On conflict sites in code-switching

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The best theoretical account of grammaticality in code-switching is still a hotly debated topic. There are contrasting predictions about what happens at “conflict sites” where the grammars of the two languages have conflicting rules. Compare for example red wine in English with Welsh gwin coch (wine red). In Welsh-English bilingual speech the nominal construction is a potential “conflict site”: do we expect e.g. gwin red or red gwin, and coch wine or wine coch? Different theories make conflicting claims on what switches are acceptable. According to the Matrix Language model (Myers-Scotton 2002) word order has to be compatible with the language of the matrix verb. For Cantone and MacSwan (2009), within the Minimalist Program, “it is the language of the adjective that determines the position of the NP relative to the adjective”. In this talk I will focus on the relative order of the noun and the adjective in two bilingual communities: Welsh-English (in Wales) and Papiamento-Dutch (in The Netherlands). I will provide a general overview of the different methodologies available to evaluate which factors determine the resolution of grammatical conflict in bilingual speech. Some of the data gathering methods will be described, from most naturalistic methods (corpus data) to most experimental ones, such as (semi-spontaneous) elicitation behavioral tasks and auditory acceptability judgment tasks or more novel methods such as the electrophysiological responses measured by means of event related potentials. I will discuss how the data obtained through these different methods may cast light on linguistic theory.