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Language Mixing in SLA

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Language mixing (or switching between languages) is a common linguistic phenomenon observed in language contact situations where two languages exist in input. Language mixing is widely observed among young bilingual children who acquire two or more languages as first languages. Language mixing is also observed among children with limited proficiency in natural second language acquisition.

Language mixing poses interesting topics of second language acquisition in relation first to communicative strategies: it functions to fill in a linguistic need and to maximize communicative competence. Secondly, language mixing provides insights into the dynamic creative process of interlanguage developments: language mixing is not random juxtaposition of items from two languages but rule-governed. Thirdly, language mixing also offers insights into the model of bilingualism and to the grammar from which mixed discourse is produced.

The objective of the paper is (1) to describe language mixing as an initial strategy for second language acquisition and as a creative process of interlanguage by a Japanese child; and (2) to examine his mixed discourse as an evidence for universal constraints which is in accordance with the matrix code principle (Kamwangamalu 1989) and is explainable within the framework of the Matrix Language Frame Model (Myers-Scotton 1992).

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The Matrix Language Frame Model (MLF) proposed by Myers-Scotton (1992) is a model of intrasentential code-switching which distinguishes the Matrix Language (ML) and the Embedded Language (EL). The MLF proposes that the ML determines the morphosyntactic frame for ML+EL constituents (1992:109): EL content morphemes are inserted into ML morphosyntactic frames (104). There are two principles in the MLF, the Morpheme Order Principle and the System Morpheme Principle. The first Principle says that surface morpheme order in ML+EL constituents must follow that of the ML (1992:108). The second Principle orders that: "active system morphemes (i.e. inflections and certain function words) in ML + EL constituents only come from the ML" (113). Similarly, Kamwangamalu (1989) proposes the Matrix Code Principle: the embedded code "must conform to the morphosyntactic structure" (1989:157) of the matrix code.

I will present that mixed utterances produced by the subject are in accordance with structural constraints of English and Japanese and that embedded constituents are well integrated and conforms to the morphosyntactic structure rules of the language of the discourse or the Matrix language.

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