Code-Switching and Symbolic Power in a Second-Grade Two-Way Classroom: A Teacher’s Motivation System Gone Awry

Deborah K. Palmer

University of Texas at Austin

Code-switching is a natural part of being bilingual. Yet two-way immersion programs are known to insist upon separation of languages, discouraging both teachers and students from drawing on both linguistic codes at once. Drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power, I examine one second-grade classroom in which the teacher instituted a motivation system to discourage code-switching. The children continue to code-switch as they find ways to draw upon all their linguistic resources. However, the system offers them a tool for manipulating symbolic power in the classroom. The conclusion agrees with recent research in encouraging teachers to allow conversational code-switches while expecting students to produce monolingual spoken and written texts where appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching, or moving easily between one linguistic code and another within a conversation or an utterance, is a natural part of being bilingual (Hornberger, 2005; Reyes, 2001; Zentella, 1997). Research on code-switching demonstrates that fluent bilinguals use code-switching as they use many other linguistic resources, drawing on both (or all) of the codes available to them in patterned and structured ways in order to express their meanings (Chung, 2006; Clyne, 2000; Myers-Scotton, 1995; Poplack, 2000). Code-switching serves users to claim membership and affiliation in multilingual communities (Anzaldúa, 1987), and provides valuable support to children learning a second language and literacy either at home or in school (Pérez, 2004; Zentella, 1997). Yet at the level of pragmatics, code-switching in some environments is considered inappropriate. Despite over half a century of study in the field of linguistics looking at the complexity of code-switching and demonstrating the richness of the practice (Clyne, 2000), many multilingual speakers believe that code-switching is a sign of linguistic weakness or inadequacy and many bilingual teachers work hard to fight code-switching when it occurs in their classrooms.

Deborah K. Palmer is Assistant Professor in bilingual/bicultural education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests include bilingual education policy and politics, two-way bilingual education, teacher leadership, and preparing teachers to build equitable learning spaces in diverse bilingual/multilingual classrooms.

Address correspondence to Deborah K. Palmer, University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station, Mailcode: D5700, Austin, TX 78712. E-mail: debpalmer@mail.utexas.edu
Two-way immersion bilingual programs are known for their insistence upon separation of languages; professional development and research for these programs admonish teachers to separate languages deliberately and systematically, by time of day, or day of the week, or subject area, or teacher. While research in bilingual education consistently claims that teachers are best served providing students with monolingual examples and refraining from code-switching or translating during presentation of academic material (Legarreta, 1979), the questions of what language children use, and what languages are allowed in the classroom during informal interaction, are much more open. In the two-way literature, teachers are encouraged to develop ways to help their students “remember” to stay in the “target language” at any given time. The rationale behind this is that students will better develop each of their languages if they are forced to depend solely upon one language at a time. It is assumed that in general code-switching among learners in dual-language settings is done not for social or pragmatic reasons but because the students do not have full command of the “target language” (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000).

In addition, the battle against code-switching is an attempt to respond to the very real issue in U.S. two-way and other bilingual classrooms of students’ tendency to move towards English. Lindholm-Leary’s (2001) research documents a tendency among bilingual students by the upper elementary grades to choose English over Spanish, regardless of their primary or home language. This is supported elsewhere as well (Potowski, 2004). Given that students in two-way classrooms are all expected to develop bilingualism and biliteracy, and given the extent to which English serves as the language of power in the U.S., it does seem that teachers’ options are limited in terms of encouraging their students to maintain and deepen their hold on the minority language.

One option two-way literature encourages teachers to try is to develop some form of motivation system to encourage the use of the “target” language (Cloud et al., 2000). This paper takes a look at one second-grade two-way immersion classroom in which the teacher has instituted a motivation system to encourage students not to code-switch. At the beginning of the day, the teacher puts the first five letters of all students’ names onto the whiteboard in the front of the classroom. Students, or their classmates, have the power at any time throughout the day to erase a letter if they have slipped and used some English during Spanish time. Enforcement is not usually needed during English time, although the system is still in place. There are no rewards or consequences built into this system other than the visual reminder of one’s status.

In this paper I will use ethnographic discourse analysis to take a look at the way this system operates to influence students’ language use or behaviors in the classroom. It appears to do little to influence their patterns of code choice, while there are certainly influences on their behaviors and interaction patterns. Namely, they discover ways to manipulate the system to assert what Bourdieu (1991) would term “symbolic power” over one another for a wide range of reasons as they are learning in their diverse classroom to navigate the complex societal discourses of race, class, language, culture, and any number of other status or identity markers that they encounter in the world around them.

It is not my intention to put down either the teacher in this study or two-way immersion education. However, I find that issues of power, as exhibited in the dynamics of the children in this classroom, are rarely discussed in two-way literature, and this jeopardizes the ultimate success of these programs. My ultimate question, to which I have no satisfactory answer but about which this paper will ponder, is about the battle for space for a minority language and culture in
U.S. society. Given that when individuals or groups are placed in subordinate positions in the classroom they tend to suffer academic as well as social/emotional consequences (Cohen, 1994; Garcia, 2005), what can a teacher do, in a classroom with English-speaking middle-class students present, to counterbalance the cultural and linguistic dominance these students are accustomed to enjoying, and to make spaces for minority-language speakers to learn and to thrive?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Code-switching will be here defined very broadly as the use of more than one language within a single utterance, regardless of the level of integration between the languages. There is a distinction in the literature between code-switching and “borrowing,” also referred to as “transference,” in which a single lexical item appears in a sentence or utterance otherwise entirely offered in one language (Clyne, 2000). Even a monolingual speaker can engage in the borrowing or transference of a single term from another language, while speakers must be bilingual and thus familiar with the grammars of both languages in order to engage in code-switching, which draws on both languages’ phonologies, syntaxes, and morphologies in patterned ways (Poplack, 2000). There is some debate in the field about how to distinguish code-switching from borrowing (Pfaff, 1979). Participants in this study engaged in both practices, and did not distinguish between them either in terms of their own speech patterns or their monitoring of others’ speech patterns. Pfaff (1979, p. 296) uses the term “mixing” to refer generally to both practices, arguing that “the categories are inherently squishy.” As this paper addresses the impacts of asking children to closely monitor one another’s switching patterns, rather than the patterns themselves, I have decided to sidestep this debate, and to use the term my participating teacher used (i.e., “code-switching”) to refer to both.

Provided all members of a conversation share linguistic background, there is no trouble, or communication breakdown, caused by code-switches. Code-switching is a source of trouble only when one party is not privy to the meanings of the words or phrases used in all languages. Speakers will often repair a code-switch by repeating their utterance in the language that listeners will comprehend—in fact, in some situations, such as when raising a child to understand and draw on both languages, a translated repair is part of the process of code-switching itself, and is termed the “emphatic” function of code-switching (Zentella, 1997).

In our society, where Spanish suffers the “symbolic dominance” (Bourdieu, 1991) of English, a code-switch from Spanish into English can appear as a strategic move to maximize linguistic capital. The speaker is essentially asserting superiority because “I know English and you do not.” While not on the same broad societal scale, Spanish speakers can also assert symbolic dominance over English speakers in some more limited contexts. For instance, when bilingual students use Spanish in the more public settings of Medgar Evers School (the school under study), such as the lunchroom or the playground, students from English monolingual classrooms have been known to take quick offense, presumably because their own lack of understanding will exclude them and lead them to feel subordinate.

A little idiosyncratically perhaps, I will also extend the definition of code-switching to include the use of a nonsanctioned language in the classroom, even if the speaker stays exclusively in that nonsanctioned language for his/her entire utterance. In two-way classrooms, even though all members of the class are expected to be bilingual and therefore capable of understanding
phrases that include both languages, a code-switch is marked, or noticed, and often deemed a mistake or error. This is because of the common policy of language separation. Two-way immersion education developed out of the French immersion tradition in Canada (Genesee, 1994; Snow, 1987). Begun in Quebec in the 1960s to promote French as a minority language among English-speaking Canadians, these programs teach French by using the language exclusively with children in school. They teach language by teaching content areas in the language, and they adhere to a strict separation of languages whereby only French is used during French instruction. In this way, proponents argue, students are given the opportunity to more fully develop the target language. These two aspects of immersion education have been carried into the two-way bilingual immersion programs in the U.S. in the past two decades, so that in order to be considered two-way immersion, a program is expected to teach language through content instruction, and to have some sort of mechanism for separating the two (or more) languages of instruction (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2008; Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Lindholm, 1990). Therefore, when a class member speaks in English during a period deemed “Spanish time,” whether for a single word, a phrase, an utterance, or an entire conversation, this is seen as a problem.

Such strict separation of language runs counter to much of the emerging literature on the phenomenon of biliteracy. It is this aspect of Dual-Language Education that Reyes (2001) rejects, asserting that such an unnatural separation will not allow natural bilingual language development, and will hinder the development of either language. Pérez’s (2004) ethnographic study of the development of two two-way immersion programs in San Antonio, Texas, explores this issue. While the teachers at the two schools for the most part maintain single-language instruction for academic content areas, they eventually decide to embrace the mixing of languages that is a natural part of their students’ (and in many cases their own) linguistic heritage for social interactions and to allow their students to draw on both Spanish and English while learning and expressing themselves in the classroom (Pérez, 2004). In an ethnographic analysis of a two-way school, Fitts (2006) asserts that a policy of language separation or “parallel monolingualism” will not curb students’ tendencies to explore the connections between, and power/status affordances of, the different codes available to them. Hornberger (2005) draws similar conclusions in her analysis of a Puerto Rican school community in Philadelphia, asserting that making space in classroom literacy practices for divergent language varieties and simultaneous, criss-crossed language and literacy acquisition allows better for the inclusion of students’ voices in the curriculum, pedagogy, and social relations of schooling. In an examination of young Spanish/English bilingual students’ patterns of code-switching in school, Reyes (2004) found that for children—just as for adults—code-switching was about communicative competence and about maintaining a sense of control in a conversation, not about lack of language proficiency.

The children in these studies all practice code-switching as a normal part of membership in their linguistic communities. It would appear counterproductive to expend energies in the classroom fighting this practice; these researchers advocate instead developing teaching practices that draw explicitly on children’s bilingual language competencies.

While more and more researchers are asserting the value of allowing a mix of languages in the classroom, there remains a tremendous amount of conflict around this issue among classroom teachers. While some will themselves mix languages during instruction (as they are a part of the same or similar linguistic communities as their students), others will vigorously correct their students’ language mixing. Certainly there is a need for more research to explore the implications
of separation of languages, seen as so crucial in dual-language contexts, in the development of bilingual/biliterate competency.

In this analysis, I will first reinforce previous research that demonstrates that children engage in code-switching with intention in ways similar to adults as they maneuver their way through the complex world of their classroom and construct their own senses of self. Then I will go a step further to show that a teacher’s well-intentioned system designed to discourage code-switching, while having little impact on students’ switching patterns, can have unintended consequences.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This analysis is grounded in a sociocultural view of language, backed by the theories of Bakhtin (1998) and Bourdieu (1991). My underlying assumption is that each member of this community simultaneously constructs and is constructed by the discourses that surround him/her, and such communally constructed discourses define not only the group dynamic but also the individual identities of group members. Language not only constitutes social reality but is simultaneously constituted by it. Thus, the discourses that constitute and are constituted by the individual students and teacher in this class provide at once a tool that they use to coconstruct and to understand their social worlds, and a window through which I as a researcher can gain insight into their processes of doing so. Discourses for me therefore, as for Bourdieu (1991), are distinct from languages in that they are:

. . . stylistically marked both in their production, in so far as each speaker fashions an idiolect from the common language, and in their reception, in so far as each recipient helps to produce the message which he perceives and appreciates by bringing to it everything that makes up his singular and collective experience. (p. 39)

The construct of discourses as I will use it here is richly textured, incorporating language and all of the sociocultural and structural dimensions of our attempts to communicate with one another.

Among the discourses that populate the classroom under study are larger societal conversations occurring in the state of California as this study was taking place, conversations that children overhear at home and in public settings and that shape their relations to each other along such societal categories as race, class, national origin, gender, etc. These include the move towards English Only schooling for language-minority children, the struggle over affirmative action, and recent attempts to deny public services to undocumented immigrants, among other things. Assumptions in their community about the process and value of literacy and biliteracy acquisition impact the children’s approaches to school tasks and to one another’s strengths and weaknesses as readers, writers, and oral communicators. Curricular discourses also impact the children in their classroom, as they learn about mathematics and science, and take different perspectives on history and social issues. Childhood also comes with its own set of discourses.

Taking a closer look at the question of children’s language choices in the classroom then, it is my belief that the students’ language choices are impacted by their perceptions of the value of their two languages within their community, and of their own value within the classroom—in other words, by their own understandings of all of these discourses and their place within them. In an effort to unpack this valuing process, I appeal to Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of “symbolic
power.” Bourdieu grounds an analysis of the connection between language and power in the assumption that “the linguistic relation of power is not completely determined by the prevailing linguistic forces alone . . . the whole social structure is present in each interaction.” Thus, speakers engage in conversations from specific social positions, and these are imbued with status and power; these positions inevitably influence the way that talk will occur, the messages conveyed, and the choices speakers make. He further explains that “The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speakers’ linguistic competences . . . in other words, on the capacity of the various agents involved in the exchange to impose the criteria of appreciation most favorable to their own products.” Thus individuals will use whatever linguistic or other tools are available to them to maximize their own capital—to position themselves most favorably (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 67).

METHODS/DATA SOURCES

In order to understand the power dynamics among the students in this two-way immersion setting, I use a form of discourse analysis that draws on ethnography while still examining closely the talk among class members. Called in various contexts “ethnographic discourse analysis” (Freeman, 1998), “sociolinguistic ethnography” (Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001), or “culturally contextualized conversation analysis” (Moerman, 1988, p. 5), the main idea behind this methodology is the fusion of ethnographic observation and interview with close discourse analysis. Each informs the other; while much can be learned about the larger context from close examination of a small snippet of conversation (Schegloff, 1991), at the same time the small snippet of conversation is only well understood when seen within the larger context and culture. In this case, the ethnographic interview and observation data inform my interpretation of the discourse data, while at the same time the discourse data informs my understanding of the ways that power and language interact in the larger context.

For this analysis, I draw on discourse, interview, and observational data from a year-long study conducted in the second-grade two-way immersion classroom in a multiethnic, urban elementary school in Northern California. Having previously been a part-time member of the staff at the school, I entered the site as a participant/observer for the school year 2002–2003. Through the course of the school year, I audio recorded a total of 22 sessions, and video recorded a total of 11 sessions, each between 45 minutes and 3 hours long. I balanced my visits equally between Spanish and English times, and captured the children interacting in a variety of formats and settings. In addition, I spent at least 3 hours per week volunteering and observing in the classroom and throughout the school. I recorded all observations, both discourse-recording sessions and volunteer sessions, in detailed ethnographic field notes. Although my unit of analysis was the entire classroom, I chose six focal students to help focus the data to answer my research questions, and to represent as best I could the diversity of communicative experiences in the classroom. In addition, during the spring, I conducted interviews with seven families from the two-way second-grade class, and eight staff members in various roles in the school, including both second-grade two-way teachers.

The classroom that was the focus of this study was a self-contained classroom of 20 children. A little under half of the students received free/reduced lunch, a common indicator of low socioeconomic status. Eight children spoke only English at home, nine spoke mainly Spanish at
home, and three came from bilingual households. Their main classroom teacher, Ms. Melanie (a pseudonym, as all names henceforth will be), was a native English speaker whose Spanish was very strong, but who had a detectable accent. She was in her sixth year of teaching. The year of the study, the class had a Friday-only English teacher, Ms. Emma, who had some understanding of Spanish but taught entirely in English. She was in her fifth year of teaching. The school’s two-way program was a strand program, with one classroom out of two or three at every grade level designated a two-way classroom, and it followed the 90:10 program model. This meant that at the second grade they attempted to maintain 70% of children’s instruction in Spanish, and 30% in English.

In this classroom, for all the reasons explained above, code-switching during class time is generally (supposedly) viewed as an error, and several levels of teacher treatment have been imposed to help children remember to stay in the correct language at any given time. To begin with, there is a language model for each language in this classroom. The English teacher, Ms. Emma, consistently uses English and asks children to respond to her in English; the Spanish teacher, Ms. Melanie, consistently uses Spanish in communication with the children, unless there is a specialist, like the science, garden, or cooking teacher, or the librarian in charge. Next, there is the system of letters, an incentive program in which students begin each day with the first five letters of their name on the board in the front of the room, and each time they forget and code-switch into the inappropriate language, they are expected to erase one of their letters. Classmates are also allowed, using an honor system, to erase one another’s letters. Parents are kept informed about students’ letters status on a regular basis. (Aside from this regular update to parents, there are no other consequences, positive or negative, involved with students’ letters.) Finally, correction of code-switches is allowed by anyone in the classroom. Ms. Melanie has been known to correct code-switches baldly and without redress in whole-class or small-group lessons. Students are invited to help classmates monitor language choice as well. Code-switching certainly still occurs in this classroom despite these efforts. And because all members of the class (except the English teacher Ms. Emma) are bilingual, code-switching rarely causes a breakdown in communication; thus code-switches are not a trouble in need of repair. However, they are indeed often (not always) perceived as an error and open to correction.

Among the research questions with which I designed this study was the question: How do members of this class, both teachers and students, manipulate the various discourses available to them to maximize linguistic capital as they engage in conversation in this classroom? This is an effort to address at the local level of the conversation the larger research question, How does linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) manifest in this two way immersion (TWI) setting? One of the issues that I uncovered in the earliest stages of data analysis as salient to this question was code-switching. This article begins my attempt to pick apart the dynamics of code-switching in this no-code-switch zone TWI classroom.

In fusing ethnography with discourse analysis, my process of data analysis for this study was (and continues to be) recursive. I would begin with the ethnographic field notes and interview transcriptions in order to identify larger themes and pinpoint sections of the discourse data worthy of closer examination. Transcribing these sections would provide me with greater insights, as would my subsequent analysis of the transcriptions. With this I would return to the larger ethnographic data for confirmation. Inevitably I would identify further passages that I wished to examine more closely, and the cycle would begin anew.
Findings

As explained above, the literature on code-switching distinguishes between a true code-switch and a “borrowed” or “transferred” word, a single word from L2 that is not integrated into a sentence otherwise drawn entirely from L1. Such single words can be borrowed when students do not know the word in L1, and even when students do not fully speak L2; borrowing, unlike actual code-switching, can indicate limitations in speakers’ knowledge of the two languages. Given the stated rationale for restricting code-switching in TWI (i.e., to promote thorough learning of each language), perhaps it should be borrowing, rather than code-switching per se, that is restricted. However, there appeared to be other factors determining whether or not students were corrected for their language switches, and this distinction did not appear relevant to the participants in this setting. The use of a single word in English was treated as the equivalent to a full phrase or sentence code-switch, and both were forbidden. In other words, students and teacher at times felt the need to correct them, invoked the letters system in response to them, and overall viewed them as problematic.

Despite the multiple ways this classroom is set up to discourage code-switching, students still switch liberally between their languages. Here are a few examples, both of those that seem to occur because a speaker does not know the word in the language of instruction—usually single-word borrowing—and true code-switches that a speaker appears to make for a purposeful reason such as emphasis, to align with a speech partner, or to identify themselves in a specific way.

Like many children in the class, particularly English-dominant students, White middle-class Rose switches frequently into her native English to fill in words she does not know in Spanish; i.e., she frequently borrows from English during Spanish conversations. This example occurred during a free playtime on a Spanish instructional day. Rose is building with blocks with working-class immigrant Spanish-speaker Braulio and biracial White/African American middle-class English speaker Nancy:

| Rose:          | Mini-casas? Aquí son casas (. . .) Pero puede tocar éste o va a a . . . [a . . va a kill. Braulio: [eee! eeee! (noises) Braulio: A matar? Nancy: Hah ha ha, [a matar bloques! Rose: [a matar a ti. A matar a ti! Si los village pers- personas o el rey o reina. Este es si una tidal wave va a um a la palacio o el village, puedes tocar a una boton ah que está aquí, y . . . no—y va a a hacer un force field. | Mini-houses? Here are houses (. . .) but can you touch this or is it going to . . . to . . . going to kill to kill (Sp)? Ha ha ha, to kill blocks! To kill you. To kill you! If the village persons or the king or queen. This is if a tidal wave goes to um to the palace or the village, you can touch a button that’s here and no—and it’s going to make a force field. |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

(Transcript, 12/19/02)

While English speakers commonly used English words when speaking in Spanish, and occasionally Spanish speakers also used English words while mainly speaking Spanish, borrowing rarely occurred in the other direction. Spanish speakers rarely drew on Spanish words when speaking in English. This is likely because, while nearly all speakers of Spanish are also speakers
of English in this setting, the opposite is not true: there are plenty of English speakers at this school who speak no Spanish, including the children’s Friday teacher Ms. Emma. This phenomenon provides a powerful and concrete illustration of the higher status of English, in our society and in this classroom. English speakers feel they can use their language with confidence even in the presence of native Spanish speakers, while Spanish speakers rarely use Spanish to fill in the gaps in their knowledge of English, even when in a group made up of entirely Spanish speakers. In fact, the only clear example in the data of a student using Spanish when he doesn’t know the English words involves a student new to the program and to the country and one of the few people in the school who do not speak English, who responded to Ms. Emma during a whole-class English lesson with an entire extended utterance in Spanish. No one bothered to translate his answer; it appears in fact as if no one heard or understood him, including Ms. Emma (Field Note, 10/7/02). Apart from this, Spanish-speaking students did not generally draw on their Spanish vocabulary when expressing themselves in English; they appeared to choose instead to describe or explain their missing words in English, paraphrasing or rephrasing to fill in gaps. Eduardo illustrates this with the following example that occurred during a garden lesson with an English-only instructor:

(The instructor has asked students to list fruits.) Eduardo can’t think of the name for his fruit in English, and so he describes it: “that little purple one?” The instructor guesses, “plum?” And he cries, “Yes!”

(Field Notes, 5/2/03)

As do other bilingual speakers, the students in Ms. Melanie’s class draw on both their codes in order to best express themselves, particularly among the children who are Spanish dominant and primary bilinguals. This sort of code-switch, which is the variety described in greatest detail in research literature (Zentella, 1997), seems so natural that when it occurs it often goes unnoticed, even by these students who are being explicitly trained to notice. There are many examples of such code-switches in the data, during both official “English time” and official “Spanish time.” Here are a couple that actually cross the language-group lines, in which children appear to draw on their bilingual resources in order to reach out to their classmates in the other primary language group.

Spanish-speaking Latino Oswaldo code-switches into English as he is helping English-speaker and African American student Aaron with his math assignment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aaron: [Para ca—para caramo más cercana está, este cerca de setenta. o de ochenta. Setenta y ocho está más cerca de. . .]</th>
<th>For wha—for wh?? Nearer is, is near to seventy. or to eighty. Seventy eight is nearer to. . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oswaldo: Fijate acá ‘ira. You have the idea.</td>
<td>Watch here look</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aaron is struggling with the math, and Oswaldo tries many ways to help him feel more confident. I would argue that his use of English in this line is among those efforts, aligning himself with Aaron by using a language he knows Aaron will be more comfortable with.

The following excerpt from my field notes offers another example. While the whole exchange presented below is in Spanish (and thus not strictly a code-switch), it is important to
note that the students have been playing entirely in English up to this point, so their use of Spanish is jarring and definitely qualifies as a shift:

It’s choice (play) time. James, Jonathan, Eric, and Daniel are playing again with the linker cubes. (Eric is a Spanish speaker; the others are English speakers.) Jonathan teases James by pointing at Eric’s structure (basically a cube of cubes) and saying “Es mejor que James’s” [“That’s better than James’s”]. James, slightly offended, responds, “¿Por qué? Solo es cuadrado.” [Why? It’s just a square.] And Eric continues the teasing by saying, “Yo sé pero por eso es mejor.” [I know but that’s why it’s better.]

(Field Notes, 12/20/03)

White middle-class Jonathan chooses to use Spanish during an English play time, perhaps to align himself with the high-status Eric, who is a native Spanish speaker and recent immigrant from Central America, or perhaps so that his put-down of a fellow (also White middle-class) student will not be overheard by the English-speaking teacher, Ms. Emma. James responds in Spanish, perhaps to prove that his own bilingual abilities are on par with Jonathan’s, or perhaps just because Jonathan has set a tone. Although in this case as in most, to a certain extent we are speculating on what the motivations are behind these code-switches, one thing is certain: There is intention behind them.

It is clear that code-switching is occurring in this “no-code-switch” zone. But of course, nothing is perfect, especially in a second-grade classroom full of learning, growing children. Does this imply that teachers should not even try to curb the code-switches in their two-way classrooms, and should perhaps encourage students to draw on all their linguistic resources throughout the day? Many would argue thus, pointing out that forbidding code-switching and insisting on separation of languages merely discourages bilingual children from drawing on their bilingual resources as they navigate new material (Reyes, 2001). However, as with any situation of power imbalance, doing nothing is not neutral in this setting; strong evidence suggests that in an American context, doing nothing about language shift will result in an inevitable shift towards English (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Potowski, 2004). The data from this study support this, and yet at the same time these data imply that in addition to doing little to deter language shift towards English, such enforcement of language separation actually serves to offer children more ways to assert power over one another.

Most uncorrected code-switches occur during peer-only interactions. Peers appear to be vigilant with one another at some times, and lax at other times, ranging broadly—but not randomly. Students choose to act on their power over their classmates by calling them on a code-switch if this choice will gain them linguistic capital, or if there is some reason they wish to cause their classmate to lose face (like, for example, vengeance). Students are far from impartial in their judgments of one another. Note Rose’s reaction to her Spanish-speaking friend Braulio’s comfortable use of Spanish during free play time on an English instructional day. Braulio and Rose are playing together with blocks:

Braulio has spoken lots in Spanish, especially using mira [look] and otra vez [again] as he creates towers and topples them, calling over to boys in other groups. Finally Rose turns to him and says,
“Why are you saying that? Why do you keep on saying that? Umm, you supposed to speak English?” He switches to English, but then distracted by his play he again slips into “Otra vez!” and she asks again, “Why you keep on saying that?” And eventually he denies that he’s used Spanish, trying to explain that he wasn’t saying “mira” he was saying “yeahh!” (He does talk to Daniel nearby, another English speaker, in Spanish).

(Field Note, 5/2/03)

There are plenty of examples of Rose using Spanish with Braulio, and plenty of instances when she slips into English during a Spanish playtime, as she does in the first example above. I would assert that it is not Braulio’s use of Spanish, but rather his persistence in talking with other boys rather than focus his attention on her that irks Rose on this occasion. For her to come out and state the real issue, that she wants him to play with her, would be too great a risk of loss of face. But she takes little risk to invoke the code-switch rule with him. In fact, to a certain extent, it works, as the result is an extended conversation about what he had “really” been saying.

To further illustrate this, let’s look at two groups working on the same project during a morning of Spanish-language centers. The groups are working together to draw a large poster-size map of North America, looking for reference at a map drawn by the teacher that is hanging on the chalkboard.

The first is a group of three students, Rose, Roberto, and Eduardo. Rose is a middle-class White child, while both Roberto and Eduardo come from working-class Mexican immigrant backgrounds. They work contentedly together, completing their project in good time and with no conflicts. Meanwhile, they code-switch constantly! Here is a transcript of the very beginning of the video recording of the episode:

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Eduardo: Este □
Rose: Oh mira, lo hizo backwards, Oh man! Yo voy a hacer como estos son los waves aquí y éste es un XX es como los waves están (gestures moving inland; she and Roberto are working together on the Pacific Ocean, drawing Hawaii and indicating water with waves).□
Eduardo: (who has been labeling the lakes in the Sierra) Oh… I’m done with the lakes.□
Roberto: D’aaa. Está surrounded por agua. ¡Aquí puede estar un volcano!□
Eduardo: ^¡No hagas eso!□
Roberto: =iNo hagas eso!□
Eduardo: (laughter)
Eduardo: Y acá ¿por qué hicieron eso?□(indicating figures including a surfer R&R have drawn in the middle of the Pacific)
Roberto: ¿Porque aquí es agua?□
Eduardo: ¿Y?□
R: Aguita, aguit.□

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After this point, Eduardo begins working on something else (putting waves in the Gulf of Mexico), and Rose and Roberto return to their work in the Pacific. There is a smooth almost dance-like quality to the way in which these three children interact. They are almost always looking down
at their large map, and at the same time they appear very aware of their classmates’ presence and actions. They lean over one another, take markers from each other, and walk around one another. Each is individually engaged with his/her coloring and embellishing, and yet they are paying just enough attention to each other’s actions to step in when they disagree. In all instances of disagreement, however, the children are able to quickly and easily resolve or move on. No arguments appear to disturb their collaborative dance. For example, both Rose and Eduardo react immediately when Roberto appears poised to add a volcano to the middle of the Pacific, with Rose’s “¡Noooo!” followed immediately by Eduardo’s “¡No hagas eso!” Roberto’s subsequent laughter diffuses that particular situation, and he agreeably abandons his idea (it is questionable whether he ever truly intended to draw a volcano). Then, Eduardo has issues with the way Rose and Roberto have drawn surfers in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Roberto offers him a tentative explanation, i.e., because there is water there, which Eduardo rejects as insufficient (“¿y?”). But the tension appears to fade, as Eduardo lets this issue drop without further comment and goes back to his own work.

Throughout the episode, in fact, all three children appear to banter playfully, color happily, and play and chat together. And never once in the entire 15 minutes do they complain about each other’s code-switching, invoke the no-code-switch rule, or even correct themselves in their use of English. English is used in this passage in grammatically appropriate ways. Rose’s use of “backwards” fits the sentence; Roberto’s “surrounded” fills in a blank for which there is not a common equivalent single word in Spanish (the structure in Spanish would more likely be “Tiene agua por todos lados!” it has water on all sides.”) Their code-switching flows smoothly, and because they are all familiar with both codes, they have no trouble communicating in this way. This follows a pattern I noted in much of the data; when children are working or playing smoothly together, when they are relaxed and appear happy, their speech crosses more frequently from code to code, and they tend not to remark upon the switches nor to problematize them. Because there appears to be no reason for the children to assert symbolic dominance over one another, there appears to be no motivation for them to invoke the no-code-switch rule.

The next group is Nancy, Marcos, Braulio, and Douglas. Nancy is a middle-class biracial African American and White child; Marcos and Braulio are Spanish-dominant working-class children of Mexican immigrants; Douglas is an English-dominant working-class Latino student whose parents use both English and Spanish at home. Unlike the first group, these four students do have a major conflict in the process of completing their map. And in contrast to the first group, as soon as this conflict occurs they begin to note code-switches religiously, particularly when Douglas, the student who appears to have caused the problem (and who certainly takes the blame for it in the group dynamic), uses English. Here is an excerpt from the group’s conversation:

(Douglas and Braulio are scribbling waves all over the page below the states.)

Braulio: (noticing that D has scribbled on the place where Mexico should go) ¡Pero México! Douglas, ¡Mexico!

Douglas: ¡Ooh!

Nancy: ¡Que hiciste, Douglas!

Douglas: ¡LOS hicimos!

Braulio: Yo estaba haciendo así, mira.

Nancy: ¡Pero México! Solo chiquito XX... no ASÍ! (waving arms like giant marker strokes) Uhhhh. XX Douglas.

XXXX Gracias, Douglas.
Braulio, who is very proud of his Mexican heritage, is horrified by Douglas’s mistake. Nancy, a child with a tendency to take control of situations (and a predilection towards perfectionism), expresses utter exasperation with Douglas. This is not the first time this group has found itself repairing Douglas’s mistakes; there is a developing pattern to these group dynamics. Although Braulio had been drawing waves right alongside Douglas and had essentially instructed him to draw where he did, by the end of this passage, he and Nancy have positioned Douglas as the owner of the mistake. Douglas’s next utterance gives his classmates a perfect opening for retaliation; it is in English:

Douglas: (softly) I don’t care.
Nancy: Inglés. (points at Braulio) ¿Oíste? English. Did you hear?
Braulio: Sí (runs to erase D’s letter) Yes.
Nancy: (points at Marcos) ¿Oíste? Did you hear?
Marcos: Sí Yes.

After Douglas has his letter erased, he fades into the background of this group; they physically exclude him, ignore his words, and take care that he does not get a marker again. His classmates have asserted symbolic dominance (Bourdieu, 1991) over him, in part by erasing his letter, and his low status in the group continues to be enacted both by his classmates’ actions and his own. Douglas moves in and out of the video picture, but does not contribute as the group negotiates the completion of the project:

Nancy: Tu puedes escribir con marcador, You can write with marker
porque . . .
Braulio, no no, haz todo este ‘ira, Braulio, no no, do all this look
(points to sample map)

N: No, cuando . . .
B: (reaches for N’s marker)
M: Hazlo con marcador, Braulio.
N: Sí, ponla . . . en marcador?
Braulio, write, write with a
M: Braulio, escribe, escribe con lápiz allí y allí, pencil here and here,
en México, de todos modos
in Mexico, anyway.

N: Ok, pone azul en California. (6)
M: No no.
B: ¿Qué?
M: Um, haz el espacio primero. Haz todo este
‘ira, (walks to front of room, points to
sample map) Todo esto.
B: Ok
N: ¿Qué color vamos a escribir esto? (pointing at
Canada with her marker, asking M)

The three children discuss which color to use for each section of the map, and who will work on what, while Douglas says nothing. Eventually, Braulio begins working on fixing their map, erasing Douglas’s waves so that he can draw Mexico in. By erasing Douglas’s work, he further
asserts symbolic dominance over him. Positioning Douglas as the source of the problem and himself as part of the solution, he sarcastically states:

Douglas’s (inaudible) response is apparently in English, prompting Nancy to again erase a letter from his name on the board. Her firm and angry gesture, putting the marker down and stomping off to the board, reinforces the retaliatory nature of her response. Immediately after this, when Douglas inadvertently moves too close to Braulio and blocks his line of sight to the sample map he is copying, Braulio acts as though Douglas were nothing more than a barrier between him and the completion of his work:

Thus, Douglas’s code-switching during this group project is problematic for his peers, and they erase his letters a total of three times during this activity. The use of erasing letters in order to retaliate against Douglas for his error on their group project is evident in both instances in which Nancy declares, “Inglés!” using the same tone of frustration with which she demanded, “Qué hiciste, Douglas?” The contrast between this group and the previous illustrates that the mechanism for correcting code-switches stands as a tool for students in need of a way to exert power over their peers. In the absence of conflict, students appear to find no reason to correct one another. However, in any sort of power struggle, a code-switch and its correction become strategic battle moves.

White English-speaking middle-class Nick provides further examples of this dynamic. On several occasions, Nick invokes the no-code-switch rule and attempts to erase classmates’ letters. Once, he erases a letter from his own name and from Laura’s name, because (according to him) they were both speaking English at their table. Laura, a bilingual child of Mexican immigrants, is furious with him. She admits to having said one English word, but does not feel she merits an erased letter. She enlists the help of the other two boys at the table (she is the only girl), and they both agree with her: Evidently, they do not feel that borrowing is a true code-switch. Yet, Nick persists, seeming to bask in the power he has to erase others’ letters. Laura even goes to the board to put back her letter, with him calling out to her as she goes, “Ms. Melanie
dice que no se puede escribir las letras otra vez!” [Ms. Melanie says that you can’t write the letters again!] There is no resolution to the question of whether one-word switches do or do not count as code-switches.

On another occasion it is his best friend, Jonathan, whom Nick targets, erasing his letter for having spoken one English word during Spanish time as the class is lining up for lunch. While their mutual friend Daniel (also White and middle-class) works to try to ascertain whether Jonathan knows how to say the word in Spanish (evidently having heard from Ms. Melanie that using English to replace an unknown word—i.e., borrowing—was acceptable), Jonathan is furious with Nick. Like Laura, he angrily goes to rewrite his letter on the board when his classmate is impervious to his denial of guilt. Nick is evidently taking full advantage of the opportunity to assert symbolic dominance over his classmates, stretching the rules in places of ambiguity such as the difference between a borrowed word and a true language switch.

In both cases, as in the groupwork dynamic analyzed above, Nick’s behaviors and the reactions of his classmates clearly draw the motivation system into a realm that the teacher never intended, invoking negative interactions among children and adding an unnecessary burden of values to children’s spur-of-the-moment oral language choices. Children discover they have a tool for the manipulation of power: In order to symbolically dominate classmates within the constraints of the teacher’s own management system, they need only catch their classmates switching to the nonsanctioned language.

Furthermore, to the extent that teachers’ strong enforcement of language separation has any impact, it seems as though children are being encouraged to develop, not bilingual competencies, but rather dual monolingualism. In other words, while bilingual children are able to move freely between two codes and draw on the resources of two cultures to communicate across borders and boundaries, occupying a liminal “contact zone” (Pratt, 1999), children in this learning setting are encouraged in a number of ways to stay within certain boundaries at any given time. Able to leap from region to region, but discouraged from lingering in the middle, they are learning a very different form of bilingualism from that which is practiced in the homes and communities of the language-minority children in the classroom.

Interestingly, parent interviews told a very different story about children’s bilingual pragmatics. Braulio’s parents, for example, spoke of the rudeness of some of their nieces’ and nephews’ moving into English when in the presence of Spanish-only speakers, particularly elders, visiting from Mexico: “It’s rude that . . . (a visitor) doesn’t know much English, sometimes they’re talking, talking, and talking, and one says, ‘hey what are they saying to me.’ [Es feo que . . . no sabe mucho inglés, a veces ellos están habla, habla, y habla, y uno dice pues qué me está diciendo.]” Yet Braulio’s behaviors with elders and respect for his heritage language and culture are far more appropriate, they explained, and they attribute this to the two-way immersion bilingual program. English-speaking James’s mother describes her pride in her children, both participants in the TWI program, when walking by some employees speaking Spanish at a favorite Mexican restaurant: Her children had been able to understand their joke and laugh along. The parent interviews in general imply that despite the artificial separation of languages in the classroom and the lack of opportunities to practice bilingual pragmatics, children gain skills as bilinguals and respect for the target language and culture in the Medgar Evers TWI program that they are able to carry with them beyond the classroom.
CONCLUSIONS

By examining closely the conversations among two groups of children working on a groupwork project during “Spanish” time, I have attempted to show that the motivation system put in place by this two-way immersion teacher is not working in the ways intended. The children find ways within the supposed monolingual norm to draw on all of their linguistic resources to assist them with the task at hand, and to simultaneously carry on work manipulating linguistic capital and constructing themselves and their place within the classroom; both groups code-switch throughout their work time. One group, evidently in an effort to further spurn a socially isolated student, appeals multiple times to the teacher’s motivation system; while for the other group the code-switching is hardly noticed. The motivation system appears to have little impact upon the students’ propensity to code-switch, while it offers certain students a tool with which to exert power over classmates, manipulating their symbolic capital within the classroom. This assertion is backed up by other data throughout the study, wherein code-switching in informal conversations is common and only occasionally problematic. Yet students in this classroom regularly produce monolingual written and presentational work, so we can assume that in general they are quite capable of functioning in either of their two languages.

The well-founded fear expressed by many bilingual educators, particularly those in integrated settings such as two-way classrooms, is that without the enforcement of a Spanish-only rule in the classroom, Spanish will all but disappear. I share this concern. I have no easy solution to it; I have only some evidence to offer that the no-switching rule in this classroom is not offsetting this tendency. Despite the policing of language these second-grade students are doing, code-switches (mostly into English) abound in this classroom, and English dominates their lives outside the classroom. We cannot overcome the influence of the English dominance of an entire society merely by fiat; this is a more subtle game than that.

So if forbidding code-switching results only in adding a tool to children’s repertoire for manipulating symbolic power, then how else can teachers impact this power imbalance in order to preserve a space for students’ mother tongues and consequent identities?

One possibility is the notion asserted by Reyes (2001), Pérez (2004), and Fitts (2006) that teachers in dual-language settings should welcome students’ drawing upon their multiple linguistic resources, while expecting students to produce appropriate finished products in one language or the other whenever asked. It is difficult at first for many teachers to embrace their students’ multilingual mix, trained in a lifetime of socialization to spurn language mixing as “impure” and somehow less valid than maintaining language “purity.” Yet, when they do, teachers may well find almost instantaneous gratification.

Border poet and writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) expresses righteous anger at the “linguicism” she faces from linguistic purists on both sides of the Texas/Mexico border. Living as she does on the “Borderlands/La Frontera,” Anzaldúa asserts the power inherent in her liminal position, and demands respect for her language in her often-cited quote, “So if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. I am my language” (p. 59). Recently, a transitional bilingual kindergarten teacher, having read Anzaldúa’s book in my graduate seminar and found the experience transformative, expressed her own ambivalence about what to do when her young students began their statements in one language and ended in another. Always in the past, she told us, she would correct this behavior, and demand that her students “finish in the language they started in.” After much deliberation and encouragement
from me and the rest of the class, she decided to allow her students to draw on both languages naturally as they expressed themselves in class. She returned to her classroom and explained this to her students. Very soon after, she came to class excited to share with us that a student who had deeply concerned her for his silence in class was now speaking up, contributing much more to discussions, and expressing himself articulately—in a mix of two languages. She wondered aloud to our group, how many children had she silenced with her “no mixing” rule over the years?

Another vital piece of the puzzle is to better prepare teachers to be critically aware of the impacts of race, class, and language status on their students’ discourse spaces in the classroom. Conversations about these issues rarely occur in bilingual teacher-preparation programs (see Grinberg & Saavedra, 2000 for a closer examination of this issue); nor are race, class, status, or power commonly discussed in the literature on innovative, enrichment two-way bilingual programs. Yet there is some evidence that critically aware teachers can impact students’ academic identities in the classroom, that they can create learning spaces for students who might otherwise suffer the consequences of low-status positioning in traditional classrooms (Cohen, 1994; Palmer, 2008a, 2008b). Teachers who understand the power of discourse and the impacts of students’ race, class, etc., identities on their participation in classroom talk and learning will be better able to uncover ways to manage classroom talk for more equitable linguistic balance. In turn, students whose identities are preserved and reinforced as they interact in the classroom will better be able to achieve academic competencies in any setting.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX I**

**Transcription Conventions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...</th>
<th>brief pause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>number indicates seconds pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>utterances are immediately adjacent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Underlined</strong></td>
<td>emphasis in speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>XX</strong></td>
<td>incomprehensible utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(comments in paren)</td>
<td>movements, gestures, gazes, voice tones, or extralinguistic sounds like laughs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>italics</em></td>
<td>code-switch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAPITALS</strong></td>
<td>louder speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>