

Communication Strategies among Trilingual Speakers: Switching and Borrowing among Sinhala, English & Japanese Languages

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Abstract—The present study examined communication strategies among trilingual speakers. The main focus was to seek evidence on language switching and language borrowing as communication strategies during conversations of Sinhala, English, and Japanese languages. A free-discussion task was conducted to gather data. Twenty-five native Sinhala speakers (14 male and 11 female) residing in Japan took part in the present task. The discussions were recorded and the results were analyzed via a simple contrast and a decision tree analysis using statistics. The analysis showed that switching and borrowing occurs arbitrarily among three languages during conversations with a high significance [$\chi^2(2)=46.985, p < .001$]. Thus, according to this study, language switching mostly occurs between Japanese & Sinhala languages, while language borrowing mostly occurs during Sinhala language conversations.

Index Terms—communication strategies, trilingual speakers, Sinhala English and Japanese languages, switching and borrowing

I. INTRODUCTION

The development sequences in acquiring a first language and a second language illustrate identical stages; silent period, formulaic speech, and structural and semantic simplification (Ellis, 1994). During silent period despite first or a second language, all learners in their early stage of language acquisition remain silent due to poor linguistic knowledge. However, when a comprehensible input (Krashan, 1994) takes place the learners begin to communicate by imitation which also called formulaic speech. Once learners are accustomed to enough formulaic speech, the third development sequence; structural and semantic simplification occurs when learners starting to build more complex language.

When a learner is able to use the targeted language to a certain degree, he/she usually encounters many communication problems due to lack of linguistic knowledge. This is where communication strategies become important (Tazaki, 2006). During *First Language Acquisition* (i.e., FLA), communication strategies are limited and remain in the periphery of first language since there are no other substitutions. For example, if a child does not know what a word or a phrase means, he/she has to ask the other interlocutors to re-phrase, simplify using body language such as gestures. However, during the course of *Second Language Acquisition* (i.e., SLA) number of communication strategies can be multiplied. If a learner experiences difficulty understanding any word or a phrase, he/she can always refer to his/her own mother tongue while also trying to receive support from the second language. Moreover, if someone acquires a *Third Language* (i.e., TLA), these strategies become much wider and complicated. If an interlocutor possesses linguistic knowledge in three languages, he/she can always refer to the other languages to clarify any difficult word or a phrase. Furthermore, such a speaker may use three different languages alternatively in the same conversation. According to previous studies, bilingual speakers alternatively use 1st and 2nd language as a discourse strategy. There are three main types of alternations in the strategies, language (/code) switching, language borrowing, and language mixing.

Although much research has been carried out with regard to SLA and competence, there has been limited data which covers the criteria beyond bilingual speakers (e.g., in TLA). Possessing the knowledge of two languages will only leave a speaker one choice between two. However, if the same speaker possesses another language knowledge, for example, a third language knowledge it will surely raise further doubts on the alternative use of three languages. For instance, how trilingual speakers choose a language among three, what are the main aspects which support or control alternation patterns etcetera. These questions have not being answered by previous studies. Therefore, this study will focus on trilingual speakers' conversations and examine how they utilize communication strategies among three languages.

This paper is consisted of following sections. Section 2 will provide information on related literature with relation to communication strategies. Following, section 3 will present the task details conducted as the main survey. Section 4 will present a general discussion and conclusion on the results. Finally, section 5 will present the limitations of this study for future considerations.

II. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

When people use language for communication, they do not just apply the knowledge received from teachers or books.

Speakers utilize other extra skills to succeed in communication (i.e., communicative competence). Thus, speakers do not exclusively rely on the rules of the language as a formal system. Rather attempt to apply the rules to convey or receive information via conversation depending on the environment such as content, opponent, and purpose etcetera. According to Canale, M. & Swain, M. (1980), there are three main components which allow a speaker to be succeeded in a conversation; (1) grammatical competence: words and rules, (2) sociolinguistic competence: appropriateness, (3) strategic competence: appropriate use of communication strategies. Learners first usually study these components as class room drills and then try to utilize once they are in real settings. Among above three components, this study specifically focuses on the third component, strategic competence; appropriate use of communication strategies.

Communication strategies differ according to the interlocutors and surroundings. Since there is no best style of communication, a speaker may utilize all his/her language knowledge to build an appropriate style in order to conduct successful conversation (Donald, 1999). Although a monolingual speaker has no other resources but to rely only on his/her mother tongue, bilingual speakers on the other hand, always have another choice depending on the discourse situations. This language choice can be even greater when a speaker possesses a third language knowledge. In addition, compared to monolingual societies, multilingual societies provide greater possibility of different social factors for speakers to utilize their language ability in different dimensions (Holmes, 2013). Among many communication strategies language (or code) borrowing, switching and mixing are said to play a significant role as discourse strategies among bilingual speakers (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1990; Hoffmann, 1991; Nishimura, 1992). Either intentional or unintentional, many bilingual speakers are said to conduct conversations alternatively between two languages (Das, 2012).

How would switching and borrowing occur in the conversations where three alternatives are available (e.g., among Sinhala, English, and Japanese languages)? This is an area where most previous studies have provided limited information. Thus, based on the assumptions provided for bilingual conversations, this paper will investigate how switching and borrowing are used as a communication strategy to achieve the objectives in a given situation. This study will mainly focus on trilingual speakers who are residing in Japan and possess knowledge of Sinhala, English, and Japanese languages. In this research, language switching and language borrowing is counted according to below definitions.

Language switching occurs when a speaker commence an utterance with one language and change into another language before the line of utterance ends. The speaker may or may not return to the original language of the utterance.

Language borrowing occurs when a speaker uses one language and partially uses other language lexicons (either functional or content).

Language Choice and Social Settings in Trilingual Situations

The present study assumes that language alteration can take place in 12 patterns (6 switching patterns & 6 borrowing patterns) as depicted in figure 1.

Figure 1 represents all the switching and borrowing to maximum possibility in a trilingual situation. However, these patterns can be limited due to hidden aspects. Therefore, this section will provide in-depth information on expected impediments in the course. This study assumes there are two dimensions which manipulate alternation during trilingual conversations.

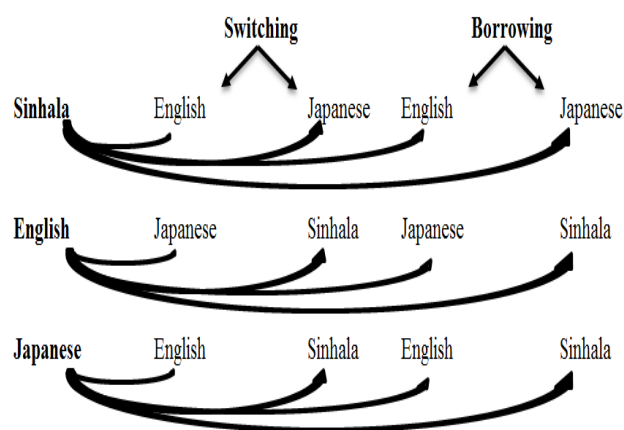


Fig.1 Possible variables of switching & borrowing among Sinhala, English, and Japanese languages

On one hand, first dimension lies in the role of language choice. On the other hand, the second dimension lies in the role of social settings. First dimension, language choice, accounts for the relation among three languages especially with regards to linguistic typology. Second dimension, social settings, is related to sociolinguistics facts (i.e., societal markedness & language specific characters).

According to previous studies (Dissanayaka, 2007; Noguchi, 1984), Sinhala and Japanese languages are said to be identical in many linguistic aspects. For example, the word order (a phenomenon related to syntax) of both languages are said to be Subject-Object-Verb as exemplified in 1&3 below. English language in contrast, composes with Subject-Verb-Object word order as can be seen in 2 below. This study assumes when alternation takes place (especially in switching form) difference of word orders might be a negative consequence which stands against arbitrary alternations between languages.

Sinhala Language

1 කසුකි රබාන ගහනව
 kazuki rabaana gahanawa → SOV
 Kasuki (ϕ NOM, anim Drum (ϕACC, in play (V+ing)
 Kasuki is playing the drum.

2 Kazuki is playing the drum
 Kasuki (NOM, anim) play (V+ing) Drum (ACC, inam) → SVO
 Kasuki is playing the drum.

Japanese Language

3 和希-が 太鼓-を たたいている
 kazuki-ga taiko-wo tataiteiru
 Kasuki (NOM, anim) Drum (ACC, in) play (V+ing) → SOV
 Kasuki is playing the drum.

The second dimension, social settings are assumed according to sociolinguistic evidence; societal markedness & language specific characteristics. The *markedness model* (proposed by Myers-Scotton, 1988; 1993b) suggests that in a given interaction or a situation, speakers have a choice of language due to certain rights and obligations sets. These language choices are in two categories; either marked or unmarked. According to this model, priority levels are determined based on social and personal reasons. With regards to social reasons, this study assumes that societal markedness plays a major role in language switching. For example, if, speakers reside in Japan, Japanese language plays a dominant role in hierarchy level leaving Sinhala and English languages behind. If speakers reside in a country where English language is mostly used, then Sinhala and Japanese languages will be dominated conversely. However, if speakers reside in Sri Lanka for example, Japanese and English languages will be in lower levels in a hierarchical structure. While societal markedness can be different depending on societies, linguistic typology remains unchanged. Thus, for language switching, this study proposes hypothesis (1) as below.

(1) *Hypothesis for language switching*

Amount of Switching can be greater between Sinhala-Japanese compared to the cases between English-Japanese or English-Sinhala.

This study assumes that the difference of word order may limit switching which includes English language expressions (either from or to). Conversely, Sinhala and Japanese languages are expected to illustrate high possibility of alternation.

The other sociolinguistic evidence; language specific characteristics, suggests that English language largely involves in the contexts of Japanese and Sinhala languages. For instance, previous studies (Dissanayaka, 2007; Gunasekera, 1999) on Sinhala language have provided evidence that Sinhala language is comprised with a considerable number of English lexicons especially in colloquial (i.e., spoken) form. It is said that most of them are used either as substitutions (as noted in Kanduboda, 2015) or loan words (according to Dissanayaka, 2007). Japanese language, on the other hand, is also reported to comprise many English loan words despite the difference of pronunciation and meaning (Shibasaki, H., Tamaoka, K., & Takatori, Y., 2007). Thus, hypothesis (2) is promoted in accordance with sociolinguistic evidence.

(2) *Hypothesis for language borrowing*

Amount of borrowing can be greater between either Sinhala-English or Japanese-English compared to Japanese-Sinhala.

If hypothesis (1) is supported by the data, then linguistic typology and social settings can be considered stronger when switching takes place between Sinhala and Japanese languages. However, if the experiment results do not support hypothesis (1), then both dimensions can be less important in switching phenomenon. On the other hand, if hypothesis (2) is supported by the data, this paper will reconfirm the evidence provided by the sociolinguistic perspective in previous studies.

In order to examine the accountability of hypothesis (1) and (2), this study conducted a free discussion task with speakers those who are able to use all three languages. The next section will provide in-depth information regarding the tasks conducted.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study conducted a free discussion task to gather data. The details of the task are provided below.

A. Participants

Twenty-five native Sinhala speakers (14 male and 11 female) residing in Japan (mostly in Aichi prefecture & Tokyo city) took part in the present free discussion task. Ages ranged from 24 years and 4 months to 28 years and 3 months, with the average age being 26 years and 0 months on the day of testing.

In order to examine the communication strategies among aforementioned trilingual conversations, participants must be able to use (i.e., comprehend and produce) all three languages. For this reason, the study selected Sinhala language native speakers who are residing in Japan during the survey time. All the participants were born and brought up in Sri Lanka for 19 years, and have moved to Japan for studying purpose. Sri Lankan general education includes English language as a subject amongst the others (MESL, 2016). All the participants possessed an A grade for English language in G.C.E O/L exam. As for Japanese language proficiency, all the participants possessed *N3* level of *JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Level)*¹, which suggests all the participants were having the capability of recognizing Japanese used in everyday situations with sound comprehension and speaking ability (*JPLT*, 2016). Overall, all the participants were considered possessing sufficient knowledge and be able to communicate in Sinhala, English, and Japanese Languages.

B. Free Discussion Task

Participants were allocated to groups of five people where gender, residential areas, and type of work were mixed. All the group members were advised to gather information on group members and make a short summary of each discussants' backgrounds keeping the main emphasis on three aspects; what were they doing before coming to Japan, what activities are they engaged in Japan, and what are their future plans. Despite discussion tips, no instructions were provided prior to the discussions as to what language they should use in which order. Discussions were recorded using an IC recorder. Participants were also advised to end the discussion when all the members are satisfied with the acquired information for summary writing. They were compensated with 2000 Japanese yen (which included an hour participation honorarium and transportation fee).

C. Method of Data Collection

Amount of switching and borrowing occurrences were calculated and prepared for analysis. As previously defined in section 2, selection of language switching and language borrowing is done with following accordance. If a speaker begins to talk for example in Sinhala language, and switch into English language, is counted as one switching occurrence from Sinhala language to English language as in “මම (I) දැන් (now) working in japan” meaning “I am working in Japan now”. On the other hand, if a speaker uses lexicons from another language during a speech in another language, for example, if English lexicons (either functional or content words) are used during Sinhala speech as in “මම (I) දැන් (now) work කටයුතු ජපානයේ” also meaning “I am working in Japan now”, was counted as a one language borrowing occurred during Sinhala speech to/from English. Samples are represented in appendix 1.

D. Contrasts among Variables & Decision Tree Analysis

First, a simple contrast is conducted to examine the frequency and percentage between switching and borrowing among three languages as illustrated in table 1.

Table1. Simple Contrast between Switching & Borrowing

	Switching		Borrowing	
	frequency	Percentage	frequency	Percentage
Sinhala to English	12	10.34%	79	33.05%
Sinhala to Japanese	27	23.28%	43	17.99%
English to Sinhala	18	15.52%	35	14.64%
English to Japanese	9	7.76%	30	12.55%
Japanese to Sinhala	46	39.66%	37	15.48%
Japanese to English	4	3.45%	15	6.28%
Total	116	100%	239	100%

The descending switching occurrences are in order of Japanese to Sinhala > Sinhala to Japanese > English to Sinhala

¹ Where degree of difficulty descends from *N1*, *N2*, *N3*, *N4*, to most easy *N5*.

> Sinhala to English > English to Japanese > Japanese to English. On the other hand, the descending order of borrowing occurrences are resulted as Sinhala to English > Sinhala to Japanese > Japanese to Sinhala > English to Sinhala > English to Japanese > Japanese to English. In sum, the data is evidential that switching mostly occurs from Japanese language to Sinhala language in the case of present interview participants. Furthermore, borrowing were mostly occurred during Sinhala language utterance from English language. These results support the assumptions made by hypothesis (1) & (2) of this study. An in-depth explanation will be provided general discussion section. However, table 1 only depicts a simple contrast based on occurring frequency. Hitherto, it is also important to examine whether above variables possess any interrelation amongst them.

Therefore, in addition, a decision tree analysis using IBM SPSS (Ver.18) was conducted to predict whether the variables [(switching and borrowing) & (Sinhala, English, Japanese languages)] illustrate further characteristics in subsets apart from a larger set of variables. Since decision tree analysis automatically detects significant interaction effects among variables, hidden connection among variables can be evident.

The interaction among variables is displayed hierarchically with stronger predictors been in the higher nodes while weaker predictors are sent to the end of the branches. However, in this process, insignificant predictors are automatically excluded. The results of the analysis are depicted as a dendrogram in figure 2. Relative proportions between switching and borrowing showed significant in the analysis [$\chi^2(2)=46.985, p < .001$]. The dendrogram illustrated three sister nodes. Node 1 [Sinhala-English, English-Japanese, Japanese-English] and node 2 [Sinhala-Japanese & English-Sinhala] depicted significant interaction in borrowing occurrences while node 3 indicated significant subsets in switching [Japanese-Sinhala, Japanese-English]. This study assumed that borrowing is done in six different patterns as demonstrated in figure 1. However, there are only five main patterns which showed a significant interaction according to the decision tree analysis. Likewise, this study also assumed another six different patterns for switching, though the decision tree analysis showed only two significant interaction among them.

Switching & Borrowing

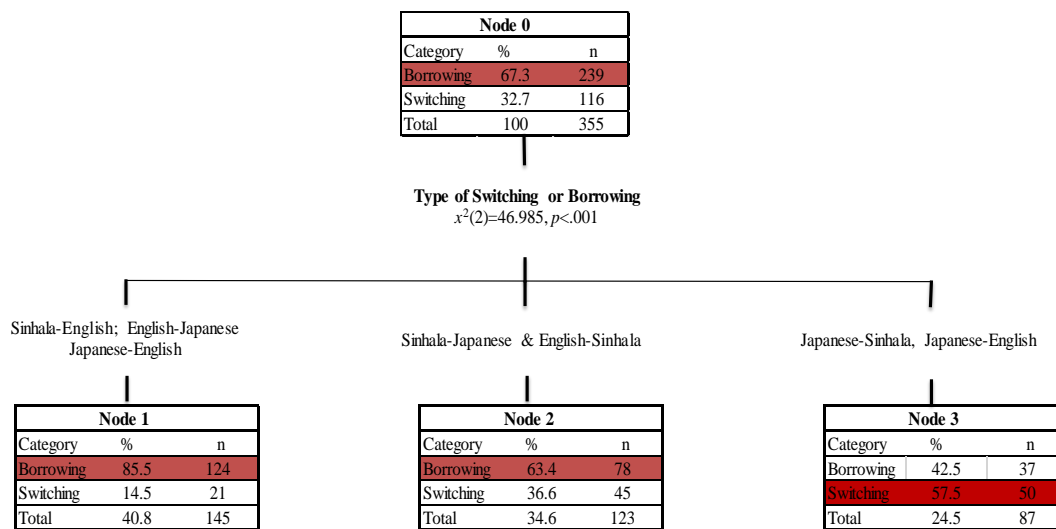


Figure 2 Dendrogram of decision tree analysis for switching & borrowing among trilingual (Sinhala, English, and Japanese) speakers

IV. GENERAL DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The main goal of this study was to confirm communication strategies among trilingual speakers. The data gathered via a free-discussion-task with twenty five Sinhala native speakers involvement. All the participants were residing in Japan, and were able to use English and Japanese languages. The analysis confirmed alternative use of all three languages in conversations. First, a simple comparison is conducted between languages (Sinhala, English, and Japanese) with two alternation categories (switching and borrowing). In hypothesis (1) the study assumed that the number of Switching can be greater between Sinhala and Japanese compared to the cases between English & Japanese or English & Sinhala with relation to language switching. Japanese and Sinhala languages were considered to possess close relation in linguistic typology & social settings. Upon a simple contrast, hypothesis (1) was proven true with regards to language switching (Japanese to Sinhala 39.66% occurrences, and Sinhala to Japanese 23.28% occurrences).

On the other hand, for language borrowing, hypothesis (2) assumed that the number of borrowings from English language can be greater in Sinhala or Japanese conversations due to sociolinguistic suggestions (Dissanayaka, 2007, Kanduboda, 2015, and Shibasaki et al., 2007). The analysis ascertained that the assumptions were true with regards to Sinhala language (with 33.05% occurrence). Unlike Sinhala, hypothesis (2) cannot be applied to Japanese language since the occurrences depicted the lowest. Overall, the results of this study suggest that, language switching mostly occurs between Japanese & Sinhala languages, while language borrowing mostly occurs during Sinhala language conversations.

Language Choice and Social Settings in Switching and Borrowing

This study first hypothesized that linguistic typology may support speakers to use languages alternatively in the form of switching due to identical aspects between Japanese and Sinhala languages. In the present tasks, number of switching occurrences showed higher between Japanese and Sinhala Languages (Japanese to Sinhala been the highest with 39.66% switching occurrences, and Sinhala to Japanese been the second highest with 23.28% switching occurrences). These results suggest that the relation between Sinhala and Japanese languages are strong. In addition, as the participants were residing in Japan (where Japanese language is mostly used), societal markedness also partially have supported the alternation process during Sinhala and Japanese languages speeches. However, switching between English language and Japanese language illustrated a lower frequency suggesting the societal markedness may not play an effective role in this regard.

Hypothesis (2) assumed that borrowing can mostly be seen during Japanese or Sinhala conversations. With regards to Sinhala language, hypothesis (2) can be accountable (Sinhala to English been the highest with 33.05% borrowing occurrences). However, English language borrowing occurrences during Japanese language conversations showed the lowest among others. According to these results, language specific characteristics can be true with regards to Sinhala language (as suggested in Dissanayaka, 2007, Gunasekra, 1989, and Kanduboda, 2015) but not with Japanese language. Although Japanese language is said to possess number of English loan words, these loan words are modernized according to Japanese syntax. Thus, direct use of English lexicons may be limited due to overlapping.

V. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This study was conducted to examine how trilingual speakers utilize communication strategies during conversations. The study mainly focused on language switching and language borrowing as communication strategies. The hypotheses assumed for this study were supported through data. In summary, the study was able to provide evidence on trilingual (Sinhala, English, and Japanese languages) communication strategies especially with regards to language switching and language borrowing. However, this study also has its drawbacks. First, gender was not included as a variable for analysis due to limited participants. Second, although alternation patterns were analyzed, an in-depth examination which includes non-verbal communication strategies (such as gestures, eye contact etc.) is needed as it will provide further significant information to the field. This study was conducted in Japan. However, in order to reassure the results gained through this study, it is important to conduct further studies where English and Sinhala languages play a dominant role in social settings.

APPENDIX 1. Language Switching	&	Language Borrowing	Examples
Sinhala to English	මම දැන් teaching in a university in tokyo mama den teaching in a university in tokyo Now I am teaching in a university in Tokyo	මම නම් බොහෝ වෙලාවට ලංකාවට return වෙන්න නමයි හිතන් ඉන්න mama nam bohowelawata lankaawata return wenna thamai hitan inne Most probably I will return to Sri Lanka	
Sinhala to Japanese	මම ලංකාවේදී 日本語を少し勉強したよ mama lankaawedi nihonngo-wo sukoshi bekyoushitayo I studied some Japanese in Sri Lanka	එක හරිම නිකුත් වැඩක් අපේ eaka harima muzukashii wedak ane That's a very difficult job	
English to Sinhala	I might ලංකාවටයයි I might lankawata yai ne I might got to Sri Lanka	He is working ඉඳලෙහිටල He is working indala hitala He is working sometimes	
English to Japanese	We also たまに 旅行するよ We also tamani ryoko suruyo We also travel sometimes	I do アルバイト I do arubaito I do partime job	
Japanese to Sinhala	いつも仕事だから 帰国するよ isumo shigoto dakara lankaawata yama hithenawa Since it's always work, I feel like going to Sri Lanka	いつも 母が 勉強勉強ばっかり isumo ape amma benkyo-benkyo bakkari My mum always telling study study	
Japanese to English	日本語も使うけど but it's easy to speak in English nihonngomo tsukaakedo but it's easy to speak in English Although we use Japanese too, it's easy to speak in English	いつか 休んだり work したいね itsuka yukkuri work shitai ne Someday, I want to work slowly	

Note: 1st line represents actual language data, 2nd line represents word by word gloss, and 3rd line represents idiomatic translation

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