 8 percent)
   The switch moves into or out of a direct request, with a supporting explanation or account.
   Example: “Vete Eddie vete, so you could see.”
   ("Go Eddie go")

4 Double subject (left dislocation) (n = 11, 1 percent)
   A noun or noun phrase is followed by a switch to a clause that begins with a pronoun that refers to the same noun; left dislocation is characteristic of AAVE (Wolfram and Fasold 1974).
   Example: “My mother’s friend, él se murió because they poisoned him.”
   ("he died")

Code switches for Clarification/Emphasis were the most frequent. Four Clarification/Emphasis strategies were slightly more productive than eight Realignment strategies: they accounted for 33 percent of the switches associated with a conversational strategy. Translations constituted the leading code switching strategy (14 percent). The central role of clarification switches can be attributed to the children's age, status, and need to make themselves understood. Access to two languages provided them with two ways to make their point, and they availed themselves of Clarification/Emphasis strategies to achieve their goal.

III Crutch-like Code Mixing

Not every switch was purposefully clear in its communicative intent; some seemed involuntary. They were precipitated by the need for a word or expression in the other language, by a momentary loss for words, by a previous speaker's switch, by the desire to repair a poor syntactic break, by taboo words, and by the cross linguistic homophones that Clyne (1967) called triggers. Unlike the switches for realignment, appeal and control, or clarification, those in this group were usually short departures from the language being spoken at the moment; they exemplified McClure's (1977) “code mixing.”

1 Crutching: The speaker did not remember or know the switched word(s).
   (n = 110, 14 percent)
   Example: “You shouldn't take that out because you're gonna stay mellà.”
   ("toothless")

2 Filling in: The speaker filled the space with a catch-all term. (n = 40, 5 percent)
   Example: “Man, you cheap, you can't even deso.”
   ("whatshis/whatchamacallit").

3 Recycling: The speaker tried to repair a non-grammatical switch. (n = 29, 4 percent)
   Example: “Tú don't go? Tú no te vas?”
   ("You")
   ("You aren't leaving")

4 Triggers: A word with similar surface structure in English and Spanish triggered a switch. (n = 12, 1 percent)
   Example: "My name es Pasa."
   ("is")

5 Parallelist: The speaker copied the previous speaker's switch. (n = 5, 0.6 percent)
   Example: I to L: “You sleep with los ojos abiertos?”
   ("your eyes open")
   L to I: “So, people DIE with ojos abiertos!”

6 Taboo: A taboo topic or term was expressed in the other language.
   (n = 4, 0.5 percent)
   Example: “They should blow an ash can [firecracker] up his huevos.”
   ("balls")

Crutch-like code mixes (n = 200) accounted for 25 percent of the strategy-linked switches. “Crutches” (n = 110) were the second most popular type of switch, after translations. Because of its predominance and its implications for a valid appraisal of code switching, “crutching” merits special attention.
Crutching or code switching?

Children had to know enough Spanish and English to be able to contrast them meaningfully, that is, switches that were made because speakers had no alternative were unlikely to convey a meaning beyond that of a linguistic gap. Many community members believed that code switching occurred primarily when they were at a loss for words. I call these switches "crutches" because, like a person with impaired use of one leg who depends on a crutch to keep walking, a bilingual who is stumped in one language can keep on speaking by depending on a translated synonym as a stand-in. To test the community belief that most code switching was crutching, switches that Paca, Lolita, Isabel, Blanca, and Elli definitely knew how to say in their other language were distinguished from "crutches"—those they did not know or momentarily forgot—and from those for which there was no evidence for or against their knowledge. Careful checking against the children's lexical and syntactic inventories made it possible to identify each switch as one of the following:

1. **Known**: The child knew how to say what she switched in both English and Spanish. (n = 1,258, 75 percent of corpus)
   
   **Proof**: She produced the same word(s) in the other language at that moment, as a translation or repetition, or at another time, often on the same tape. Some were basic vocabulary and expressions known to all, e.g., "food," "apartment," "Hold this," "Keep quiet," "Give me a kiss."
   
   **Example**: Sometimes I eat arro(s) con bistec twice, two platos.
   
   ("rice with steak")
   
   ("plates")

2. **Not known**: The child did not know how to say what she switched in the other language. (n = 57, 3 percent of corpus)
   
   **Proof**: She had never heard to utter the word(s) in the other language. Often they were terms linked to the family (Spanish) domain or to the public (English) domain.
   
   **Example**: Look at her luna. My brother's got one on his nalga.
   
   ("mole")
   
   ("buttock")

3. **Lapse**: The child switched to cover a momentary lapse of memory. (n = 53, 3 percent of corpus)
   
   **Proof**: She had said the word on previous occasions, but this time she paused and/or repeated herself and sometimes asked how to say it.
   
   **Example**: Give me some piña o deso — o cómo-se llama.
   
   ("pineapple or thingamajig or what's-its-name")

4. **No evidence**: The field notes and the tapes provided no way of verifying if the speaker knew, did not know, or had momentarily forgotten how to say (in the language she was speaking) what she switched. (n = 317, 19 percent of corpus)
   
   **Example**: You got a lot of caspias.
   
   ("dandruff")

Code switching was more than a convenient way to handle linguistic gaps, since the children knew how to say three fourths (n = 1,258, 75 percent) of their switches in both languages. Given these data, how do we explain the contradiction between the children's preference for switching segments known to them and the popular belief that they switched mainly when at a loss for words? Part of the answer lies in the fact that bilinguals sometimes are unaware of alternating between languages because it has become such an effortless way of speaking. A switch for an unknown or forgotten segment, however, may not be as unconscious. Hesitation, a memory scan, and/or conscious acts such as chagrin, guilt, or annoyance at the lapse, serve to call attention to the behavior. Speakers tend to recall such efforts more readily, heightening their awareness of "crutching." Those incidents are generalized to account for most code switching, erroneously; even nonfluent children did less "crutching" than most people assume. Stressing that code switching was not mainly a lexical cover-up is not to suggest that crutches do not perform a significant function by resolving a loss for words—they do.

Assigning Conversational Strategies

Pinpointing the purpose of each code switch is a task as fraught with difficulty as imputing the reasons for a monolingual's choice of one synonym over another, and no complete accounting may ever be possible. Not every switch could be identified with a particular function, and every change in communicative function was not accomplished by a shift in language. The potency of code switched discourse is enhanced by the multiple readings that many switches suggest, freeing the speaker and hearer to co-construct their interpretations in ways appropriate to each exchange. Moreover, conversational strategies often performed double duty, complicating their assignment to a single strategy. For example, a switch for a quotation might break a narrative frame to focus on another actor, or provide the sign-off for a monologue. Consider 12 year old Delia's explanation about why she hated living in Puerto Rico, made during a visit to the block:

**Delia:** It's so boring!

**Young dude:** 'Cause you don't have nobody to take you out!

**D:**

1. I go out a lot pero you know que no [unintelligible] after — ("but")
   
   ("it's not")

2. It's not the same you know, no e(-s) como acá. ("it's not like here")

3. **Porque mira, you go out y to(-do e-)l mundo lo sabe:** ("because look")
   
   ("and everybody knows about it")
Delia could not have explained the choice of one language over another, the grammatical boundaries, or the communicative intent of each of her switches. Code switching strategies require further investigation before passages like Delia's can be interpreted unequivocally, but several identifiable strategies create a dramatic picture of the constraints and misunderstandings that she suffered as a NYPR when her family moved to the island. Indirect and direct quotations (5, 6), checking for approval or solidarity (1, 7, 9), repetition and translation (2, 5), and attention attraction (3), all contributed special effects. The languages were so smoothly integrated that it was not clear if Delia was switching into English from a Spanish base, or into Spanish from an English base. In fact, she used more English clauses (n = 12) than Spanish (n = 9) and they, with the help of frequent “you know”s, communicated that she considered herself and her friends on the block to be English dominant and distinct from islanders. The Spanish parts tapped into her listeners’ Puerto Rican identity and their knowledge of the traditional limitations placed upon adolescent females. Weaving together both languages made a graphic statement about Delia’s dual New York City-Puerto Rico identity, and highlighted particular conversational strategies at the same time. The language of the switch was not always linked to the reality being addressed: she referred to Puerto Rico in English and to New York in Spanish (2), quoted the islanders in English (6), and used both languages to break up her litany of complaints (3, 8).

The dramatic impact that switching can have is exemplified by Delia’s last line, in which she caps off her lament with a switch (see Realignment strategy 8 above): “I like it to visit, pero pa(-ra) quedarse!” Delia could have ended with a monolingual coda: (“I like it to visit, but to stay!”) or “Me gusta pa(-ra) visitar, pero pa(-ra) quedarse!” Neither would have had the effect of her switch into “pero pa(-ra) quedarse!”, although a similar effect might have been achieved if she had said “Me gusta pa(-ra) visitar, but to stay!” A switch, into either English or Spanish, calls attention to the negative counterpoint of her final clause and underscores it. Research on adult narratives in another part of El Barrio (Alvarez 1991) found that Spanish-based narratives, which constituted the majority, switched into English at the end, but narratives that began in English switched into Spanish soon after. Delia’s little speech offers a third alternative, an English-Spanish narrative that exploits the power of contrasting both languages throughout.\(^{14}\)

Not all of Delia’s shifts from Spanish to English can be identified as a type of Footing, Clarification, or Crutch-like code mix, which brings us back to an earlier point about the difficulty of pinpointing the purpose of each and every code switch. The majority of the principal subjects’ switches (52 percent, 882/1,685) were not assigned to any of the conversational strategies I have identified, for several reasons. In an effort to avoid amorphous or subjective categories such as “ethic solidarity,” only strategies that were clearly supported by their structure in the discourse were identified. More important, code switching occurs for many of the elusive reasons that prompt the selection of one synonym over another in monolingual speech: a code switch “says it better” by capturing the meaning or expressing a point more effectively. Finally, as noted previously, switching called attention graphically to the fact that the members of el bloque were integrating the heritages of “dos worlds/two mundos” (Padrón 1982), adapting them to their own reality, and transforming them in the process. The code switching by Delia and the children of el bloque proved that it is not the case, as Poplack (1988: 230) claims, that “individual switches cannot be attributed to stylistic or discourse functions . . . in the Puerto Rican community.” Community members, including children, are adept at creating a style of discourse that is emblematic of their dual identity and of simultaneously exploiting its rhetorical power by switching for specific conversational strategies.

**Individual Conversational Strategies**

Sorting out how Paca, Isabel, Lolita, Blanca, and Elii shared some ways of using code switching as a conversational tool and went their separate ways for others illuminated the problem of trying to generalize about the bilingualism of NYPR children. Members of the same social network displayed multiple ways of being bilingual, ways often obscured in group percentages. The girls observed community patterns, but they also departed from them,
primarily in age-related ways. Revealing dissimilarities were linked to the personal situation of each child.

Slightly more than half of the group’s code switches were not assigned to any of the 22 strategies, for reasons explained above, but not every girl’s switches followed this pattern. The majority (54 percent) of the youngest girl’s (Paca) switches were assigned to a strategy and the majority (59 percent) of the oldest girl’s (Elli) were not. Blanca broke with the age-graded continuum because a majority of her switches were identifiable by strategy, placing her closer to Paca than to her closer and older friend, Elli (see table 5.1). Because Blanca and Paca spoke more Spanish than the others, quantity of Spanish and quantity of conversational strategies seemed to be associated. The way in which the strategies were deployed, however, suggested that switching performed different conversational work for the younger and older children. Support for this age-related interpretation comes from the fact that the strategies which figured most prominently in the younger girls’ switches were of the involuntary and clarification types, especially Crutching and Translation, while the older girls led in the production of switches that realigned the conversation by checking with the listener, breaking into narratives, and shifting roles. Within the age subgroups, as usual, individual preferences for particular categories of strategies stood out (see figure 5.1).

Paca’s strategies

Paca led the girls in the proportion of switches devoted to Topic Shifts; 14 percent of her strategy shifts were of this type. As mentioned previously, the demands of switching languages for different addressees made on bilinguals early in life often were accompanied by a shift in topic, establishing a link between language shift and topic shift. Not surprisingly, evidence of the transfer of this link to intra-turn switching was strongest among the youngest speakers. Topic shifts, for example, “She works a lot. Ay, tengo que ir pa(-ra e)-i baño.” (“Uu, I have to go to the bathroom”), accounted for 3–14 percent of each girl’s conversational strategies, along an age-graded continuum, with eight year old Paca at the top of the scale and 13 year old Elli at the bottom (Paca 14 percent, Isabel 9 percent, Lolita 8 percent, Blanca 8 percent, Elli 3 percent).

Switching to change topics was Paca’s second favorite strategy, after translations, which occupied a larger proportion of her switches than of the other girls (18 percent, 27/152). As the youngest child, Paca took the most advantage of switches which helped her clarify her intentions. She also distinguished herself from her friends by being the source of the largest percent (13/37 = 35 percent) of Aggravated Requests, in part because she was the only one who spent much of her day with toddlers, whom she sometimes commanded or threatened, e.g., “Give me a kiss o te pego” (“or I’ll hit you”). Other Appeal/Control switches helped her get her way with adults; most of her commands (68 percent) were directed at me, e.g., “Don’t put me that. Guárdame.” (“Save it for me.”) Paca used more switches to translate, shift topic, and to fill in lexical gaps, but she also put code switching to effective use in her caretaker and caretaker roles, as if to make up for the lack of power associated with her young age, tiny frame, and anemic health.

Lolita’s strategies

In Lolita’s speech, the most obvious tie between social role and discourse strategy manifested itself in her origination of the majority of four of the six types of the involuntary code mixes:

1 Crutching “Esto es un-microphone.
('This is a')
Que me están-uh-recording.”
('That they're-uh-recording me')

2 Recycling “If they wanted to borrar (erase) –
if they wanted to erase the mark.”

3 Triggers Quiero comprar uno nuevo en la farmacia.
("[I want to buy a new one in"]("pharmacy")

4 Fillers “Now there’s no more desto.”("whatstas")

Crutch-like code mixes were so important in Lolita’s speech that its six strategies made up close to one-half (41 percent, 113/277) of all her conversational strategies. Crutches stood out most of all, contributing 23 percent (64/277), a rate three or more times higher than her other types of
switches. More than anything (in her own speech) and more than anyone (in the group), Lolita depended on code switching for filling in gaps in Spanish vocabulary and grammar. Additionally, she switched for Spanish N/NPs that she knew how to say in English but that recalled home and family, e.g., plancha ("iron"), muebles ("furniture"), and nevera ("refrigerator"). Along with her frequent insertion of kinship terms, e.g., tío ("uncle"), madrina ("godmother"), abuela ("grandmother"), Lolita's reliance on family-linked one-word mixes made her seem less independent than her friends, and younger. Social factors related to aspects of her physical size and family role contributed to her switching behavior. Her birth eight years after that of her only sibling, her petite frame, her protective father, and some infantile regressions (it was not generally known that she still drank milk from a baby bottle in the morning) combined to create a little girl image that her short code mixes reflected and strengthened.

The strategies of Blanca and Elli

The two oldest girls used negligible amounts of Crutching – Blanca produced eight and Elli none – and they dominated the Realignment strategies that the younger children controlled less. Of interest despite too small a sample, Blanca and Elli produced most of the Double Subject switches which followed the subject noun or noun phrase with a pronoun in the other language, e.g., "There once was an old lady, ella tenía una fiesta en su casa" ("she was having a party in her house"). At eight years of age Paca had not learned this kind of switch yet; it was the only strategy she did not accomplish at least once. Elli lived in the predominantly African American projects, and her classmates principally were African Americans; not surprisingly she was the source of the majority of the Double Subject switches. It was the only strategy in which she led the others. Blanca led the group in making effective use of switches for breaking the frame of narratives for evaluations and codas. The strategies, topics, and grammatical choices that Blanca and Elli favored identified their narratives as more adult-like than those of the younger girls (see chapter 6, Linking Language, Constituents, Grammaticality, and Developmental Patterns).

Isabel's strategies

Isabel's leading role in half of the Realignment and Appeal/Control strategies indicated that she used code switching as a communicative aid, to help make herself understood in compensation for her pronunciation difficulties and irregular grammar. To this point, Isabel repeated herself with translations (accounting for 31 percent of all translation switches = 35/113), and switched to attract the attention of her listener (35 percent, 6/17) more
than any other child. She used the translation strategy primarily in questions – to help her get explanations and/or information, for example, “What’s that? ¿Qué (e-)s eso?” – whereas her friends were more likely to translate a declarative to emphasize a point. She also did the most checking with her listener about a future referent (37 percent, 10/27). Isabel’s switches were more directed at ensuring her listener’s comprehension than at establishing her own identity/role: she never switched to separate evaluative statements or codas in a narrative, and only one of her switches marked a shift in role. She also quoted others indirectly at twice the rate than when she assumed their voices directly.

Isabel produced the largest number of shifts into and out of questions, by switching languages (a) between declaratives and interrogatives, for example, “Look Ana, I’m doing it. Y de/hipué(-s) de/hita, ¿qué va?” (“And after this one, what goes?”) and (b) between rhetorical questions that the speaker asks and answers, for example, “I tell you? El/la una pantalla de corazón(-s)” (“It’s an earring made of hearts”). Switches such as these demonstrate why it is difficult to distinguish switching for specific conversational strategies and switching grammatical categories. Switches of type (a) and (b) both facilitate distinguishing statements from questions, a distinction which is variably maintained in AAVE and PRE. Most members of el bloque used the same syntax (S-V-O) for questions and statements. They converted declaratives into interrogatives by means of rising intonation, e.g., “You saw it?,” “She goes there?” This rule, part of Standard English (SE), was extended to include questions with interrogatives like “Why you don’t call me?,” “How they made that?,” which require a change of tense and syntax in SE. Switching languages to separate statement-like interrogatives from declaratives served to emphasize the boundaries between the two. Moreover, Dore (1978, cited in Heath 1983) found that – in mainstream school-oriented children’s speech – the type of rhetorical questions which I have labelled Ask and Answer are an attempt to ensure acknowledgment of their turn to speak. In the lower working class African American community that Heath studied, “they were important in establishing a conversational frame for storytelling among both adults and children” (ibid p. 378, n. 26). Similarly, by asking a question that only she could answer, Isabel ensured her addressee’s attention and kept the conversational ball in her court for her narratives. Both were invaluable strategies for a child who was considered language-disabled.

The switches that most communicated Isabel’s insecure status and her eagerness to explain herself were those that mitigated requests (42 percent, 11/26), for example, “Eso me molesta (‘That bothers me’), please,” and accounted for requests (32 percent, 20/62), for example, “Ay, espera (‘Gee, wait’), I ain’ ready.” In contrast to Paca’s imperious role in the life of her infant charges and adult caretakers, Isabel sought to ingratiate herself

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English (%)</th>
<th>Spanish (%)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>75 (629)</td>
<td>74 (629)</td>
<td>1,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19 (157)</td>
<td>16 (159)</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5 (38)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5 (13)</td>
<td>5 (41)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100 (837)</td>
<td>100 (848)</td>
<td>1,685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by explaining and softening her requests with switches. But code-switching helped her stand her ground too, and demand her right to speak as an equal: “Yo puedo hablar (‘I can talk’). It’s my mouth.” As the only child of a poor single mother, Isabel code switched to appeal to others and to defend herself.

**Language Knowledge and Language Choice**

A similar number of switches into English (837/1,685) and Spanish (848/1,685) was the most telling illustration of the children’s interweaving of their two worlds.\(^9\) Smooth bilingual transitions exploited the opposition between the status embodied in the language of the dominant group and the solidarity embodied in the language of their less powerful community, blurring the boundaries between them. A closer look at the data revealed that some of the distinctions in the patterns of English and Spanish switches corresponded to individual differences in language proficiency. More significant, English maintained its powerful associations in some ways but in others the symbolic values traditionally attached to it and to Spanish were being challenged.

The great majority of the switches in both languages were part of the children’s bilingual repertoire (see table 5.2). The girls knew the English for 74 percent of their Spanish switches, and they knew the Spanish for 75 percent of their English switches. For the switches for which there was no evidence as to whether the child knew how to say it in the other language, there was only a 3 percent difference – in favor of English switches. Twice as many of the (few) switches which the children did not know how to say in the other language were in English and three times as many of the switches that stood in for momentary lapses were in Spanish. Despite the paucity of examples, these figures hint at a weaker command of Spanish and a dependence on English vocabulary, a pattern which was corroborated by
Table 5.3 Individual differences in language of the switch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominance</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Eng (%)</th>
<th>Span (%)</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paca</td>
<td>(SpanDom)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
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<td>Isabel</td>
<td>(SpanBil)</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>51</td>
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<td>Lolita</td>
<td>(EngBil)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>(EngBil)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elli</td>
<td>(EngBil)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td></td>
<td>840</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>1,685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Age in December 1980

ethnographic data and children’s self-reports. These exceptions aside, there was an extraordinary parity between English and Spanish in 93 percent of the switches (1,574/1,685).

**Individual Spanish/English preferences**

The rate of switches into English (49.7 percent) and Spanish (50.3 percent) for the five girls as a group was nearly equal, but the combined group figures averaged out a slight weighting in the direction of the dominant language of each speaker (table 5.3).

The girls were all born, raised, and educated in El Barrio, and whatever their proficiency in Spanish, they became more English dominant as they got older, which showed up in their code switching choices. There was a progression from the youngest and most Spanish dominant, Paca, who favored Spanish switches by 10 percent, to the oldest, Elli, an English-dominant bilingual who favored English switches by 4 percent, although the differences were not statistically significant. The almost equivalent Spanish–English rates of all except the youngest echoed similar findings in studies of older Puerto Rican bilinguals (Marcos and Zentella 1978, Poplack 1980).16

**Language, power, and strategies**

English enjoyed symbolic domination because of its power on international, national, and local levels. Whereas English was the language of an independent and wealthy US, spread by its technologically superior media and spoken by its first class citizens, Spanish was the language of a dependent and impoverished Puerto Rico, and of its second class citizens.17 Beyond el bloque, English was the language of widest applicability. As the children grew, so did the number of their activities beyond the confines of the block – for shopping, education, sports, parties, and movies – activities which required English and enhanced its status. The most affluent people the children saw or met spoke English. Some of them also spoke Spanish, like I did, and not everyone who spoke English was well off, like the African Americans in their neighborhood, but all the Spanish monolinguals they knew were poor: the newcomers from Puerto Rico invariably were the neediest families on the block.

Unexpectedly, the traditional associations between Spanish and English and their symbolic values did not result in predictable patterns of language-linked strategies. Despite the connection of English to the powerful public domain and of Spanish to poor in-group members and intimate settings, there was no consistent coupling of specific topics with either Spanish or English. Children moved from debating the national gas strike or the Skylab rocket in Spanish to discussing their experiences in Puerto Rico or at home in English. The colonial past of Puerto Rico had introduced the instability and ambivalence in language associations that is the consequence of the imposition of the imperial power’s linguistic and cultural models. The socio-economic reality of el bloque heightened them. For second generation NYPRs, the conventional symbolic values of Spanish (the intimate “we” language of solidarity), and English (the outsider “they” language of power) were being challenged as English engulfed an increasing number of domains and activities. In every setting, including home, school-age children usually spoke English to each other, thus weakening the connection between Spanish and Puerto Rican culture, and threatening to edge out Spanish altogether. The prevalent pattern for Spanish exchanges was one or two sentences. The pressures in school to conform to English and the lack of insistence on communicating in Spanish at home augured language loss; code switching seemed to be the vehicle for the vestigial remnants of the children’s Spanish. Yet their knowledge of how to say more than 90 percent of what they switched in either language proved that they did not need to switch as much as they did, and called attention to the persistence of code switching and its significance for the community. Of particular interest was the nature of the bond between Spanish or English and specific conversational strategies.

Nearly half of the strategies (9/21) did not favor Spanish or English by more than 10 percent, and the remainder were equally divided in their predilection: six favored English and six favored Spanish (see table 5.4). The biggest contrasts occurred in two strategies that favored Spanish: one (Fillers/Hesitations) represented a group pattern and the other (Narrative Frame Breaks) was due to one individual’s preference. As mentioned earlier, Blanca produced most of the departures from narrative structure for evaluative comments, and she did so most often in Spanish. For hesitations
and fillers, all of the children tended to insert Spanish fillers in their English pauses much more than they inserted English versions into Spanish. Since monolingual English speakers fill pauses with “uh” or “um,” and monolingual Spanish speakers fill pauses with e or esto, these hesitation words can reveal a speaker’s language dominance. Regardless of language background however, the children opted more for Spanish esto. Moreover, no child used English filler words like “what’s,” “thingamajig,” etc. For them, all unknown items were deso or desto, the Spanish fillers typical in Puerto Rico. Sprinkled throughout the speech of even the most minimally bilingual, these easily insertable hesitations and fillers served as tag-like emblems of Puerto Rican identity.

Most intriguing was the English role in two thirds of the Appeal and Control switches. It came as no surprise that English was linked to appeal and control, particularly the aggravation of requests, given the Hi(English)-Lo(Spanish) dichotomy that characterizes social and linguistic relationships between a governing group and an impoverished minority community. What was surprising is that English was favored for both aggravating and mitigating requests. If this was because the Hi-Lo relationship was reversed in the lives of el bloque’s children as it was for Puerto Rican children in an Ohio classroom (Olmedo-Williams 1979), then English should have accomplished request mitigation and Spanish should have communicated more aggravation. What process could explain el bloque’s preference of English for both?

Several interpretations are possible, all of which reflect the interactive nature of code switching. Since the objects of children’s imperatives usually were friends who were English-dominant, the switch into English may have been an attempt to get the message across in the language the commanded child knew best. This was more necessary when the command was in Spanish than when it was in English, thereby accounting for the lesser number of aggravating or mitigating Spanish switches. In this scenario, children overrode the customary associations to power and solidarity in favor of ensuring communication. Another view is that the same language can be used for opposite strategies because it is the switch itself that conveys meaning by drawing attention to the juxtaposition of languages. This explanation recognizes that the language of a switch necessarily depends on the language that precedes it, regardless of the correlation between the purpose of the switch and the language that usually is ascribed to that purpose. Since bilinguals may wish to highlight the aggravation or mitigation of a request in the midst of speaking English or Spanish, they must switch into either language for that purpose. The switch serves as an organizing feature. It can be the primary conveyer of mitigation or aggravation or, presumably, other meanings. The language choice may be secondary. As Valdés (1981: 102–3) noted:

The direction of the language switch does not seem to be an important factor. That is, switching to English does not necessarily aggravate and Spanish mitigate. Both can be used to do either, depending on the base language chosen and the possibilities offered for contrast by switching to the other language. Indeed, it seems that in this area it is precisely the contrast itself which is being exploited, very much the same way intonational contours are exploited by monolingual speakers.

More evidence that the fact of the switch was more important than the language it was in came from the across the board use of both languages for all types of grammatical units and conversational strategies. There was at least one instance of a switch into Spanish and English in every category. Evidently, children took into account the particularities of the participants and the demands of the speech act as well as the longstanding and changing affiliations between English and Spanish and their social meanings. Additionally, the distinct identities that the children might wish to enact in their co-construction of each conversation could result in switches that defied the expected correlation between switch and language.

The impact of the direction of the language shift was not totally lost. Bilinguals did not give up the ability to play upon the symbolic values linked to the languages in their repertoire, and these might also be employed to advantage, such as to add social meaning. But the bond between linguistic code and power/solidarity variables cannot be regarded as a rigid dichotomy that denies the language of solidarity a role in control. We cannot assume only English is used for enforcement, Spanish for endearment. Switches for both will occur in either language, but may differ in terms of their deployment. Cazden (1979) suggests that these differences are along the lines of the Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness forms selected to minimize face threatening acts, i.e., “positive politeness” forms are intimate, in-group ways such as mock chastising, whereas “negative
politeness” forms stress social distance and power by appealing to respect and deference. She predicted that bilingual “teachers will frequently code switch into Spanish for control purposes,” but that “Spanish is used for positive politeness, English for negative politeness” (Cazden 1979: 154–5), a hypothesis which I found corroborated in a Bronx classroom (Zentella 1981c).

The language of the switch cannot be taken as the only indicator of negative politeness. Cazden’s point that other linguistic features will co-occur to underscore one of the meanings was supported by two of Paca’s switches into Spanish after imperative requests. Both were directed at her two year old second cousin:

1 Victoria Jenine go over there! Jennie, vete pa(-ra a-)llá. (“Jennie, go over there”)

2 Give me a kiss o te pego. (“or I’ll hit you”)

In 1, the switch to non-exclamatory intonation features, an intimate form of address, and a plaintive beckoning tone co-occurred with the switch into Spanish to underscore the softening of the demand. In 2, the switch into Spanish was not accompanied by other features that suggested mitigation, such as a joking tone; the bald threat appeared to be serious despite the fact that it was in Spanish. Indeed, since the threat was in the language that Jennie knew best and the one which the girls’ mothers’ used for commanding them, the Spanish switch could be interpreted as an aggravation of the command. Nevertheless, Paca’s switch may not have been as aggravating as the alternative version in English — Dame un beso or I’ll hit you — would have been.

At six years of age, Paca was alternating Spanish and English with other linguistic features in ways that revealed her knowledge of the nuances of Spanish-English code switching. She and her friends had the ability to manipulate the multiple oppositions that the languages represented by calling upon the traditional connotations of each language or reversing them, by differentiating between negative and positive politeness switches, and by contrasting the languages regardless of the symbolic values attached to them.

Conclusion

Contrary to the attitude of those who label Puerto Rican code switching “Spanglish” in the belief that a chaotic mixture is being invented, English-Spanish switching is a creative style of bilingual communication that accomplishes important cultural and conversational work. Ethnographic and quantitative analyses of the switching done by el bloque’s school-girl network revealed that it is neither “an individualistic whim — merely stylistic and largely non-functional — or a pre-programmed community routine” (Auer 1984: 7). Auer reached the same conclusion based on Italian-German conversations among children after investigating the interaction signals and “contextualization cues” (Gumperz 1982) that accompany the sequencing of switches among speakers. Code switching is, fundamentally, a conversational activity via which speakers negotiate meaning with each other; like salsa dancers responding smoothly to each other’s intricate steps and turns. Among el bloque’s children, the construction of a NYPR bilingual identity was facilitated by switches that responded to parts of the micro context that were “on the spot” observables such as setting and speakers, and reflected “in the head” knowledge of how to manage conversations. Of particular importance were conversational strategies that allowed speakers to realign their footing, to clarify or emphasize their messages, and to control their interlocutors. Children manipulated conversational strategies in two languages in keeping with el bloque norms, the communicative objectives of the moment, individual styles, and the unequal positions of the majority and minority language groups in the national economy.

Disaggregating quantified group figures achieved two related objectives: specific code switching patterns were associated with different age and proficiency groups, and individual patterns of code switching were identified. Reliance on composite totals obscured individual patterns, some of which were age-related, while others were more linked to each speaker’s personal situation. In the group tallies, for example, English and Spanish code switches appeared to be equally favored. This finding turned out to be the result of sub-groups that balanced each other out, the younger Spanish-dominant speakers favoring Spanish switches slightly, and the older English-dominant children favoring English switches slightly. Each group preferred the opposite language for easy insertions such as object N/NPs and tags, which indicated that children were making an effort to use their weaker language to demonstrate their ability to switch, thus displaying an important badge of community membership.

The advantage of complementing age-group patterns with specifics about individual practices became obvious when strategies which predominated in younger or older girls’ speech were overshadowed by individual preferences. Each girl emphasized one or more strategies in accordance with her age, proficiency, and social status. Paca flexed her tiny muscles by code-switching for the aggravation of commands to have her demands heard by her caretakers, older friends, and younger charges. Lolita’s code-switched crutches filled in involuntary gaps, eliminating hesitations. This strategy
gave the appearance of more fluent speech – appropriate for the successful bilingual student that she was – while the content of her crutches projected the little-girl image fostered by her petite frame and protective family. The older girls’ switches for the double subjects common in AAVE and for narrative frame breaks identified Elii and Blanca as more influenced by community outsiders and more oriented to adult-style speech than their younger friends. Finally, Isabel’s switches enabled her to explain herself by compensating for her grammar and discourse difficulties, and helped her negotiate her way around her lower status. Each girl’s code-switching patterns constituted her unique contribution to what is, in Gal’s (1988) terms, the “political economy of code choice” of el bloque. In Gal’s view, code-switching practices are “not only conversational tools that maintain or change ethnic group boundaries and personal relationships, but also symbolic creations concerned with the construction of ‘self’ and ‘other’ within a broader political economy and historical context” (Gal 1988: 247).

Thus, in addition to serving as their badge of membership in el bloque, the girls’ code switching enabled each one to fulfill crucial communicative functions in ways that joined her to others similar in age or language profile, as well as to construct and display her unique self. Many factors beyond their control shaped the children’s linguistic output, but ultimately each one’s code switching was her own creation, a personal blending of her two languages and cultures.

On the periphery of a prestigious English monolingual world and the periphery of a stigmatized Spanish monolingual world, el bloque’s children lived on the border of the “borderlands” alluded to by Anzaldúa (1987), unwilling to relinquish their foothold in either. Their code switching was a way of saying that they belonged to both worlds, and should not be forced to give up one for the other. Switches into Spanish were attempts to touch home base, a resistance to being engulfed by English. As one 16 year old male explained it, “Sometimes I’m talking a long time in English and then I remember I’m Puerto Rican, lemme say something in Spanglish.” “Spanglish” moved them to the center of their bilingual world, which they continued to create and define in every interaction. Every time they said something in one language when they might just as easily have said it in the other, they were re-connecting with people, occasions, settings, and power configurations from their history of past interactions, and imprinting their own “act of identity” (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985) on that history. In the process, they called upon their knowledge – described in the next chapter – of how to exploit the similarities in two sets of grammatical rules to accomplish rule-governed code switching, challenging the view that their code switching, or “Spanglish,” was a chaotic jumble.

The linguistic and cultural insecurity expressed by a second generation NYPR in Sandra Maria Estéves’ poem, “Not Neither” (1984: 26), is all too common:

| Being Puertorriqueña americana | (“PR American”) |
| Born in the Bronx, not really jibara | (“PR peasant”) |
| Not really hablando bien | (“speaking well”) |
| But yet, not Gringa either | (“US American”) |
| Pero ni portorra, pero si portorra too . . . | (“But neither PR”) |

The narrator’s fear that she is “Not really hablando bien” reflects her internalization of the charge that her generation’s type of bilingualism is unacceptable, the mark of one who is neither Puerto Rican nor US American. In this chapter we refute the charges of linguistic incompetence by analyzing the “out of the mouth” factors that demonstrate the children’s knowledge of Spanish and English grammars. Some of what we refer to as “out of the mouth” may seem to be part of the “on the spot” observations since they are hearable and recordable and can be analyzed with precision; some are highly abstract and in some sense, “in the head.” They differ from the other two categories in that they rest on the structure of language and are more amenable to treatment by the analytic tools of the linguist. The selection of English or Spanish and the syntactic boundary of the switch point are “out of the mouth” factors because they define a code switch’s form, although speakers clearly called upon knowledge that was “in the head” of how to say what they switched, as discussed in chapter 5 (In the Head: Communicational Factors). Here, the focus is on the grammatical constraints observed by the children, and on the constituents they linked with English or Spanish. What looked so effortless actually required the complex coordination of social and linguistic rules, most of which are shared