Code-Switching and Silence in International Communication: An Ethnographic Case Study

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Generally speaking, code-switching and silence in intercultural communication are identified as the manifestation of linguistic deficiency. However, this pragmatic interpretation does not always apply to plurilingual settings, where there are multidimensional sociolinguistic norms. This study addresses the issues of facework and politeness strategies achieved through the use of code-switching and silence in plurilingual intercultural communication between Japanese and Chinese, where Japanese, Chinese and English are available. This study employs an ethnographic case study approach as its data collection method.

一般的に、異文化コミュニケーション中におこるコードの切り替えと沈黙は、第二言語話者の言語的欠陥の現れであると捉えられることが多い。しかしながら、複合言語環境という複雑な社会言語学的規範を持つ言語使用環境を想定した場合はこの限りではない。本研究では、日本人中国語学習者と中国人日本語学習者が参加している、日本語、英語、中国語の3言語が選択可能な多文化的ディスコースを対象に、コードの切り替えと沈黙の facework、及び politeness strategies としての語用論的機能に焦点を当てて、ケーススタディーを行う。

1 Introduction

Code-switching (CS) is defined as the alternative use of two or more languages, vernaculars, and even speech styles as well as mixtures of them as a result of the contingent manifestation of language choice (Gumperz, 1982). Studies on CS and language choice are controversial topics of inquiry in fields such as multilingualism, intercultural communication, applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. In sociolinguistics, conversational code-switching is a frequently discussed subject. Many studies have investigated the pragmatic function of CS: not only bilinguals' (e.g., Alfonzetti, 1998; Milroy & Muysken, 1995; Oka, 1995; Tasaki, 2007) but also language learners' (Arnfast & Jørgensen, 2003; Ellwood, 2008; Leibscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2005). Since this study deals with the discourse of intercultural communication between Japanese L2 learners of Chinese and Chinese L2 learners of Japanese, the function of CS observed thereby should naturally be as a communication strategy employed by learners, rather than the manifestation of bilingual competencies. In the following section, therefore, only studies relevant to the issues of L2 learners' CS are summarised.

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When people switch their linguistic code while communicating in their L2, it is apt to be identified as the manifestation of linguistic difficulty and/or hardship. Tarone (1977), for example, stated that CS employed by L2 speakers can potentially be a strategic competence to compensate for their lack of language proficiency. However, Firth and Wagner (1997) criticised this view as stereotyped. In light of this, Arnfast and Jørgensen (2003) have asserted that CS appears as a contextualisation cue to enable novice L2 learners to enter a discourse community. By the same token, Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2005) have stated that CS "is a characteristic feature of bilinguals' speech rather than a sign of deficiency in one language or the other" (p. 235). A paradigm shift on dynamics of language choice is thus taking place (e.g. Alfonzetti, 1998; Gumperz, 1982; Lavric, 2007; O'Driscoll, 2001).

2 A Face Model of Language Choice

Communication is a complicated sociolinguistic phenomenon and encapsulates various levels of negotiation. Goffman (1981) wrote that the negotiation of positionality plays a significant role in human interaction and labelled it as "footing", which he defined as "the alignments we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (p. 18). In light of this, O'Driscoll (2001) applied Goffman's theory to the studies of plurilingualism (i.e., situations where multiple languages are predominant and available) and provided a theoretical model on face negotiation accomplished through language choice.

Face is one of the constituents of human communication. Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) regarded facework "as the default in interpersonal behaviour" (p. 1454). Goffman (1967) acknowledges that the concept of face originated in China, and argued that it can be seen in various kinds of human interaction. He taxonomised the Chinese traditional concept into positive and negative face, and Brown and Levinson (1987), in this light, redefined those aspects as follows:

> **negative face**: the want of every 'component adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others.
> **positive face**: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.   (p. 62)

This face theory has been widely applied to linguistic studies. One seminal work is Brown's and Levinson's 1987 model on politeness strategies. They postulated some universal communication strategies for saving interactants' positive and negative face. O'Driscoll (2001), in light of this, proposed three basic aspects of face which can be instantiated through language choice in intercultural communication: 1) ethnolinguistic face, 2) cosmopolitan face, and 3) polite face.

First of all, ethnolinguistic face refers to choosing language "as a way of making ethnolinguistic group membership salient in interaction" (p. 253), and is a contingent manifestation of "ethnolinguistic identity" (Giles & Johnson, 1987). Second, cosmopolitan face is predicated on "employing a language of international standing which is L2 for both members" (O'Driscoll, 2001, p. 254). Hence, it is a means of

equalization and mitigation of power relations caused by the discrepancy of language proficiency between speakers. Third, polite face is predicated on seeking others' social approval (pp. 255-256), in contrast to the preceding two aspects of face, which are relevant to the L1-L2 distinction. In addition, polite face is different from the other two "in being primarily alter-oriented, in manifesting, or at least appearing to manifest, consideration rather than display" (p. 25). The predication of these three faces, however, has no clear borderlines: some "hybridity" (p. 256) should be acknowledged.

3 Research questions

Although this face model is quite persuasive, O'Driscoll (2001) still raises a question: "[I]n settings limited to bilingualism, when no link language is considered to be available, can we still speak of three basic faces?" (p. 263) That is, his argument presupposes situations where the language proficiencies are quite balanced. However, imbalanced situations should also be a topic of further inquiry, as they are typical of intercultural communication. So far, some studies have shown that face is related to CS, including Gardner-Chloros's and Finnis's (2003) studies on CS by bilingual women as politeness strategies, and Lavric's (2007) exploration of code choice in relation to face in multilingual business environments. Nevertheless, no studies have applied O'Driscoll's model empirically, at least as far as the author knows.

The theoretical constellation shown above suggests the following three research questions:

1. Does CS mediate facework and politeness strategies in imbalanced plurilingual intercultural communication?
2. If so, is O'Driscoll's face model applicable to such contexts?
3. What can possible answers to these questions suggest for further studies on intercultural communication?

To answer these research questions, the following research methods will be employed.

4 Research Methods

Conventionally, conversation analysis (CA) has been the most frequently employed approach to tackle both CS and face/politeness studies. However, as Bargiela-Chiappini et al. (2007) argued, sole reliance on one single approach to transcultural studies can potentially generate research bias. Therefore, this study combines CA with an ethnographic approach to discourse analysis to obtain multiple perspectives on the complex reality (Samra-Fredericks, 2004).

4.1 Research Context

As its research context, this study focuses upon a specific discourse community where Japanese-Chinese intercultural communication constantly takes place. The data was obtained by means of audio recording and field-note taking in the Ming-Xing Chinese

Club (MXCC), a group for autonomous Chinese language learning at Meisei University, located in the western part of Tokyo. MXCC was established in June of 2006. As an administrator, I longitudinally observed the club activities for approximately four years ever since it was established. As Davis (1995) emphasised, such longitudinal observation helps in taking "holistic perspectives" in discourse studies.

4.2 Participants

MXCC consisted of 5 participants (3 Japanese and 2 Chinese citizens), excluding the author. The data analysis focuses its attention on linguistic strategies of two of the Japanese participants (Shun and Mihoko) and observed while they interacted with the two Chinese members (Fang and Qing). Their personal and background information will be detailed later. Shun and Mihoko were approximately the same age (20 or 21) at the time of this data collection. These participants were frequently involved in intercultural communication activities, and the author could obtain data without much difficulty. This accessibility to the participants enabled the researcher to conduct longitudinal studies upon how they dealt with intercultural communication.

4.3 Data Collection

In order to capture the complex reality of intercultural communication, I collected two different types of data in MXCC. One is the participants' actual interactional data; the other is the participants' own interpretation of their linguistic behaviour. The first data were transcribed and coded using a CA-based transcription convention to every moment of their interaction.

The excerpts presented in this paper were prepared using a strict procedure. First of all, I recorded the participants' verbal interaction while taking field-note for comments on non-verbal behaviour. Next, I transcribed about four hours of conversation. Subsequently, I codified the data to reveal the frequency of similar kinds of events. Through this coding, I identified when CS was used as facework and politeness strategies. Lastly, in order to enrich the perspectives of data analysis, an interview about the CA data was conducted with each participant.

5 Data Analysis

Based on the above methodology, I present examples of my data analysis in this section. The space limitation allows me to present only two cases: one is called Shun's struggle (5.1), and the other is a misunderstanding between Mihoko and Qing (5.2). Each section contains both actual recording of the participants' talk-based interaction and the subsequent interview.

5.1 Shun's Struggle

Shun was a second year undergraduate, majoring in Chinese as a second language. He had been learning Chinese for one and half years. In addition, he was one of the most active participants in MXCC. For ease of reference, the line numbers and the speakers' names are presented beside the utterance. In addition, the original transcript and English translation are provided separately due to the multilingual nature of the treated data.

Lastly, to clarify languages used, Chinese is shown in regular font, Japanese in italics, and English in bold. Other elements will be transcribed by applying Gail Jefferson's 2004 data transcription convention, as is shown below. Lastly, the focal point of analysis is underlined.

Transcription Convention:			
(1.0)	pause in second	(.)	pause shorter than 0.2 seconds
:	extension of vowels	.	falling intonation
?	raising intonation	(( ))	paralinguistic elements

Excerpt 1
Original Transcription:

1.	Fang	我已经十年没有在十二点种以前睡觉 (wǒ yíjìng shínián méiyǒu zài shí'èr diǎn zhōng yǐqiān huìjiào)
2.	Shun	(1.0)
3.	Fang	明白吗?不明白? (míngbai ma? bù míngbai?)
4.	Shun	大概 (dàgài)
5.	Fang	就不明白? (jiù bù míngbai?)
6.	Shun	(2.0)
7.	Fang	**hmm I have been (0.5) keeping the habit of sleeping after twelve**
8.		**o'clock (0.5) for ten years**
9.	Shun	a:

Translation:

1.	Fang	I have never gone to bed before twelve o'clock for the past ten years.
2.	Shun	(1.0)
3.	Fang	Are you clear, or not clear?
4.	Shun	Probably
5.	Fang	You mean "not clear"?
6.	Shun	(2.0)
7.	Fang	**hmm I have been (0.5) keeping the habit of sleeping after twelve**
8.		**o'clock (0.5) for ten years**
9.	Shun	Ah…

(CA data, 2007/8/3)

The first excerpt records a situation where Shun had difficulty in comprehending an utterance by Fang (a female Chinese participant who was a newcomer to MXCC then) occurring during a club activity on 3 August, 2007. Fang was, then, also sensitive enough to feel Shun's difficulty and asked Shun whether he had caught what she said clearly or not. Shun's difficulty in communicating in Chinese in front of others apparently threatened his face (or ethnolinguistic face) as a Chinese learner, hence he strategically avoided answering her directly.

On line 1, Fang spoke longer compared with other turns during the observed conversation; in intercultural communication, she tended to speak in shorter sentences

and more succinctly so that her counterparts could easily comprehend her. After Fang's utterance, Shun stayed silent for 1.0 second. Fang then sensed that her counterpart, Shun, had difficulty catching what she said, and she asked him "míngbai ma? bù míngbai? (Do you understand or not?)" (line 3), which sounded quite threatening to Shun. Subsequently (line 4), Shun gave an ambivalent response by saying "dàgài (probably)". The purpose of his utterance was not only to fulfil his communicative responsibility, but also to defend his ethnolinguistic face. In reference to this, I conducted a semi-structured oral interview nearly a year later after playing the records for him, and he answered it by saying:

Excerpt 2

最初、いろんな意味で「大概」って言ったんすよね。っていうか、「请再说一边」とかも言えたんですけど、それを言っちゃったら迷惑になるかなと思って言わなかったんすよ。なんていうか、相手は「客人」だし、言い直してくれって頼むのも悪いかなぁって。でも、もう一度言ってほしかったって言うのは絶対ありますね。だから、「大概」って。(Saisho, ironna imi de "dàgài" *tte ittansu yone. Tteiuka,* "qǐng zài shūo yíbiàn" *toka mo ietandesu kedo, sore o itchattara meiwaku ni narukana to omotte iwanakattan suyo. Nanteiuka, aite wa* "kèrěn" *da shi, iinaoshite kure tte tanomu no mo warui kana tte. Demo, mō ichido itte hoshikatta tteiuno wa zettai arimasu ne. Dakara* "dàgài" *tte.* [At first, I said "dàgài (probably)", to mean a lot of things. If I had said "could you say that again?", I thought it would have bothered Fang, right? She was "kèrěn (a guest)", so I thought it would be impolite to ask her to paraphrase it, anyway. But, I really wanted her to repeat what she had said, so I said "dàgài (probably)".]) (Interview, 2008/7/28)

Fang's utterance on line 1 was incomprehensible to Shun, and he needed to reconfirm it by some means; meanwhile, he assumed that asking for a repetition explicitly might not only threaten his ethnolinguistic face, but also impede Fang's display of polite face. Thus, his ambivalent "dàgài (probably)" ultimately functioned as a face-defending/saving strategy.

Likewise, Fang was confused by Shun's taciturn behaviour (i.e. it could be interepreted in myriad ways). Thus, she needed to reconfirm what his real intention was (line 5) in order to continue their interaction.

It is also important to pay attention to Shun's answering Fang with 2.0 seconds of silence on line 6. This was followed by Fang's somewhat overpowering utterance, "míngbai ma? bù míngbai?" He commented:

Excerpt 3

で、Fang がちょっと高圧的に「就不明白」って言ってきたんで、それでちょっとムッとしちゃって。だから、とりあえず黙ってました。(De, Fang ga chotto koatsuteki ni "jiu bu ming bai?" *tte itte kitande, sorede chotto mutto shichatte. Dakara, toriaezu damatte mashita.*[Then (meaning, "after line 4"), Fang somewhat overpoweringly said " jiu bu ming bai? (you mean not clear?)" I felt a little frustrated by this, and stayed silent.]) (Interview, 2008/7/28)

Therefore, his taciturn behaviour did not represent his giving-up of communicative

responsibility; rather, he code-switched into silence. Nakane (2007) argued that silence occurring in intercultural communication potentially functions as a face-saving strategy. Likewise, Shun's taciturn behaviour served to defend his ethnolinguistic face. Besides, as the interview data show, Fang's question (line 5) was "frustrating" to Shun and threatened his negative ethnolinguistic face. His silence, on the other hand, frustrated Fang, who attempted to elicit his true intention. Here emerged an intercultural conflict associated with the misinterpretation of silence that had ambiguous meanings.

In order to mitigate their misunderstanding, Fang finally switched to English, which was their mutual L2, to paraphrase her utterance. In a follow-up interview, she stated:

Excerpt 4

I wanted to focus more on listening comprehension rather than leading the conversation. Well, honestly, I had some difficulty in communicating with Shun very often. Well, I don't know, but it is true that Shun could easily understand me, and he could express himself very clearly, but we still tended to have some communication breakdown on the way. I don't know how he felt it.
(Interview, 2007/8/6)

Therefore, she chose to switch not to Japanese but to English, their mutual L2, and helped Shun confirm what she truly meant to say without threatening his negative face as a second language learner of not only Chines but also Chinese. To that, Shun responded by saying "a:" on the last line with an extended vowel, indicating that he eventually understood what she truly intended to convey. In other words, Fang's attempt to deal with this intercultural conflict triggered her desire to save Shun's negative ethnolinguistic face. Besides, as was represented in her "hmm" (line 8), her decision to use English was made after some consideration; thus, it was strategic.

5.2 Misunderstanding between Mihoko and Qing

The second example was obtained while Mihoko was talking with Qing, a graduate student from China specializing in electrical engineering. He had been learning Japanese for three years, and he was quite friendly to the other participants. Therefore, many of the members of MXCC often talked to him rather frankly. Thus, he sometimes encountered some accidental face-threatening acts (FTA) of others. Below is an excerpt in which Mihoko happened to do an FTA to Qing out of misunderstanding.

Excerpt 5
Original Transcription:

1.	Mihoko	え、请客してくれるの?请客?(E qǐngkè shite kureru no? qingke?)
2.	Qing	(2.0)
3.	Mihoko	你会请客吗? (nǐ huì qǐngkè ma?)
4.	Qing	おごってはあげない (Ogotte ha agenai)
5.		((laugh))

Translation:

1.	Mihoko	Wow will you treat me to lunch? Treat me?
2.	Qing	(2.0)

3.   Mihoko   Will you treat me?
4.   Qing   I won't treat you
5.   ((laugh))
(CA, 2007/4/24)

To begin with, it should be noted that "qǐngkè", or treating one's guest, is a common custom in Chinese culture: everybody feels comfortable in doing so based upon positive politeness norms. Mihoko's understanding of this sociocultural background led her to refer to "qǐngkè" in Chinese in the middle of a Japanese sentence. However, Qing did not feel so comfortable in this situation, as is represented by his following 2.0 silence. Regarding this, I conducted an oral interview a few days later with Qing:

Excerpt 6

あの沈黙はね、さまざまの意味。私は Mihoko の意味はわかった。でも、あまり気分がよくないですから、でも、それを言ったら彼女もあまり気分がよくない。だから、沈黙であいまいにした。日本人はよくこれやるでしょ？(*Ano chinmoku wa ne. Samazama no imi. Watashi wa Mihoko no imi wa wakatta. Demo, amari kibun ga yokunai desu kara, demo, sore o ittara, kanojo mo amari kibun ga yokunai. Dakara, chinmoku de aimai ni shita. Nihonjin wa kore yoku yaru desho?* [Oh, that silence. That meant a lot of things. I did understand what she was saying, but I was not so comfortable with that. But, if I had verbalised it, it would have botherd her, too. That's why I used silence to be ambivalent. Japanese do that a lot, too, right?]) (Interview, 2007/4/27)

Although "qǐngkè" functions as a positive politeness strategy in Chinese, urging others to do so should naturally lead to an FTA, which Mihoko accidentally did on the first line. Therefore, according to Qing, he was not comfortable with this imposition by her. Meanwhile, he also recognised that verbalization of the cause of his discomfort could lead to further FTA because it would criticise not only her attitude but also her lack of understanding about Chinese culture. Therefore, he instead attempted to follow Japanese norms about ambivalence by staying taciturn. Therefore, just as in the above case, his choice to remain silent was strategic. That is, he switched his code from non-taciturn to taciturn.

Mihoko, on the other hand, happened to misinterpret his taciturn behaviour as something different from what he really meant. To her, it was merely a sign of incomprehension. She commented on his silence as follows:

Excerpt 7

私は分からなかったときとか、繰り返してほしかったりとか、そういうときにいつも黙っちゃうのね。うん、それで Qing もこのとき黙ってたから、私の言ってる日本語が分からないのかなって思って、中国語に言い直してみた。(*Watashi wa wakaranakatta toki toka kurikaeshite hoshikattari toka, sōiu toki ni itsumo damatchau no ne. Un. Sorede, Qing mo kono toki damatteta kara, watashi no itteru nihongo ga wakaranai no kana to omotte chugokugo ni iinaoshite mita.* [When I do not understand or I want others to repeat what they said or something like that, I tend to

stay silent. Yes. Similarly, Qing stayed silent this time, so I thought he did not understand me very well. That's why I tried to rephrase what I had said in Chinese for him.]) (Interview, 2008/4/27).

Evaluating from her own perspective, she perceived Qing's silence as a sign of his incomprehension. Thus, she decided to code-switch into Chinese, Qing's L1. She expected her CS not only to function as a compensation strategy that helps him understand her intention based on the display of polite face, but also to enhance her ethnolinguistic face. Thus, her CS was motivated by her hybrid face value.

Ironically, her CS based on facework caused intercultural conflict, because Qing's real intention for her silence was absolutely different from her interpretation of it. In addition, her use of Chinese made it much more difficult for him to properly deal with this conflict. He finally switched his code to Japanese, his second language on line 4. Furthermore, by reversing the direction of her CS (i.e., Mihoko switched from Japanese to Chinese, while, Qing went the other way), he deliberately emphasised the social distance from Mihoko. Thus, his code-switching to Japanese on line 4 represented a "negative politeness strategy" (Brown & Levinson, 1987) by displaying his polite face on the one hand, while avoiding sharing both ethnolinguistic and cosmopolitan face with her on the other. As a side-effect of his negative politeness strategy, he also mitigated the tension accompanied by his refusal of her impolite request.

Alfonzetti (1998) proposed that the direction of CS could be an important factor when considering the pragmatic functions of CS. Qing, in this discourse, performed the CS back to Japanese as a means of negative politeness strategy. Here, the display of ethnolinguistic and cosmopolitan face was sacrificed. However, their eschewal enhanced the display of polite face as a negative face saving strategy in this plurilingual intercultural communication.

6 Discussion

In conventional studies on intercultural communication, CS has been viewed as signaling intercultural conflict, including a lack of linguistic competence and communication breakdown. However, the data analyses detailed in this discussion indicate that the function of CS in intercultural communication is not limited to compensation strategies, and it can potentially function as facework (Goffman, 1967) and, to some extent, a politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Furthermore, the data analysis suggested that O'Driscoll's (2001) theoretical model of face negotiation in plurilingual settings was not limited to balanced multilingual situations but also applicable to imbalanced plurilingual intercultural communication. In addition, his discussion on ethnolinguistic face considers only L1 contexts. However, this study revealed that the theoretical discussion of face can be extended to L2 contexts as well. Lastly, O'Driscoll (2001) considered face as something to display, while the data analysis counter-evidenced that "eschewal" can be another course of action.

Although this study has made some contribution to the research domain of politeness and face studies as well as language choice and CS, it also contains some potential limitations. First of all, since the data analysis of this study was exploratory,

researchers are advised to carefully consider for themselves whether it is transferable or not, before expanding it to their own research contexts. Second, the data collection methods should be revisited. This study employed only audio recording of the participants' talk-in-interaction, and nowadays many CA studies use video recordings in order to be able to capture various types of non-verbal information which helps researchers understand the context and the communications involved in greater depth. While audio recordings and transcripts are helpful, it is also true that they are highly limited in providing holistic information on the observed discourse. Lastly, this study explored the possibility of combining ethnography and CA, its transferability to other contexts is not 100% guaranteed. Therefore, further research inquiry will be called for and I myself would like to take this as the up-coming point of investigation.

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