Code Mixing as a Ruled Governed Phenomenon– A Study with Special Reference to the Tamil-English Mixed Discourse

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In bilingual and multilingual societies, there are usually at least two interacting language groups, each representing different cultural and linguistic features. Sri Lanka is a multilingual country where there is a tendency of mixing two languages as a communicative strategy used by the speakers. It has been observed that mixing of indigenous languages - Sinhala, Tamil and English is a common speech behaviour, which occurs in the discourse of educated bilinguals in Sri Lanka. There have been several studies on sociolinguistic, structural linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of code mixing in different countries. In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on the linguistic constraints on code mixing. The objective of this study is to investigate the rules of code-mixing (CM) in Tamil-English mixed language data. The focus of the present study of Tamil-English mixed discourse is the educated urban bilinguals in Jaffna. From a syntactic point of view, it is proposed that code mixing is governed by a host code/guest code principle. This principle says that in a code-mixed discourse involving languages L1 and L2, where L1 is the host code and L2 is the guest code, the morphosyntactic rules of L2 must conform to the morphosyntactic rules of L1, the language of the discourse. In order to determine the rules that govern Tamil-English CM, the qualitative method of analysis was adopted. The present study drew upon data collected a recorded spontaneous conversation between bilinguals in a language contact situation in which the two languages are syntactically very different from each other, namely, Tamil and English. The data collected were analyzed and findings were derived. Linguistically, the analysis confirms that Tamil-English Code-mixing is a rule-governed behaviour. The study addresses that Tamil English code mixing is a rule governed phenomenon, that is, there are constraints that govern where in a sentence a code-mix can occur and where it cannot occur. In that context, CM facilitates to avoid communicative hindrances.

Key words: Bilinguals, Code-Mixing, Linguistic Constraints, Morphosyntactic Rules, Rule Governed