

Dr Zhu Hua
Speech & Language Section
School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences
King George VI Building
University of Newcastle upon Tyne.
NE1 7RU
Email: hua.zhu@newcastle.ac.uk
Telephone: 0191-2225210

Duelling Languages, Duelling Values: Conversational codeswitching in intergenerational dispute in bilingual, immigrant families.

Summary:

This project aims to investigate the changes in family values in immigrant communities by focussing on a specific linguistic phenomenon, namely, codeswitching – the alternation of language in conversation. Through an analysis of the sequential organisation of codeswitching between immigrant parents and their British-born children in Chinese families in Tyneside, we aim to demonstrate how personal needs, social identities and cultural values are negotiated in response to a wide array of interactional and social factors. The research will provide new insights into the (changes of) family values in diasporas and migrant communities, evaluate current theories of intercultural communication and conflict resolution, and contribute to the development of a general theory of the pragmatics of codeswitching.

Outline of the project:

In bilingual, immigrant families, different generations of speakers have different language preferences and proficiencies. Typically, the grandparent generation has remained largely monolingual in their heritage language(s); the parent generation is dominant in their heritage language(s) and uses limited English in specific contexts; the British-born generation is becoming English-dominant, restricts the use of the heritage language(s) to interactions with their grandparents, and switches extensively between English and the heritage language(s) with their parents (see e.g. Li Wei, 1994).

The focus of the project is on codeswitching in conflict talk between immigrant parents and their British-born children in Chinese families in Britain. We consider it problematic the stereotypical view that the Chinese regards obedience of children to their parents as central to their family values and aim to investigate how the complex linguistic phenomenon of codeswitching helps to shape and reshape family values in the Chinese immigrant families as well as to develop and change the social identities of the individuals and their communities. For this perspective, we wish to demonstrate that linguistics has the capacity to uncover the methods through which ordered social activities are generated.

Research Questions:

The project aims to address the following questions:

1. How is bilingual codeswitching used in structuring and restructuring family relationship in conversational interaction?
2. How differences in family values (which must be seen as part of the process of identification amongst diasporas and migrants) are constructed, managed and resolved through the use of codeswitching ?
3. What kind of identity predicates, or membership categories, can codeswitching be an index of in conversational interaction? And what could be the long-term consequence of the construction of cultural identities in diaspora and migrant communities?
4. Can the pragmatics of codeswitching be explained without recourse to the rationality-based theories? In other words, how can codeswitching as an identity index be shown to be interpretatively relevant?

Outcome

The research findings will enable comparative analysis of diasporas, migration and their associated identities across many different contexts, and facilitate connections between researchers in linguistics and other disciplines (e.g. cultural studies and anthropology) and raise general awareness of the important socio-cultural changes that are taking place through everyday interaction in bilingual families.

Further information

Length of project: 9 months