The role of functional heads in code-switching. Evidence from Swiss text messages

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This study aims to test two principles of code-switching formulated by González Vilbazo (2005) based on Bentahila/Davies (1983), Belazi/Rubin/Toribio (1994), Mahootian/Santorini (1996), and Chan (1999), namely the Principle of the Functional Restriction (PFR) and the Principle of Agreement (PA). The first states that a code-switch (CS) between the morphological exponents of functional heads belonging to the same extended projection of a lexical category (N° or V°) is not possible. The second claims inter alia that inside a sentence or a phrase, agreement requirements have to be satisfied, regardless of the language which provides the lexical material. Hence, according to the PFR, it should be possible to switch language between a determiner and a noun (1), but not between a determiner and a quantifier (2) of the same noun.

(1) a. [DP:Fr la [NP:Ger Königin [PP:Fr de l’Angleterre]]]
   b. [DP:Ger die [NP:Fr reine [PP:Fr de l’Angleterre]]]
   ‘the Queen of England’

(2) a. [DP:Fr les [QP:Ger *drei [NP:Ger Königinnen [PP:Fr de l’Angleterre]]]]
   b. [NP:Ger die [QP:Fr *trois [NP:Fr reines [PP:Fr de l’Angleterre]]]]
   ‘the three Queens of England’

The PA can be illustrated by (3) where the φ feature values (Gender, Number) must agree inside a DP (or a QP) in order for this to be grammatical:

(3) a. Fr.: l’ve.FSG grader.FSG étoile.FSG/Ger.: der.MSG grosse.MSG Stern.MSG
   b. die.FSG grosse.MSG étoile.FSG/dier.FSG grader.FSG étoile.FSG/
   l’ve.MSG grader.MSG Stern.MSG/le.MSG grosse.MSG Stern.MSG
   c. *der.MSG grand.MSG étoile.FSG/*def.MSG grader.FSG étoile.FSG/grander.MSG grosse.MSG étoile.FSG
   d. *l’ve.FSG grader.FSG Stern.MSG/la.FSG grosse.MSG Stern.MSG/la.MSG grosse.MSG Stern.MSG
   ‘the big star’

The corpus on which we will test these hypotheses consists of 25’947 authentic text messages collected in Switzerland in 2009/10 (cf. Stark et al. 2009-2014). In Switzerland, there are four official languages (German, French, Italian, Romansh) and many Swiss German, and Romansh Italian dialects are spoken in everyday life. At school, at least one official national language is taught as a foreign language besides English. This particular sociolinguistic situation is reflected in the corpus data: the majority of the messages contain lexical elements of at least two different languages or dialectal varieties. Even if most of these elements are very short (consisting of one, two or three items), potentially formulaic and highly transparent (cf. tag-switching, Poplack 1980), there are also some more complex CS sequences, mostly produced by native bilinguals. All the examples show first that the PA is maintained. In (4) we can see that the Swiss German determiner dä (M.SG,NOM/ACC) agrees with the Italian Tessinio (M.SG), while the (Swiss) German corresponding Tessin is neuter (requiring the determiner ds or s).

(4) CH Ger.: Schön, dass äs dir guäät goht & du dä
[It bello Ticino] so
nice that it you.DAT well goes & you the.M.SG
lovely.M.SG Ticino.M.SG so
‘Nice, that you are doing well and that you can so delight the lovely Ticino.’

Second, the PFR also seems to hold in the corpus. But here, data which contain more than one lexical item for more than one functional head in the extended projection of the same lexical head are very rare, with the exception of compound tenses which require an auxiliary and a participle. But here, we have to make a distinction between the Romance varieties and English on the one hand, and German on the other: According to González Vilbazo (2005:88) only in the first case the participle occupies a functional head, whereas in the second it remains in V°. Hence, it should be possible to combine a Romance auxiliary with a German participle (aFr. *erzählt*Ger), but not vice-versa (*hat*Ger *raconté*Fr).

In our corpus, we have some CS between auxiliaries and participles (also Romance ones). But, in line with the hypothesis, these participles are morphologically integrated in the language to which belongs the exponent of T°; hence the switch takes place between the functional head v° (determining the morphology of the participle) and the lexical head V°. This can be illustrated by (5), where the lexical head of the verb ‘to look’ is English, but the participle ending –é on looké is a functional element of French.

(5) Fr. J’ai pas looké mon fone.  
‘I haven’t looked at my phone.’

In (6) below, we have a special case, since the English question structure has no equivalent (with *do* support) in German. The corresponding question in the perfect past is formed with the auxiliary *haben* ‘have’ and the past participle (6b). Now, it is commonly assumed that the English infinitive stays in v°, a functional head, whereas the German participle remains in V°, a lexical head. It is not clear, if (6c) is grammatical. On the one hand, a CS is in principle possible between T° and V°. But, on the other hand, there are conflicting requirements on the second verbal constituent: the English structure requires an infinitive, while the German structure shows a participle.

(6) a. How did das neue jahr begin?  
  b. Wie hat das neue Jahr begonnen?  
    how has the new year begun  
  c.  How did das neue Jahr beginnen?  
    how did the new year begin  
    ‘How did the new year begin?’

At first sight, example (7) seems to contradict the PFR, since the complementizer *wänn* (in C°) appears to be Swiss German while the inflected verb *are* in T° is English.

(7) […] maybe *wänn you are zrugg* in züri at that uhrtime you can just drop by for a kaffee if you like.  
‘Maybe when you are back in Zurich at that time, you can just drop by for a coffee if you like.’

But here, we would like to argue that *wänn* [væn] is actually almost phonologically equivalent to the English when [wæn], especially in the quite widespread erroneous pronunciation of English [wæn] as [væn], even if a Swiss German orthography is used is this sentence (cf. also González Vilbazo 2005:98 for a similar example). So assuming that ‘phonetic spelling’ is one of the graphical properties of electronic writing (cf. e.g. Anis 2007), we consider this as a case
confirming PFR in our data. This is also confirmed by the English word order in the subordinate clause being left-headed by the verb, whereas the German subordinate clauses show OV word order (compare *when you are back* vs. *wenn du zurück bist*).

Overall, the evidence found in spontaneous written non-standard data like text messages, seems to confirm the validity of the two principles proposed by González Vilbazo (2005).