iSwitch: Spanish-English Mixing in Computer-Mediated Communication

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Abstract

Technology, and the Internet in particular, have rapidly transformed the means of communication in the 21st century, opening the door to a novel and fertile ground of research. What takes place when bi- or multilingual individuals sit at the keyboard has been the focus of several studies exploring computer-mediated communication (CMC). However, there appears to be a lack of research dealing specifically with Spanish-English language mixing online, a surprising fact given that Spanish is the third language of the Internet and its use has grown 800% in the last decade. The present work analyzes and compares data from three different sources of CMC (e-mail, blogs, and social networks including Facebook and Twitter) among Spanish-English bilinguals in an attempt to further explore the relatively new field of “electronic code-switching”. The study aims to outline the reasons behind bilingual individuals’ language mixing online, hypothesizing that it will accomplish many of the socio-pragmatic functions traditionally ascribed to oral code-switching along with, perhaps, other uses idiosyncratic of CMC. Furthermore, it intends to emphasize the cultural nature of code-switching, a crucial component that has often been overlooked in the search for grammatical constraints.

Keywords


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1 Introduction

Code-switching, the alternating use of two or more languages in bilingual individuals’ speech, is a natural phenomenon that, unfortunately, has often been erroneously attributed to illiteracy or poor linguistic competence, still carrying a stigma in some communities and/or contexts. For instance, the mix of Spanish and English in the United States has earned derogatory labels such as “Spanglish” or “Tex-Mex” and generated opinions such as the following: “Those poor kids come to school speaking a hodgepodge. They are all mixed up and don’t know any language well. As a result, they can’t even think clearly” (quoted in Walsh, 1991: 106). However, decades of research in the field have proved that, far from being a random or lazy mode of speaking, language mixing is actually governed by both grammatical and socio-pragmatic constraints (see Valdés-Fallis, 1976; Jacobson, 1977; Poplack, 1981; McClure, 1981; Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1983; Toribio and Rubin, 1996; and Zentella, 1997 among many others). While the vast majority of the studies on code-switching to-date have targeted its oral form, I here investigate a less-traveled path, namely bilinguals’ written production. More specifically, I analyze writing in three different electronic communication outlets among bilingual individuals.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has quickly transformed the traditional ways of interacting among bilinguals and monolinguals alike. A field that is continuously growing and ever in transformation, CMC presents us with a new realm for sociolinguistic research as social networks expand and link millions of users worldwide (see, for instance Androutsopoulos, 2006; Danet and Herring, 2007). Even though it is getting more difficult and complex to make valid generalizations about “the language of the Internet”, it seems obvious that one of the characteristics of CMC is the freedom that allows its users to break grammatical rules and even ignore spelling, punctuation and/or capitalizing conventions. Despite this liberty, mixing languages online was initially seen as a controversial issue for bloggers such as Fernández (2004), who warned against language change in the first of his “10 commandments for bilingual blogs”:

There should be a button, link, or pull-down menu to click or select, present in every page. That’s the way to turn from reading content in one language to the other in a bilingual blog. Mixtures of languages in individual pages, no, that’s not OK [...].

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1 For an in-depth discussion of the so-called Spanglish see Lipski, 2004 and Otheguy, 2008.
Another blogger, Colón-Bilbraut (2005), was determined to write in both languages nevertheless: “Como soy de Puerto Rico, mi idioma es el “spanglish” [...], por lo que mis blog are going to be tanto en espanol [sic] or in English. It all depends in [sic] which language me resbale la tongue.” (Since I am from Puerto Rico, my language is “spanglish” [...], so my blogs are going to be in Spanish or in English. It all depends on which language my tongue will slide).³

In fact, Spanish-English bilingual bloggers often show mixed feelings about code-switching. Some are apologetic: “I usually don’t mingle my spanish [sic] and english [sic] though am known by my most fervent reader, editor, proofreader, slacker, güevón [sic], patron (that is, me) to occasionally indulge in doing so” (Yonder Lies It, 2005). (I usually don't mingle my Spanish and English though I am known by my most fervent reader, editor, proofreader, slacker, moron, patron (that is, me) to occasionally indulge in doing so.) Some others are proud of it:

Which all brings me a este blog. My English is always gonna run laps around my ability to speak Spanish, tho [sic] it's gettin better, and honestly, that's a huge part of why this blog is English-dominant. However, I also quiero demostrar that spanglish es más que una amenaza contra el español. It's a means of resistencia, or, in sunshiney terms, an opportunity for cultural contact, mutual understanding, and peaceable mingling. In short, I ain't gonna sit idly by and see only Spanish altered por el esanglish. Textaisle, 2005a

(Which all brings me to this blog. My English is always gonna run laps around my ability to speak Spanish, though it’s getting better, and honestly, that’s a huge part of why this blog is English-dominant. However, I also want to show that Spanglish is more than a threat to Spanish. It’s a means of resistance, or, in sunshiny terms, an opportunity for cultural contact, mutual understanding, and peaceable mingling. In short, I ain't gonna sit idly by and see only Spanish altered by Spanglish.)

Still, we also find the same blogger later blaming his “Spanglish” for the lack of readers: “Tho [sic], admittedly, it’s my infrequent posting y el uso bien heavy del spanglish that is perhaps more responsible for keeping readership down, but no bother really” (Textaisle, 2005b). (“Though, admittedly, it's my infrequent posting and the heavy use of Spanglish that is perhaps more responsible for keeping readership down, but no bother really.)

³ My own translations for all of the bloggers’ quotes appear in parentheses.
Despite the controversy, the reality is that language mixing does happen online and the more democratic world of CMC allows bilingual and multilingual users to freely switch languages in order to fully express themselves. The present study attempts to take a further step in the exploration of the still relatively new field of “electronic” Spanish-English code-switching. To this end, I compare bilingual data in three different CMC channels among Spanish-English bilinguals: electronic mail, blogs, and social media (Facebook and Twitter) in order to find out:

1. Why bilingual individuals mix their languages when writing online.
2. Whether these individuals' behavior online will obey the same socio-pragmatic motivations that have been traditionally ascribed to oral code-switching and/or new functions that are idiosyncratic of CMC.
3. The extent to which biculturalism—as much as, or even more than, bilingualism—plays a role in language mixing online, an essential component that has often been overlooked in the search for grammatical and pragmatic constraints at the oral level.

2 Previous Studies

The ever-growing field of CMC has allured many a sociolinguist since the 1990s. Numerous studies have explored language mixing among bilinguals engaged in a broad range of CMC formats, both synchronous and asynchronous. Most of the research has focused on e-mail but some works have also targeted blogs, web discussion forums, fan fiction, and other sites where CMC takes place such as Flicker. As we will see, many of the sociolinguistic studies that have explored the discourse functions conveyed by code-switching online point out the important role it plays in terms of denoting social and/or ethnic identity. The ensuing review of the literature is not meant to be exhaustive but rather to offer the reader a chronological outline of previous research on the topic of code-switching online involving different language pairs.

Paolillo (1996) was one of the first researchers to analyze the factors that influenced language choices among Punjabi-English bilinguals in an online forum. The results of his study revealed that Punjabi was used for marked discourse functions (often negatively) and only with Punjabi community members. Georgakopoulou (1997) examined style- and code-switches in Greek-English email messages and one of her conclusions was that language switching served to reframe footings of symmetrical alignments and intimacy among
bilingual individuals. Dascalu (1999) did a comparative study of e-mail messages in three groups of non-native English bilinguals: Belarusian-English, Korean-English, and Romanian-English. She concluded that code-switching was a deliberate communicative behavior that reflected the writers’ competence in the two different languages.

In the last decade, several works have further explored language mixing in e-mail. Warschauer et al. (2002) explored Egyptian Arabic-English code-switching in young professionals in relation to global trends of language, globalization, and identity. Interestingly, their participants indicated that their use of English did not mean embracing Western culture or an abandonment of Egyptian identity. In his monograph, Hinrichs (2006) analyzed the discourse function of English-Jamaican Creole code-switching in e-mail using Myers-Scotton’s (1983, 1998) and Gumperz’s (1982) theoretical frameworks.

Androutsopoulos (2007) examined language choice and code-switching in German-based web forums and found that bilingual speech in these forums was actually comparable to conversational code-switching in terms of its typical discourse functions.

Tsiplakou (2009) analyzed Greek-English code-switching in e-mail and concluded that switching languages was an established and accepted practice with specific discourse functions (e.g., Greek was used for factual or referential information while English was used for affective or evaluative comments) within a close-knit group. Paolillo (2011) studied conversational code-switching in English, Hindi, and Punjabi on Usenet and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). His findings indicate a tendency for synchronous modes of CMC to favor code-switching while asynchronous modes of CMC tend to disfavor this practice.

Recent studies on bi- and multilingualism in CMC outline researchable problems and theoretical, practical, and methodological issues in multilingual web discussion forums (Kytölä, 2012). Lee and Barton (2012) explore how non-native speakers of English deploy their linguistic resources on Flickr.com, highlighting the importance of language mixing online as a means to project glocal identity (i.e. the participants’ intention to project themselves either as global or local members of the online community). Similarly, Leppänen (2012: 235) studies Finnish-English language mixing in Internet-based fan fiction as part of a more general “heteroglossic communicative style”. She argues that code-switching can serve the purpose of contextualizing meaning and suggesting specific ways to interpret the text, it can indicate a transition from one type of discourse to another, characterization or shifts in the narration (e.g., English is used to represent the inner speech of a character or to evoke an English-speaking setting, comparable to what code-switching has been shown to accomplish in oral communication).
Despite the increasing interest in this particular field and the countless studies carried out in different language pairs, there seems to be a shortage of research dealing specifically with Spanish-English mixing online. This is surprising given the fact that Spanish is the third language used in the Internet after English and Chinese and its use has grown 800% in the last decade. Moreover, Spanish is now the second language used in Twitter (after English) while Facebook has more than 80 million Spanish-speaking users. Montes-Alcalá (2005, 2007) analyzed bilingual e-mail and weblogs respectively and concluded that code-switching for the bilingual individuals represented a way to express their connection to both Hispanic and Anglo cultures. In a similar study, Negrón Goldbarg examined e-mail exchanges among Spanish-English bilingual students using multi-dimensional scaling analysis and tree diagrams. She found that Spanish was an important identification tool used to personalize and for intimate, informal exchanges while switches to English were mainly motivated by technical terms or to draw on American frames of reference (Negrón Goldbarg, 2009: 12–13).

3 Methodology and Corpora

In the absence of a theoretical framework specifically designed to analyze written and/or electronic code-switching, I follow the sociolinguistic approach established in previous studies carried out for Spanish-English code-switching at the oral level. Researchers have unanimously pointed out a number of different socio-pragmatic and stylistic functions achieved by code-switching in oral discourse that are quite consistent across the literature (see Valdés-Fallis, 1976; Jacobson, 1977; Poplack, 1981; McClure, 1981; and Gumperz, 1982 among others). Examples of such functions include quotations, repetition, addressee specification, emphasis, clarification, elaboration, focus, attention attraction or retention, topic shift, and role shift just to name a few. Along the same lines, Zentella (1997) distinguished three main communicative strategies accomplished by oral code-switching: footing, clarification, and crutch-like mixes.

We must bear in mind, however, that assigning a specific function to each and every switch can be problematic. Zentella (1997: 99) suggested that “pin-pointing the purpose of each code switch is a task as fraught with difficulty as imputing the reasons for a monolingual’s choice of one synonym over another, and no complete accounting may ever be possible”. Nonetheless, rather than

4 See the latest data from the Instituto Cervantes reported in http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2013/01/14/actualidad/1358165374_278922.html.
an implication that code-switching is arbitrary we must interpret this statement as an acknowledgment that a given switch may have multiple readings in terms of the functions it performs. For example, a switch for a lexical item (the oft-quoted switching for lexical need) may also work as a trigger for a subsequent switch. Or a switch for a parenthetical comment may serve as a clarification or elaboration at the same time. We may therefore encounter switches that fulfill not one but several pragmatic functions at a given time. Conversely, there may exist switches with no apparent specific pragmatic function.5

The underlying hypothesis in the present study is that most of the stylistic and social functions traditionally displayed in (conversational) oral code-switching may also be present in CMC given the fact that this mode of communication, despite being written, shares many similarities with oral, face-to-face, interaction (see also the general introduction to this issue). Furthermore, since it is now widely accepted that CMC is a domain in and of itself, perhaps it is time to put aside the endless debate about whether or not this type of interaction resembles more oral than written discourse. One might suppose, for instance, that some of the canonical social functions of oral code-switching, such as addressee specification, would not obtain in written communication. However, there are no real limitations to what can be accomplished via CMC and technically every single function attested in oral production could be found online. Using the “@” before a name to switch interlocutors and/or language is common practice in social networks, thus fulfilling the addressee specification function mentioned above. Moreover, I also hypothesize that CMC may reveal original, idiosyncratic functions not previously substantiated in oral or written communication.

In the electronic corpora, all the code switches found conformed to most (if not all) of the abovementioned functions traditionally found in the literature of oral code-switching. However, for the sake of consistency and simplicity, I grouped those functions that served a similar purpose under the same category, which resulted in five main socio-pragmatic functions. For instance, in the literature of oral code-switching we find clarification, elaboration, and parenthetical comments as two or three separate functions. Yet, I found that all the parenthetical comments were in fact elaborating or clarifying what had been written before. Therefore, following Zentella’s (1997) “clarification” function, I grouped these three categories under the same function—i.e.,

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5 Huerta-Macías and Quintero (1981) call “informative” utterances to a large part of their code-switched data that does not manifest any particular social function.
elaboration. Likewise, emphasis and repetition usually appear in the literature as two separate categories. I classified those examples of repetition that actually served for emphatic purposes as emphasis, while those cases where repetition in the other language was employed to clarify an idea were categorized as elaboration. Focus/topic constructions were also included under the emphasis category since they perform the same function (to highlight an idea or word). Finally, although in previous works lexical need, idiomatic expressions, tags, discourse markers and linguistic routines are listed as separate functions, I here grouped them all in the same category (culturally-bound switches) since they fall under what Zentella (1997: 98) calls crutch-like switches “because, like a person with impaired use of one leg who depends on a crutch to keep walking, a bilingual who is stumped in one language can keep on speaking by depending on a translated synonym as a stand-in”.6 In those cases where, as discussed above, one language switch could fulfill more than one function, one token was assigned to each category. For this reason, in the quantitative analysis for each function, I use a token count instead of a switch count. Each of the five socio-pragmatic categories will be individually discussed below followed by relevant examples.

The data presented here comes from three CMC corpora where mixing of Spanish and English among bilingual individuals takes place:7

(1) E-mail, given that it seems to have replaced traditional handwritten (“snail”) mail. The corpus consisted of one hundred e-mail messages written by six women and four men, aged between 30 and 50 from assorted countries of origin including Ecuador, Argentina, Mexico, Puerto Rico and the US. One hundred and sixty four tokens were totaled for the analysis.

(2) Blogs, which have emerged as publicly accessible journals for any individual who is willing to share their thoughts online. This corpus consisted of fifteen bilingual blogs written by ten women and five

6 However, my classification is different from Zentella’s (1997) in that she establishes three major categories: footing, clarification, and crutch-like switches. Under her footing category she includes topic shifts, quotations, tags, and attention attraction among other purposes. Under clarification she refers mainly to repetition and emphasis. In the category of crutch-like switches she includes crutches, fillers, taboo words, and other situations where there might be—although not necessarily—a linguistic gap.

7 A part of the data presented here comes from the e-mail and blog corpora collected for previous studies (Montes-Alcalá, 2005 and 2007). This data is now being contrasted with new data from social media.
men, all in their 20's and 30's, most of them of Mexican descent except three Puerto Ricans. A total of five hundred and thirty nine tokens were collected for the analysis.

(3) Social networks, since they appear to be the fastest growing mode of communication in the world (an estimated 340 million “tweets” are sent via Twitter every day while Facebook had one billion active users as of October 2012.) The social media corpora consisted of two hundred and eighty Facebook and Twitter posts written by eleven women and four men, all in their early 20's, from Colombian and Venezuelan origin. Thirty-three tokens were considered for the analysis.

The bilingual subjects were chosen based on a single criterion: their use of mixed language in their CMC regardless of their level of bilingualism. As mentioned above, the country of origin varied among the subjects. However, neither the origin nor the type of bilingualism were taken into account as significant variables for the purpose of the present study. While all the data presented here represents spontaneous (not elicited) written production, in order to protect the anonymity of the subjects and any third party mentioned in the texts real names have been replaced by fictitious names in all the examples.

4 Results

I will now discuss in detail each one of the socio-pragmatic functions considered for the analysis and illustrate them with relevant examples taken from each one of the CMC corpora (e-mail, blog, and social networks).

4.1 Quotes

Using the original language to cite somebody else’s words, either as a direct quote or as a paraphrase, is one of the main functions attested in oral

9 http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Fact.
10 Several dichotomies have emerged in the literature of bilingualism but I here follow Mackey’s (1968) definition, which conceives bilingualism as a relative concept. Thus, a bilingual individual is defined as someone who habitually uses two languages (in this case, Spanish and English) with communicative capacity.
11 For easier visual identification, Spanish is presented in italics; English in regular font.
code-switching (see Valdés-Fallis, 1976; Gumperz, 1982; and McClure, 1981). Although this was not a very recurrent function (9.1% of the total number of switches in the e-mail corpus with 15 tokens, 10% in the blogs with 54 tokens, and 6% in the social networks with 2 tokens), several examples of both direct (examples 1, 3 and 4) and indirect (example 2) quotes were found in the electronic corpora. In some cases the base language was Spanish and the quotation was in English (examples 1 and 2). Some other cases were the opposite, with English being the base language and quoted words in Spanish (examples 3 and 4).

(1) *Y me pregunta* “does it look corny?” *Y yo le dije que sí, y me contesta* “well I’m very corny!” (e-mail)
   And me asks And I her said that yes and me answers
   ‘And she asked me “does it look corny?” And I said yes, and she said “well I’m very corny!”

(2) *Después me quedé pensando por lo que dijiste que* that would make the other guy mad. (e-mail)
   After me kept thinking about that what you said that
   ‘Afterwards, I kept thinking about what you said that that would make the other guy mad’

(3) And as my Godson left he ran back and gave me a big hug and said, “*Madrina Lulu, no dejes de visitarme*”. (blog)
   Godmother
   Lulu, no stop of visit me
   ‘And as my Godson left he ran back and gave me a big hug and said, “Godmother Lulu, don’t stop visiting me”

(4) The poor lady had her hands full with the two little rascals. She sat next to me and we started making small talk. She asked me, “*Y tienes hijos*?”
   I replied, “No.” And without missing a beat she replied, “*Que bueno*.” I literally laughed out loud at her reply. (blog)
   And you have kids
   How good
   ‘The poor lady had her hands full with the two little rascals. She sat next to me and we started making small talk. She asked me, “And do you have kids?” I replied, “No.” And without missing a beat she replied, “That’s good.” I literally laughed out loud at her reply’
4.2 Emphasis

In oral speech, code-switching can be used as a device to emphasize an idea (see, for instance, McClure, 1981). By switching languages, the speaker can call attention to a word, sentence or idea—which relates to the concept of “foregrounding” presented by Valdés-Fallis (1977) and Keller (1976). In a text, foregrounding can be achieved by underlining or capitalizing a word or a sentence. In addition to those widely known conventions, a bilingual individual also has the option of using both languages when writing in order to highlight something. For instance, example (5) below contains both capitalizing and code-switching in order to emphasize the idea. The remaining examples show switching for emphatic purposes, which accounted for 10.3% of the switches in the e-mail corpus (17 tokens), 28.3% in the blog corpus (153 tokens) and 9% in social media (3 tokens).

(5) *Qué relación más rara, la de Vicky y Tere, muy WEIRD!* (e-mail)
   What relation more strange, the of Vicky and Tere, very
   'What a strange relationship, Vicky and Tere's, very weird!'

(6) *Me encantan las notas crípticas y la tuya es criptíquísima. Awesome!* (e-mail)
   Me love the notes cryptic and the yours is very cryptic
   'I love cryptic notes and yours is very cryptic. Awesome!'

(7) *No tengo ni idea* what the hell that is supposed to mean, but it can't be good. (blog)
   No I have nor idea
   'I have no idea what the hell that is supposed to mean, but it can't be good'

(8) *Soy mexicana,* and i was taught never to talk back, but now that i think about it, its fun! (blog)
   I am Mexican
   'I am a Mexican woman and I was taught never to talk back, but now that i think-about it, its fun!'

(9) *WTF????????? En The Good Wife en la segunda temporada ellos representan a Chávez????????????!!!!* (Twitter)
   In in the second season they represent to
   'WTF? In The Good Wife in the second season they show Chávez??'

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12 Taboo and swear words are sometimes classified as a separate category (see above mentioned Zentella’s crutch-like switches). In this case the use seems clearly emphatic.
4.3 Elaboration
Switching languages to further explain, clarify or elaborate on what was previously said is another traditional pragmatic function commonly attested in bilingual oral speech (see McClure, 1981 and Zentella, 1997). The electronic corpora yielded abundant examples of this category, totaling 20.1% of all the switches in e-mail (33 tokens), 11.1% in blogs (60 tokens) and 3% in social networks (1 token). As explained above, sometimes—as in examples (12), (14) and (16) below—these switches appear in the form of a parenthetical comment, i.e. the switched phrase or sentence is written between commas or parentheses.

(11)  *Me parece muy raro que vayan a la fiesta.* They must be desperate for something to do! (e-mail)
Me seems very strange that they go to the party
‘It is very strange that they are going to the party. They must be desperate for something to do!’

(12)  *Aún no sé a qué oficina me mandarán* (or even whether I’ll still have this computer!!), pero por ahora sigo aquí. (e-mail)
Still no I know at what office me they will send
but for now I stay here
‘I still don’t know what office they will send me to (or even whether I’ll still have this computer!) but for now I am here.’

(13) They all suck major ass, especially Rosa…. I hate her so much right now… *no la puedo ni ver a la maldita vieja.* (blog)
I can nor see at the damn old woman
‘They all suck major ass, especially Rosa…. I hate her so much right now… I can’t stand that damn old woman.’

(14) A couple of them were my cousins (*primos segundos*) who I didn’t know. (blog)
'A couple of them were my cousins (second cousins) who I didn't know'
Where are you?? I need therapy, I’m dying, no puedo más. (Facebook)

‘Where are you?? I need therapy, I am dying, I can’t (go on) anymore’

No puedo más, quiero dormiiir! 189 pages left... (no avanco) (Facebook)

‘I can’t (go on) anymore, I want to sleep! 189 pages left... (I am not making progress)’

4.4 Culturally-Bound Switches: Isolated Nouns and Idiomatic Expressions, Discourse and Identity Markers, and Linguistic Routines

A so-called lexical need is one of the most recurrent functions attested in oral code-switching and it typically encompasses switches that occur at the word level, mainly nouns (see Valdés-Fallis, 1976 and Poplack, 1981). Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that, consistent with previous studies in oral code-switching, this category was by far the most prolific one in the CMC corpora with 51.1% of the total number of switches in the e-mail corpus (84 tokens), 43.2% in the blogs (233 tokens), and 69.6% in the social networks (23 tokens).

Yet, it merits noting that the issue of lexical need is one of the most controversial ones in the literature. Quite often the interpretation of such “need” has been misconstrued as lack of proficiency in one of the languages or, even worse, laziness on the part of the speaker. While it could be argued that, technically, each and every switch—regardless of whether it is a noun or a phrase—fulfills a need, under no circumstances should this be inferred as a lack of language proficiency. Sometimes, switching may be due to a lack of an exact equivalent in the other language, a momentary gap in the lexicon of the individual, or simply a higher frequency of exposure to a lexical item or an idiom in a specific language or culture. Such is the case with specific holidays (Halloween, Thanksgiving or Valentine’s Day, as seen in example 17 below). For this reason, I name these culturally-bound switches, since—unlike the previous functions discussed above—they are closely related to the bicultural environment where a given situation takes place.

I had a nice surprise of

‘I had a nice surprise for Valentine’s Day love u’
Nonetheless, even when a lexical item, an identity marker or an idiomatic expression might be easier to access in one language or culture as opposed to the other, that does not necessarily imply a language deficiency. These “gaps” should rather be attributed to the verbal flexibility allowed by the bilingual/bicultural receptor. In fact, code-switching at the oral level has proven to be highly pervasive when making reference to specific culturally-charged items.\footnote{Mahootian (2005: 367) refers to this type of switches as emotionally/culturally evocative/bonding.} Certain words and concepts are simply better tailored to serve a cultural setting rather than another. As Zentella (1997: 101) points out, “a code switch ‘says it better’ by capturing the meaning or expressing a point more effectively”. Additionally, Mahootian (2005: 369) claims that “emotions are better expressed in Spanish, because words sound more powerful in Spanish”.

As explained above, I also included in this category other types of switches such as discourse and identity markers as well as linguistic routines following Zentella’s (1997) concept of “crutch-like” switches. These types of discourse-pragmatic words appear to be highly “borrowable” and are attested in many contact situations. Matras (1998: 281) calls them “utterance modifiers” and argues that bilingual individuals actually draw on the resources of their pragmatically dominant language, so switching languages in this case is “therefore not due to lack of equivalent functions in the indigenous language, nor is it due to the prestige effect that the integration of L2 items may have on the overall flavor of the discourse.” Example (18) represents a discourse marker, examples (19) and (20) show linguistic routines, while examples (20–23) illustrate identity markers and endearment terms both in Spanish (21–22) and English (23):

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{(18)} \textit{Pero} just from the quote she posted, I’m totally sucked in. (blog) \\
  \hspace{1cm} But \\
  \hspace{1cm} ‘But just from the quote she posted, I’m totally sucked in.’
  \\
  \item \textbf{(19)} So… \textit{aquí de nuevo en el} Disney Learning Center... (blog) \\
  \hspace{1cm} here of new in the \\
  \hspace{1cm} ‘So… here again at the Disney Learning Center…’
  \\
  \item \textbf{(20)} \textit{– Te llamo en un rato}. I love youuuuu. \\
  \textit{– Dale}, I love you moore!!! (Facebook) \\
  \hspace{1cm} to you I call in a while \\
  \hspace{1cm} Okay \\
  \hspace{1cm} ‘– I will call you in a while. I love you.’ \\
  \hspace{1cm} ‘– Okay, I love you more!’
\end{itemize}
(21) *M’ijo*, pass me some of that coffee made out of those coffee beans Marquitos from Chiapas sent me. (blog)
My son
‘My little child, pass me some of that coffee made out of those coffee beans Marquitos from Chiapas sent me.’

(22) *Híjole mano*, remember he borrowed that cd too del Flaco Jimenez? (blog)
Wow brother
‘Wow man, remember he borrowed that cd too del Flaco Jimenez?’

(23) Baby, todo bien @home!!! (Facebook)
all well
‘Baby, is everything okay at home!’

The ensuing examples show how certain lexical items are more easily rendered in one language rather than in the other one. At times, as in examples (24) and (25), the switch obeys technical or professional terminology such as “file”, “command”, “delete”, or “consulting advisor”. In other cases, certain items belong to a specific culture and cannot be readily translated in another language/culture. Such are the terms “significant other” in (26), “flake” in (27), or “roommate” in (28). Something similar occurs with the idiomatic expression in (29). None of these terms has an exact equivalent in Hispanic culture without using a paraphrase and the same can be said about translating “regañona” and “coscorrones” in (30) into English.

(24) Cuando traté de abrirlo, el sistema me indicó que el file tenía un virus. Entonces traté de eliminarlo con un command pero no lo aceptó y me ordenó que hiciera delete el file [...] de alguna manera volver a copiarlo o quizá hacerme un hard copy of the transcriptions? (e-mail)
When I tried to open it the system me indicated that the file had a virus. Then I tried to eliminate it with a command but it did not accept it and it told me to delete the file. Is there any way to copy it again or maybe make a hard copy of the transcriptions?"

(25) Montse es nuestra consulting advisor porque ella se va en Marzo. (blog)
Montse is our consulting advisor because she herself goes in March
‘Montse is our consulting advisor because she is leaving in March’
(26) *Estaré, claro, en la cena, y supongo que mi significant other eres tú, ha, ha!* (e-mail)  
I will be, of course, in the dinner, and I suppose that my are you  
‘I will be, of course, at the dinner, and I suppose that you will be my significant other, ha ha!’

(27) *Estoy más desilusionada con Sophie... es la flake más grande del mundo....* (e-mail)  
I am more disappointed with Sophie... is the more big of the world  
‘I am so dissapointed at Sophie... she’s the biggest flake in the world.’

(28) *Ahhh es q ya tienes pensado tus planes con el q va hacer tu roommate rumbas salir-deras ta bien* (Twitter)  
is that already you have thought your plans with the that to make your exiting is well  
‘Ah, so you have already made plans with your future roommate, going rumba, it is okay’

(29) *Just kidding, no he hablado con nadie.* (e-mail)  
no have spoken with nobody  
‘Just kidding, I have not spoken with anybody’

(30) I remember when we were small we used to be scared of her and we wouldn’t like her very much cuz she was real *regañona*, and she used to give us *coscorrones* when we wouldn’t listen. (blog)  
nagger  
clouts  
‘I remember when we were small we used to be scared of her and we wouldn’t like her very much because she was a real nagger, and she used to give us a clout on the head when we wouldn’t listen.’

4.5 **Triggered Switches**
An interesting phenomenon commonly attested at the spoken level (see Valdés-Fallis, 1976) is when the switch of a word unconsciously prompts switching in what follows or precedes it (in the case of anticipatory triggering). Actually, it is

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14 Triggering as a phenomenon in bilingual speech was first noticed and explored by Michael Clyne (1967), who later turned it into a more general concept of facilitation (Clyne 2003) and has been subsequently problematized by other researchers in the field of language contact (see also Haugen, 1973 and Jacobson, 1978.) The idea behind anticipatory triggering is that a sentence could already be constructed in an abstract way in the mind of the speaker before he/she knows in what language it will come out. Hence, if an item is going to be switched later on, that could prompt a switch in what precedes that word.
not unusual that a single lexical switch—like the ones discussed in the previous section—will cause a triggered switch. In the following examples we can see how this psycholinguistic process occurs when writing in CMC as well. While no data is available to directly compare the occurrence of triggered switches at the oral vs. written levels, this category was not overly prolific in the electronic corpora. Thus, triggered switches represented 7.9% of the total amount of switches in the e-mail corpus (13 tokens), 7.2% in the blogs (39 tokens) and 12.1% in social media (4 tokens). The triggering item(s) that provoke switching in what follows them are represented in bold face in the following examples. Sometimes the trigger is an English word (examples 31–34), sometimes it is in Spanish (examples 35–36):

(31) Si no le viste, te perdiste el **ugly dress** of the year!!!!! (e-mail)
    If not her saw you missed the
    'If you didn’t see her, you missed the ugly dress of the year!'

(32) *Y el otro imbécil... que puso unos folders* all around the room... (e-mail)
    And the other idiot... that put some
    'And the other idiot... who put some folders all around the room...'

(33) *Te dije que conseguí un curro de Research Assistant?* It's a work/study job, so the
    Federal Gov't pays my salary. (e-mail)
    To you said that got a job of
    'Did I tell you that I got a job as a Research Assistant? It's a work/study job, so the
    Federal Gov’t pays my salary.'

(34) *Tuve una linda sorpresa de Valentine's Day* love u (Twitter)
    I had a nice surprise of
    'I had a nice surprise for Valentine's Day love u'

(35) Los Angeles and Colorado will be the only **recuerdos de lo que hubo anteriormente**. (blog)
    reminders of it that was
    'Los Angeles and Colorado will be the only reminders of what was there before.'

(36) And my big brother was all excited and he told us that the truck was outside and
    my **hermanillo y yo nos salimos a mirarla**. (blog)
    little brother and I ourselves went out to look her
    'And my big brother was all excited and he told us that the truck was outside
    and my little brother and I went out to look at her.'
Additionally, there were two examples of anticipatory triggering. In this case the triggering element, usually a noun, actually appears after the triggered part, as a modifier to the noun.

(37) Laura escondiendo everyone’s drinks! (e-mail)
    hiding
    ‘Laura was hiding everyone’s drinks’

(38) 1 fucking tweet a las 2.50 am hora Americana y extraño a @madisaurio así como bastante ... (Twitter)
    at the 2.50 hour American and I miss to so
    like enough
    ‘One fucking tweet at 2.50 am US time and I miss @madisaurio so much...’

4.6 Twisting Traditional Functions: Switching for Privacy

While code-switching is mainly used for intra-group communication, between members of the same ethnic, social or cultural group—a classic case of “we” vs. “they” codes (see Gumperz, 1982)—it can also be employed as a device to exclude other individuals. Such exclusion can be effectively accomplished by switching to a language that a third party will not understand, a situation in which a monolingual would whisper or use euphemisms. This type of function would accomplish the opposite objective of what has traditionally been called situational code-switching (i.e., switching languages to adapt to a change in the communicative situation—including topic, setting, and/or participants—for instance, to communicate with an interlocutor who does not speak the language being used) thus putting a new twist on the traditional switching for addressee specification (Gumperz, 1982). Interestingly, one of the earliest systematic code-switching to occur in bilingual interactions is a function of the category “participants” (see McClure’s 1981 study on bilingual children). In fact, as Tsiplakou (2009: 365) points out, “the very fact of choosing a mixing mode from the speakers’ repertoire (to the exclusion of other, more “monolingual” modes), can of course be of social significance; it may, for example, signal group identity.”

Although, to my knowledge, this function has not yet been attested as such in written code-switching and was not initially considered as one of the categories for the analysis, I found two instances—both of them in the e-mail corpus, accounting for 1.2% of the total—where an attempt to “exclude” other

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15 See Wei’s (1999: 171) example of switching from English to Cantonese in order to temporarily exclude a participant from a conversation.
potential readers prompted a code-switch. The context in example (39) is that of a person who is applying for jobs and does not wish to share the location of her future interview with other co-workers and/or superiors. In example (40) the person was caught by someone nearby writing something about a third party and decided to switch languages instead of using the name of that third party in order to enhance the confidentiality of the message (presumably because the by-passer did not understand English). In both cases, it would have been possible to keep the base language and still not reveal the name of the person/place, but switching languages adds another layer of privacy and confidentiality to the message.

(39) Y además, me llamaron para una entrevista at that place. (e-mail)
    And besides, me called for an interview
    ‘And besides, they called me for an interview at that place.’

(40) Pues, aquí estaba contándote cositas de you know who, y llega Juan y tuve que cancelar mi mensaje…. (e-mail)
    So, here I was telling you little things of and arrives Juan and I had to cancel my message...
    ‘So here I was telling you things about you know who, and Juan arrived and I had to cancel my message…’

5 Discussion

As these results show, CMC provides a new ground for sociolinguistic studies in general and the area of language mixing in particular. While oral Spanish-English code-switching still carries a stigma in certain communities and social contexts, the data presented here supports the theory that, despite the initial controversies regarding the appropriateness of mixing languages online, code-switching now seems acceptable in many CMC bilingual communities. In fact, it emerges as a valid strategy to communicate online due to the democratic nature of the Internet as a whole and the liberty that allows its users to disregard established conventions, grammatical or otherwise. Thus, the most straightforward answer to the question of why these bilingual individuals mix languages in CMC is “Because they can”. Regardless of their origin and type of bilingualism, they afford themselves a freedom of expression when writing to or for other bilinguals online.

A quantitative summary of the results presented above appears in Table 1, showing the total number of tokens for each CMC corpus and for each of the
socio-pragmatic functions considered for the study. As we can see, the blog corpus yielded a much larger number of code-switches than the other two, while the social media corpora produced a much more limited amount of switches. This disparity can be partly explained by the different size of each corpus (the blog being the largest and the social media being the smallest) but it is most likely related to the subjects themselves. Note that two hundred and eighty entries were analyzed for the social media corpora while the e-mail corpus consisted of one hundred and sixty four messages. By the same token, there were more participants in the social media corpus (fifteen, just like in the blog corpus) than in the e-mail corpus (ten). Therefore, subjects in the social media corpora simply code-switched at a much lower rate than the subjects in the other two corpora, and collecting a larger amount of data most likely would not have produced radically different results—while a different set of participants undoubtedly would. A future study focusing exclusive on social media (in progress) will include a larger pool of participants to investigate this premise.

Continuing with the second research question, the aim was to examine the different socio-pragmatic functions across different CMC outlets in order to take a further step in the exploration of the still relatively new field of “electronic” language mixing and—more specifically—to fill a gap in the literature of Spanish-English code-switching in CMC, which has been scarce to date. The qualitative results discussed above are consistent with previous studies done in other language pairs that have proven that code-switching in CMC conveys specific discourse functions as well as play an important role in terms of signifying social and/or ethnic identity.

I have shown that the types of socio-pragmatic and stylistic functions performed by code-switching in the CMC corpora mirror those traditionally observed in oral production quite closely. Table 2 illustrates and summarizes the results for each function in each corpus. We observe that, unambiguously,
the most prolific socio-pragmatic function in every single one of the three CMC corpora by far is the culturally-bound switching (encompassing, as previously described, isolated lexical items and idiomatic expressions, identity and discourse markers, as well as linguistic routines). Switching for emphatic purposes—in addition to or instead of other more traditional methods available in writing such as using capital letters or boldface—is the second most fertile category overall, although it gets a third place in both the e-mail and the social media corpora. Switching for clarification and elaboration purposes is the third most recurrent function in general. Although less frequent but also important, code-switching in CMC can be effectively used as a technique to quote someone else’s original words or ideas, the fourth category for all three CMC corpora. Last but not least, the triggering phenomenon applies to CMC just like it has been attested at the oral level; a switched item can cause another switch in the preceding or ensuing words. This function appears last for both e-mail and blogs but gets a surprising second place in the social media.

Table 3 shows the breakdown of the results for each CMC corpus. Although, as explained, the distribution of each category is not identical, once again we can see a clear pattern where culturally-bound switches are the most prevalent function across the board. Perhaps the most interesting result is that elaboration does not seem to play a significant role in social media as much as in the other two CMC corpora, while triggered switches and quotes seem to occur at a higher rate in social media than in e-mail and blogs. It is worth reminding the reader

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<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Summary of results by socio-pragmatic function (percentages)</th>
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<td>Triggered</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
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that the differences across genres are most likely due to the particular samples and participants analyzed rather than idiosyncratic of each CMC channel.

Furthermore, and despite the fact that this was not one of the sociopragmatic functions initially considered for the analysis, I found that code-switching in CMC can also serve the purpose of maintaining or enhancing confidentiality between the interlocutors as a way to exclude other individuals. While it is possible to find this behavior in oral communication as well in the form of addressee specification, it had not been attested in bilingual writing before. It thus seems quite idiosyncratic of CMC due to the very nature of the Internet realm, where privacy cannot be guaranteed.

Therefore, language mixing online—as in real life—emerges as a rather complex strategy that may be perceived as a superior expressive repertoire, as opposed to a limitation or lack of familiarity with the language. This should not come as a surprise in CMC, a relatively casual and spontaneous mode of interaction that has often been placed at the middle of the continuum between spoken and written communication.\textsuperscript{16} However, it is worth reminding the reader that in the domain of CMC we can find a whole range of registers just as we do in real life interaction. Most (if not all) of the spontaneous data presented here represents an informal or colloquial register, and it is safe to assume that the quantity and the quality of language mixing produced by all these subjects would be different in a more formal context, both on- and off-line.

Moreover, addressing the last research question, while bilingualism is a necessary condition to be able to switch from one language to another, I have demonstrated that biculturalism plays a crucial role in the most prominent socio-pragmatic function, namely the culturally-bound switches. This category, as we have seen, was the single most fertile one in all the three CMC corpora analyzed. While the remaining functions had different distributions in each corpus, switching for cultural reasons was the common denominator across the board. Therefore, we can conclude that biculturalism, not just bilingualism, is at the core of language mixing online (just like in natural speech production).

To recap, the one feature shared by all three CMC corpora analyzed is the writers’ ability to manipulate both codes for communicative effects. The results presented here, consistent with previous CMC studies in other language pairs, indicate that code-switching online is a deliberate communicative behavior that reflects the users’ bilingual competence. In fact, fully competent bilingual individuals do code-switch when engaged in CMC because they possess sufficient linguistic and cultural knowledge of the nuances of both Spanish and English in order to do so and because, rather than being indiscriminate, this mode of interaction performs specific socio-pragmatic and stylistic functions similar to those attested in oral code-switching. These individuals live between two cultures and two languages they can and must use to fully express themselves both on- and off-line. Mixing languages in CMC—as well as in real life—is “a way of saying that they belong[ed] to both worlds, and should not be forced to give up one for the other” (Zentella, 1997: 114). That is, a way of expressing one’s cultures as much as one’s languages.

References


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