Variation in Chinese English code-switching in Chinese discourse among 1st generation Chinese immigrants —the influence of social variables

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The sociolinguistic study of code-switching (hereafter CS) represents a large body in CS literature, which focuses either on identity-related functions when speakers are identifying themselves with a particular social group (Gumperz, 1982) or on discourse-related functions in performing conversational tasks in accordance with speakers’ obligation and rights as conversational participants (Li Wei, 1994). To extend the focus of research to causal and interactional relationship between language practice and their social stimuli, this study assesses the relative influence of different social factors on CS practice.

This study explores the influence of social network type, attitudinal orientation and English proficiency on the practice of Chinese-English CS in Chinese discourse by analyzing data taken from 40 participants of first generation Chinese immigrants aged from 25 to 40 in London in the form of recorded meetings with participants, social network type and attitude questionnaire and verbal guise experiment. The addition of the experiment to the attitude questionnaire aims to elicit more private attitude, in which every participant listened to the three recordings with varying degree of CS and rated questions on a 7 point scale with respect to the speaker’s socioeconomic status, personality and competence.

It is demonstrated in the analysis that CS enjoys a covert prestige among the participants. On the basis of quantitative analysis on the correlation between the factors and the use of CS, the study suggests that attitude towards CS seems to be a stronger influence than the social network type or English proficiency and proficiency does not correlate strongly with high or low use.

Keywords: attitude, Chinese-English code-switching, social network type.