Code Switching in a Bilingual Workplace

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Abstract:

Bilingual people often find themselves in a situation where they switch from one language to another. As with the number of Spanish speakers exponentially increasing in the United States, "code-switching" within Spanish and English is more noticeable within work spaces. When and where does code switching occur? Why does it occur? And what does it mean about the work environment? This essay will argue that code switching can be used within any environment, regardless of class or education. First, it's important to know the history of code switching and how it differs from Spanglish. "In-groups" can be formed with basic similarities and can affect code switching. There are different places one could code-switch, and there doesn't exist much research on code switching within formal settings. Some think that people switch languages due to lack of education and knowledge of the language, but switches are due to stylistic choice and emphasis. This information will be combined with a study of editorial meetings within a bilingual company, Telemundo Chicago. Using transcriptions of editorial meetings at Telemundo, situations in which code switching occurs will be analyzed, and it will be seen how code switching is used in a workplace to conserve identity and create an in-group.

Keywords: Code Switching, Spanglish, workplace, television, Telemundo, Hispanics, informal, Spanish, English.

<u>Introduction – Code switching vs. Spanglish</u>

As the number of Spanish speakers in the United States increases, so does the frequency of code switching (CS) within conversations between bilingual people. This essay looks to show what CS is and how it is used within conversations in bilingual environments. After spending a summer working at Noticiero Telemundo Chicago, I noticed that the employees switched from Spanish to English, so I looked to research when employees code switched, later looking into why. It's necessary to understand what CS is and how it differs from *Spanglish*, which are often confused. Academics have found why people code switch within prose and in informal environments, but there is very little research done on CS in a formal environment like a workplace, which is why this study is necessary. Instead of thinking that someone switches languages due to lack of education, the research done at Telemundo proves that code switches cross geographical and educational boundaries, and there are many reasons as to why someone does so, including for emphasis and because of the terminology existing in only one language.

It's crucial to know what CS is and how it differs from Spanglish, so I have set two definitions to make the study easier to understand. CS has two languages within one *sentence*, while Spanglish has two languages within one *word*. They can both occur within many contexts and there are many types of *code switches*. The most generic way to explain *any* kind of switch is: "*quiero ir al* → <u>mall next Tuesday</u>" (I want to go to the mall next Tuesday*)* (Zirker 8). *Code mixing* is a sentence that inserts few words from one language into the other: "*voy a comprar* → <u>milk today</u>" (I'm going to buy milk today) (Zirker 8). *Code interchanging* is a large clause from one language inserted into another language: "<u>Yesterday I went to school and learned about algebra and then suddenly</u> → *un chico empezó a cantar muy fuerte durante el clase y por fin todos fueron cantando* → <u>and then the teacher got mad but she couldn't get us to stop singing</u>"

(Yesterday I went to school and learned about algebra and then suddenly a guy started to sing loudly during class and everyone ended up singing, and then the teacher got mad but she couldn't get us to stop singing) (Zirker 8). A *tag switch* includes a mannerism from one language inserted into a sentence; including examples like *you know, I mean, no way, but, pero, en serio,* etc. "*Es difícil encontrar trabajo estos días,* ➔ you know?" (It's difficult finding work these days, you know?) (Zirker 8).

   Unlike CS, Spanglish mixes two languages within one word. An example of Spanglish would be "parquear" " ("to park", *estacionar*). Some scholars debate whether the term "Spanglish" is correct or if it should be classified as something else, such as "Spanish in the United States" because the mixing of two languages is due to the geography of the languages and the speaker. Spanglish in Latin America or Spanglish in France would differ than Spanglish in the United States because of the speaker's geography. This is because Spanglish is a phenomenon where two languages are superimposed (Otheguy 89). Ricardo Otheguy explains that words like *beismen* (the Spanglish version of *sótano*, basement) can expand a bilingual person's lexical because they can use both *beismen* and *sótano* to explain an environmental difference of that location. However, it should not be classified as another language, but instead as a dialect due to the geography of the speaker (89). Opinions also vary on whether or not Spanglish is a danger to Spanish, allowing English to "invade" Spanish. Instead of thinking that Spanglish and CS are an invasion and a creation of a new language, they should be considered as a dialect because one language will never be able to overpower the other (Betti 43). Spanglish and CS are not a new phenomenon, and experts like Silvia Betti don't think Spanglish will ever overpower Spanish or English. In fact, there's evidence that Spanglish actually surged in the

United States over 200 years ago. Some academics believe that Spanglish has existed since 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Betti 34).

There also exists the thought that people who use Spanglish or CS do so because they do not have the full understanding of one language, and that they may switch languages in order to complete their thought. However, Betti points out that the bilingual people who switch languages demonstrate a high linguistic competency because "those changes need to respect the grammatical rules of both languages" (40). Therefore, it's necessary to understand that someone who switches between languages or mixes words does not lack grammatical knowledge. In fact, one can find speakers who switch or mix languages within various socioeconomic levels and with different levels of education and income (Otheguy 97). Eva Lenkaitis explains that someone who code switches employs both languages with an "extremely functional manner" (13). The knowledge of *both* languages is being used simultaneously. Also, at times one can code switch because it is more useful to use two languages instead of one. For example, someone could say "préstame una ficha metálica para abordar el tren subterráneo" or "préstame un *tóken* para tomar el *subway*" (Lend me a token to take the subway) (Betti 47). It is much faster and easier to say "tóken" instead of "ficha metálica" and "subway" instead of "tren subterráneo." There are various reasons for why one may use the phenomenon, and although people may have used it as a test of intelligence or social class, that is no longer the case. When two languages are used within one phrase, there needs to be concordance and proper gender agreements within both languages (if both have them), and it shows that a high competency is required in order to do so.

The acceptance of Spanish in the United States

Although Spanglish has existed for hundreds of years, the form and acceptance of its usage is relatively new. In fact, various authors that have recently started to incorporate Spanglish into their writing have won *Pulitzer* prizes (Callahan 266). The acceptance of English mixed with Spanish has increased, and it appears it will continue to grow. In a study done in Rochelle, Illinois, Lenkaitis found that 78% of the first generation of immigrants declared Spanish as their dominant language, 70% of the second generation felt comfortable in English and sometimes Spanish, and in the third generation *no one* declared themselves comfortable speaking Spanish (24). In addition, 22% of the first generation believed that CS sounded good, 40% of the second generation, and 75% of the third generation (25). This proves that some of the United States' population is beginning to get accustomed to CS and believe it sounds appropriate. With the acceptance of CS in a home environment, it may also expand into more formal contexts, like a work environment.

Even with these changes, Andrew Smith demonstrates that when Spanglish is used, it's rarely used in advertisements, at least not in national ads. And when it is used, it's not only for information, but to generate a specific effect (169). The advertisement's intent is more to provoke that the Hispanic population buy the product, and it's likely that the message would be understood in English or in Spanish. One ad from VitaminWater says "queóndalastnight? water" (what happened last night? water) using CS to make a joke about their electrolytes and how it can be used after a night of partying. Another ad from Bud Light beer uses CS: "tan buena como encontrar un parking frente al building" (as good as finding parking in front of the building). The advertisers chose to use CS because sometimes the meanings get lost in translation, and this way it accesses another key audience. The fact that the ads appear in Spanglish/code-switched is

important because it attracts the population of Spanish speakers that live in the United States and recognizes the daily use of the dialects.

As CS has become more common, there has been some push-back on Spanish in the United States. Within the last 30 years, 31 states have approved *English-only laws* (Betti 36). The primary purpose of the law is for the government to save money by printing official papers in English. However, an unintended consequence that has occurred due to these laws is when someone speaks a language other than English, those within one of the 31 states could perceive non-English speakers in a negative way. This provokes attitudes towards one language be negative, with one language appearing "good" and the other (Spanish in this case) "bad." Although the English-only laws don't prohibit people to speak a language other than English, it does cause a social turn that propels English to be the superior language since the government has an "English-only law." Because of this, Smith explains that Spanglish is a way to rebel against society and the laws that attempt to silence non-English speakers. Sociolinguist Silvia Betti explains that Chicanos "wished to conserve their identities… they began to use words from English, but with Spanish pronunciation or phonetics" (Betti 35). In order to follow the law, they use the "official language" but change it in order to fit their needs. From there, they can form new words that belong to Spanglish, or mix words within a sentence used in CS. Code switching and Spanglish have since left the original reasoning of rebelling against the government and are now seen in everyday life by various kinds of people.

CS within formal contexts

The importance of register

A register includes various aspects, such as familiarity of a person with whom they are speaking with, their relationship with them, and the environment. These variables can affect the formality with which one speaks. The most notable example in dialects (in Latin America) is "tú" versus "usted." Both words can be translated to "you" in English. However, *usted* is a linguistic recourse most used in formal registers, while *tú* is considered informal. For example, "¿Cómo estás?" is informal compared to "¿Cómo está?". Both ask, "how are you?" but can be used with different people and in different environments. According to John Bergen, it's common that friends and family use an informal register, but it can occasionally be used with superiors at work. This could be because there is a feeling of familiarity and friendship with superiors, and the line is sometimes crossed. In his study, more than 50% of the time someone will use "tú" instead of "usted" with a work partner without the gender of the speakers playing a role (Bergen 19). Occasionally, bilingual people find themselves in a formal situation in which they don't know which register to use, and nearly half of the time they use formal or informal registers. This is surprising because one could assume the speaker would use a formal register if they're in a formal situation, but instead it's a 50% chance which register they'd use due to circumstances like familiarity or environment.

Importance of rhetorical institution

Cecilia Montes-Alcalá explains how CS exists within literature and the role that biculturalism plays. She analyzes different literary genres and how language switches occur within the genres, and why the authors choose to do so. Montes-Alcalá found that CS was never found within prose in a formal register, but instead that it was only found within informal or colloquial contexts (268). Nevertheless, if CS was used, it would be for cultural/lexical reasons, to clarify, for style, or for emphasis (Montes-Alcalá 276).

These same reasons can be applied to oral switches as well. Within a conversation, someone could switch from English to Spanish in a formal setting (similarly to prose in writing) for cultural significance or to clarify something. Orally, CS can be motivated by the information received (words and the language spoken), the group with which the speaker identifies, and/or the personal needs (Bergen 50). A person who mixes languages at their home may not mix them at work or on the street since it depends on the situation and the group that they are with. Lenkaitis found that many bilingual participants in New Mexico used CS or maintained only one language as a symbol of identity and to prove that they are members of a group. Spanglish and CS will continued to be used as they maintain a sociopsychological significance to their speakers" (Bergen 57). People sometimes use CS to show their identity, and although the situation affects the use, it does not interrupt it.

CS within a work environment

As discussed previously, CS is used more in informal situations. CS is seldom used within a workplace, as it is considered a formal environment. In cases that there is a high Hispanic population, it is likely that they switch languages when they feel there is a sufficient number of members that could do so. In a service work environment, the language most commonly used is the language preferred by the client (Callahan 14). If someone begins by speaking in Spanish, the conversation will continue so. But one also has to try to predetermine the language that they think the client will speak. In these cases, English is frequently the automatic language and if afterwards the speakers discover they share another language in common, they may switch. It is also a form of creating an in-group and an out-group. An in-group is a group in which someone can feel solidarity or have a community with the same

interests (In-Group). One can feel solidarity with similar characteristics such as gender, race, religion, sexuality, etc. Since an in-group exists, so does an "out-group." Frequently in our United States society, Spanish speakers and Latinos are placed on the outskirts of society, not being allowed into the predominant group. Because of this, when they code switch, they form their *own* group. There is a privilege of being included in the in-group of Spanish speakers, so it is often assumed that one is in the out-group until they can prove their capacity to speak Spanish and be included in the group. Callahan proves that there are restrictions to who and when CS can be used, and those within the in-group can define those restrictions, obtaining the linguistic power (77). Auer declares that the minority language is the submissive language while the majority language, in this case English, is the one that controls the power (236). For the Telemundo participants, it's the opposite: those who speak Spanish occupy the in-group in some situations, and those who control the situation and decide those who can speak Spanish with them. But, when one uses Spanish or code switches, the group of Spanish speakers maintain the power instead of the English speakers. Spanish speakers maintain autonomy over those who are included in the conversation and prove part of their identity based on the language they choose to use.

CS in Telemundo

It is not common practice to use Spanglish or CS in national news because it is not part of the news style since news is given in a formal register. Regionally, however, the rules may vary. If it is a news radio station with a Latino audience, it's possible the anchors may speak Spanglish or code switch. In fact, there are more than 25 radio stations in California that utilize Spanglish since 2011 (Betti 45). In the media, it is important to use words and phrases that can be

understood by any listener; the phrase "speak as if it were your friend" applies frequently. Because of that, it's possible that radio stations use Spanglish so they can "speak to their friends." Also, according to Peter Auer, in a Portuguese/Spanish radio station, different voices can be used. There is a code for reporting, a code for complaints, and a procedural one as well (Auer 37). The code used depends on the situation and the style that they want to present to the audience. This reflects the affirmations of Montes-Alcalá and Betti as to *why* people code switch.

Noticiero Telemundo Chicago, a news station in the city of Chicago will be analyzed in this essay. Telemundo was created in Puerto Rico in 1954 as "Radio El Mundo," (radio of the world), later converting to a television station in 1984 (Estrada). In 2002, NBC bought out he chain, helping to promote it into the number one Spanish chain. Due to the fact that Telemundo was bought by NBC, they share an office and the combined meetings are held in English. However, the broadcasts from Telemundo are transmitted in Spanish. As previously mentioned, CS is rarely used within formal situations. Intriguingly, I discovered that my participants used CS within a formal situation, their jobs.

The purpose of the editorial meetings I investigated are to choose the news of the day and who would report on each story. The press releases would be read in English since public relations chairs would send the releases to English companies as well as ours. Yet, occasionally (once every 1-2 minutes) a Spanish comment would be thrown in or the conversation would switch to Spanish. After a comment was made not relevant to the task on hand at Telemundo, the language would switch to Spanish.

A worker who usually uses their knowledge of a community and the physical traits and expressions will suspend those techniques at work in favor of the automatic use of English (Callahan 13). Because Telemundo and NBC share the same office, English presents itself as the

automatic language if they don't know someone in the office. But as they know someone who

works for Telemundo, Spanish may assume the role of the automatic language. At the same time,

the automatic language of Telemundo is Spanish since the news that goes out of the station is in

Spanish. It is not a professional custom to code switch within a news report. Similarly, when

"man on the street" interviews were conducted for the news, the conversation would always

begin in Spanish. This is due to the fact that it's easier to use a Spanish speaking source over an

English speaking one. In an environment where one is speaking to someone else who is also

bilingual, there is a subconscious decision that needs to be made over what language will be used

and how (Cantone 55).

　　According to Katja Cantone, if two bilingual people are speaking, both languages will be

used. In my investigation, I found that that is not always the case. There are various factors

including the situation and topic of discussion that have to be evaluated, although it is likely that

CS will take place. When one is speaking to friends or in an informal situation, it's probable that

languages will change. But, because changes within a company are being analyzed, the

environment and probability of change will depend on the topic that is being discussed and how

much time they have to speak off topic.

Analysis of CS in Telemundo

　　After analyzing editorial meetings, I categorized the various types of switches within

eight categories: return after question, code interchanging, tag switch, code mix, proper noun,

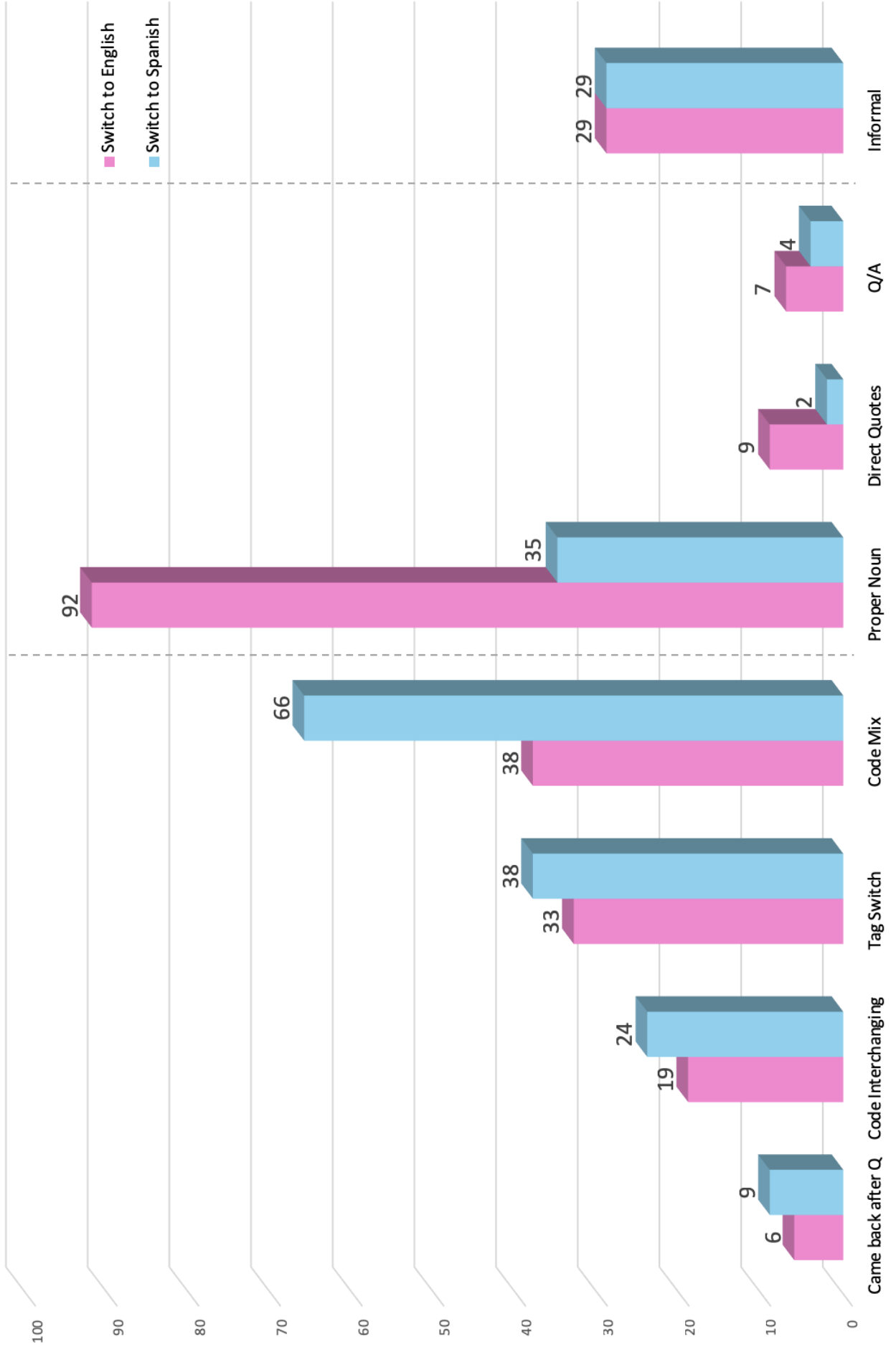direct quotes, question/answer, and informal.

　　The bar graph on the next page includes each of the codes that was analyzed. The pink

bar shows the code switch from Spanish to English, and the blue show the changes from English

to Spanish. There were eight categories that were coded, some that had been taken from other academics and their research, while I created a few categories I thought would fit best. The graph is divided into three sections from left to right, shown by the vertical dashed lines: more switches to Spanish, more switches to English, and equal switches in both languages.

In total, there were approximately two and a half hours transcribed from the editorial meetings, with 218 switches from Spanish to English and 196 switches from English to Spanish. The majority of the conversations were conducted in English, so it was surprising that there were more changes from Spanish to English. It could have been because when someone switched to Spanish, a coworker may want to return to English.

[Bar graph found on next page]

Code Switches

Legend:
- Switch to English (pink)
- Switch to Spanish (blue)

Data by category:

Category	Switch to English	Switch to Spanish
Informal	29	29
Q/A	7	4
Direct Quotes	9	2
Proper Noun	92	35
Code Mix	38	66
Tag Switch	33	38
Code Interchanging	19	24
Came back after Q	6	9

As a reminder, a code interchange is when there are many words or a complete thought in one language used within a sentence in another language. One day when we had many story options to pick from, one producer said, "There are gonna be days where we're gonna sit here you know racking our brains to find a story → tú sabes esos días dónde estamos de, 'bueno dónde inventas las historias hoy?' (you know those days where we're like, 'well where do we pull stories from today?)'" She used Spanish informally to help another employee understand why one story wasn't chosen on that day. It's possible that the producer believed that stylistically, Spanish would have helped her to understand better, or to differentiate between her formal statement and one more informal.

A tag switch seems similar to a code interchange in that it has one transitional word change the language. However, it's different because there is almost always one word that is used to change from a subject to another – in this case, one language to another. This category had the second most switches to Spanish. 36% of the tag switches from Spanish to English occurred with the word "so." Occasionally only that word would be used, and the conversation would return to English, but there were also other situations where that singular word would change the discussion language completely. Whereas "pero" (but) took 42% of tag switches from English to Spanish. Similarly, "pero" could be used to switch languages, but more often than not, it was used alone.

On the other hand, a code mix is when there are a few words from one language used in another. A situation that would happen frequently at Telemundo is the word "maybe" being used to change from Spanish to English: "fin de semanas son violentos (weekends are violent) → maybe → si me comunico… (if I communicate with)… " The speaker used the word "maybe" instead of "tal vez" (maybe) in this sentence, and in many others. To switch from English to

Spanish, the phrase "lo de" (the case of) was used frequently: "This is one of two conferences that are taking place today→ lo del [subject]." In this case, the speaker switched from English to Spanish to use the phrase "lo de" (the case of) that doesn't have an exact translation in English. It could have been that it was easier to use "lo de" instead of "the case of" or something similar, because the phrase already exists in one language.

The most common reason co-workers code switched to English was a "proper noun" which had more than double that of any other switch. There were 92 switches to English due to proper nouns. This could include names of Telemundo employees, story names, and Chicago neighborhoods. It seems the reason that there were so many changes due to proper names is because the television station is located in Chicago, a city that predominantly speaks English. So, the street names and schools are named in English. For the most part, the discussion would only switch from Spanish to English for the proper noun and soon switch back to Spanish. There were a few cases where the conversation would continue in English after the proper noun in that language, and the majority were due to one case in particular. Frequent phrases included "y lo de (and in the case of) → [story] → le acabo de comentar a (I had just commented to)", or if it continued in English: "lo que me de pena lo de (what I hate to say about) → [story] is that we." It happened frequently because there was a myriad of proper nouns in English.

Direct quotes were used the least in editorial meetings. Because press releases are sent in English, it was easier for news directors and assignment editors to read the press release in the language it was written in instead of translating it. So, there were nearly 5x the number of changes from Spanish to English than the other way around. At times, the conversation would maintain itself in English after having read the quote about an event, but in the case that someone was speaking Spanish, and someone interrupted them to quote the release, the conversation

would resume in Spanish. This could be because, although there was a quick change in language, the speaker already had everything thought out in one language.

The next category analyzed was "question/response" where it was found that if someone was speaking one language (Spanish, for example) and someone asked them something in another (English), the main speaker would change their language to match the question in English. There were a few cases where the speaker would maintain their original language instead of switching to the other- or would go back to the primary language right after answering the question. For example, someone who was originally speaking in English was asked in Spanish at what time a reporter would be doing a story and someone responded "Porque le hacemos un VO/SOT a las 4 y media (why don't we do a VO/SOT at four thirty) → and the" so the person speaking responded, but returned to English because they were speaking in that language first.

People were just as likely to code switch from Spanish to English and English to Spanish in informal conversations. Some examples of something coded as informal would be a conversation topic that didn't pertain to the news or a conversation that would be between friends. The employees at Telemundo were very friendly and seemed to get along well, so there were often informal conversations during editorial meetings. In total, there were 58 informal switches, divided evenly between Spanish and English. For example, what type of coffee drank in the morning, the experiences one had when they were starting school as a kid, or family anecdotes were coded as informal. It's necessary to note that there were many clarification questions that would change the language spoken. More than half of the coded examples from English to Spanish were clarification questions like, "a que hora es el evento?" (at what time is the event), while only 20% of the changes from Spanish to English were clarification questions.

This shows that in a work space like Telemundo, bilingual people tend to clarify or make questions in Spanish, their primary language.

Conclusion

Code switching is not used because of illiteracy or lack of education, but it shows a knowledge far greater than one needed for only one language. By knowing the gender of a word and where it needs to be placed in *two* languages, the speaker shows a linguistic wisdom. Academics have found that CS is used in literature for reasons of emphasis and style. The "informal" category at Telemundo reflects the investigation done by Montes-Alcalá, showing that CS is used in informal contexts. Nonetheless, my study at Telemundo contributes a lot to the conversation that hasn't been studied before. According to my experience at Noticiero Telemundo Chicago, code switching was done primarily for a proper noun or a code mix. I argued that code switches were done for stylistic choices, but also because the speaker is used to that word in one language and it is easier to speak in that language. What's most noticeable in the study is that there were code switches within a work environment that is considered formal. This is crucial in understanding that anybody can code switch. There were a variety of people and experiences within the editorial meetings, but everyone code switched during the meetings, and during the work day. Along with that, it shows code switching can occur in many environments, especially in a formal one. There aren't many investigations done within that environment, and for that reason, it's important to study the phenomenon within different contexts to understand that CS can stretch across environments and experiences.

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