JAKOB CROMDAL. Code switching for all practical purposes. Bilingual organization of children's play. Linköpings Universitet 2000 (Ph. D. dissertation; Linköping Studies in Arts and Sciences, vol. 223). Pp. 257.

Reviewed by JACOB L. MEY

Jakob Cromdal's (henceforth JC) dissertation consists of two parts: one, an 'Overview of theory, research and summaries of the studies' (pp. 13-131); and two, four articles by the author, either previously published or in press (pp. 133-254, pages 135 and 133 have been switched around in the binding process). The independently published studies form also the topic of Chapter 6 of the first part, entitled 'Summary and discussion of the studies'; hence the studies themselves can be considered as appendices, to be consulted while reading the main part of the dissertation. But the inclusion of this chapter makes for more coherence and consistency in the entire work, pulling together the individual threads that are spun in the studies and integrating them in the overall fabric of the book.

Among the reasons for studying children's bilingual practices, the author mentions mainly two:

> one, according to the 'developmental approach', children's behavior (e.g. in language acquisition) can tell us something about the way adults develop (p. 82);
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> two, the 'doing being bilingual' that children practice in play (the expression is Auer's; 1984) is a resource in its own right, and enables the children to '(re)construct the interactional order' (p. 83).

Contrary to what many researchers, basing themselves on the 'monolingual' norm, have meant, code switching is not an effect of 'limited linguistic competence' (p. 74), but a functional resource of discourse. The use of different codes should always be interpreted 'locally', in relation to the participants' use (rather than to some abstract notion of 'linguistic proficiency'; p. 70). Language alternation, is in Auer's words (1984:7) a 'locally functional usage of two languages in an interactional episode'.

In this sense, code-switching can be considered a 'contextualization cue', in the sense that participants, while accomplishing 'accountable actions' (p. 71) signal to themselves how they define the situation, and, in fact, are building up the situation.

Contrary to this is the notion of 'sociolinguistic contextualization', ascribed to Gumperz, which assigns 'inherent properties' to language codes ('the 'semantic' view of code switching'; p. 72). In contrast to this, JC maintains that there is no absolute value in any code (cf. also Alfonzetti's 1998 study of Sicilian): the value of a code is 'brought about by the ... juxtaposition of ... two codes' (p. 73). Here, the author could profitably have referred to the incisive critique of Gumperz' work by the Norwegian linguist Britt Mæhlum (1996), who has shown that the analytic methods and theoretical assumptions underlying Blom and Gumperz' much-quoted study on code switching in a Northern Norwegian village (1982) lack stringency and conceptual clarity. Rather than assuming that code switching is something which is strictly determined by contextually describable conditions, Mæhlum talks about 'interference' (1996:752; on different levels, p. 756), whereby the automatic switching and 'rigid structural connection between the two varieties [spoken in Hemnes]' are shown to be more of a 'myth' than 'reality'. Instead, one should perhaps speak of 'code swaying', using a term coined by Gibbons, a linguist working in the code switching environment of Hong Kong (1983, 1987).

JC's views place him squarely within the Conversation Analytic camp, where it is held that the social meaning of any interaction is a 'feature of discourse' (p. 68). Contrary to those who believe that interaction is determined by social and individual features (class, gender, ethnicity, education, intentions and so on), the CA approach considers all such factors to be the 'accountable outcomes of participants' interactional work' (p. 69), rather than constituting the very basis of interaction in discourse. The rationality of discourse is henceforth not to be found in the individual interactants' choices, but in the interacting conversationalists 'building the social world through language practices' (pp. 82-83). And JC continues: 'Preconceived notions about what is relevant for any interaction tend to obscure the interactional goals of participants' (p. 68). Hence, we should trust the interactants, rather than the analyst, such that

> '... there is no need for researchers to undertake an analysis of context based on episodic external knowledge of (a set of) situational factors, since the participants must do the same job. Since by virtue of being participants in the interaction rather than mere observers, interactants carry out such analyses more competently (i.e. more relevantly for their own concerns) than researchers, a more reasonable task for analysts of social interaction would be to highlight precisely the analyses made by the participants themselves' (p. 68).

In other words, the message is: 'The native interactant is always right'; subsidiarily, 'Leave your interaction alone!'. These two variations on well-known dicta from structural linguistics illustrate the tendency of conversation analysts to follow the precepts of 'exact' science, as these were internalized by the structuralist linguists and sociologist of the 'fifties and 'sixties. 'Let the facts speak for themselves', as the well-worn positivist adage has it.

But, while it is certain that a (pre-conceived or unreflected) monolingual bias has been prevalent in studies of language acquisition and development (cf. p. 52), and that the 'mentalistic' view of these processes ('what's going on in the learner's head'; cf. p. 51) can be said to have carried over to the study of bilingualism *per se*, the question still remains: Where do we go from here? A 'bottom-up' approach such as advocated by JC may be a useful antidote to mentalistic and monolingual 'top-down' approaches, but the problem is: Can we get anywhere decent starting from the bottom? and: Is the local organization of interaction really where it's at, when we look at language use as a whole?

Significantly, JC and many other researchers of his observance place their confidence in the child, and in the ways children organize their interaction. Moreover, as is appropriate for children, such interactions are naturally in the form of play. But children have to become adults sooner or later, when playtime becomes real time. And in that real world, can we say that the insights obtained in studies like JC's indeed carry over?

When it comes to defining a set of norms for successful adult language acquisition and interaction, one should not omit the ability to switch codes in the proper way, adapted to the domain of interaction and the ongoing action. Code switching in a business negotiation context will certainly not be the way to land that

contract or sell that property (unless the interaction is between same or similar code switchers, that is to say, in a subculture where code switching is the norm). As JC himself remarks (p. 114), we should avoid introducing a 'bilingual bias' into our research, in reaction to earlier monolingual biases. Idealizing a particular bilingual interactional situation is, after all, just as bad as what Chomsky did, when he focused on the idealized speakers/hearers on the grounds that, as JC astutely remarks, the 'real [users] constantly make mistakes' (p. 53). Idealizing a local situation and projecting it out into the 'real' world overlooks the difficulties that speakers will meet when dealing with the world on non-play, non-protected, non-ideal terms. It is true, as JC remarks, that also native speakers have their difficulties in dealing with the world linguistically, but that should not make us 'short-sell' the non-natives by telling them anything goes, as long as they interact and communicate according to local practices. The meek may inherit the kingdom of heaven (*Mt.* 5:5), but the global market place is carried away by the violent (cf. *Mt.* 11:12).

My last remarks, with their biblical overtones, may sound a bit like preaching. But I cannot refrain from having the feeling myself of being admonished (in a gentle way) and told to behave, when I read that 'children make use of the local availability of two languages for their own practical purposes, whether we as researchers like it or not' (p. 114). The implication here is clearly that researchers (notice the inclusive 'we') have to battle a tendency to idealize the facts of life, make them appear more beautiful or better organized than they are in reality. In JC's view, this view originates in the researchers' 'monolingual purity ideals' – that even innocent children may, to a degree, have appropriated during their socialization process (ibid.).

There is a moralistic innuendo here, which I think is not germane to a scientific discussion. Besides, the real question is not one of purity or of 'clean hands'; we must ask ourselves what these playful children are going to do with their lives and languages later on, when they leave the kindergarten of code switching *ad libitum* and interaction on the local level. Here, one would have welcomed a wider societal perspective in JC's work (as in most conversation analytic inspired studies); contrary to CA's strictures about the local construal of social reality and the unique significance of topical organization in discourse, analysts should have more of their

attention turned towards the social significance of the codes employed and their pragmatic implications (cf. Mæhlum 1996:759).

If one abstracts from these theoretical (not to say: dogmatic) presuppositions, JC's work deserves to be honorably mentioned for its painstaking attention to detail and its thorough analyses. The author makes it abundantly clear that there is more to code switching than is assumed in the 'classical', structuralist interpretation, and that (with the reservation hinted at above) bilingualism indeed may be a resource for speakers, rather than a stigma that they have somehow to try and hide.

The research supporting the studies is sound and well-founded; the transcripts have an authentic 'feel' to them (being based on participant observation: JC seems to be a popular playmate!). The quoted conversations (in contradistinction to what is often considered 'good' CA) have to do with real issues, viz., the building up of social relationships and indeed, the construction of (a part of) the social world. There is no analysis for analysis' sake; every analysis that JC undertakes has an 'interpret(at)ive' twist to it, which situates it in its proper context (a 'contextualization' which goes beyond the minimalist exigencies of the standard model), rather than letting it dangle in the vacuum of pure and unadulterated CA.

From the point of view of language and style, both the articles and the main, first part of the book are a pleasure to read. JC is a first class stylist, and in this respect, too, distinguishes himself from most other CA practitioners, whose exclusive study of talk-in-interaction apparently has made them forget how to write good English prose (even though one could maintain that scientific exposition, after all, also is based on interaction). The relevant literature has been intelligently read and excerpted (with the exception of a few important references, see above). Also, it would have benefited the book if the author had made explicit his own, independent view on major issues, rather than leaving theoretical problems aside, in the best of the CA tradition.[1] In this connection, I am thinking of such matters as the notion of contextualization, that big divide separating the wayward sociolinguists (of whatever plumage) from the conversation analytic chosen. Here, too, the distinctions made are too often black-and-white; there should be room both for those sitting safely in Father Harvey's theoretical bosom (cf. *Lk.* 17:22) and for those still messing around with the societal implications of language use, including conversation.

On the technical side, the bibliographies are a bit messy and sometimes incomplete. Pages 133 and 135 have been switched around. A number of typos still survived the editorial eye. And the quality of the paper that the publishers have chosen is not very helpful to the reader who has to use artificial light: the pages give off a sheen which prevents reading in certain angles, and the feel of the paper is decidedly unpleasant, reminding one of the old Cannon copying paper of the seventies.

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Note

1. Not so long ago, I asked a prominent CA'er what s/he thought of some critical remarks on CA I had made in a lecture at which s/he had been present. The cheerful reply was: 'I don't deal with those matters, I just do the stuff'.

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