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*Morphological Constraints on Intra-sentential Code-Switching: toward a standardization of Spanglish Grammar**

0. Introduction

Spanglish is a language that results from the verbal encounter between the English and the Spanish languages and civilizations. It is a hybrid language whose basis is Spanish with the introduction of English terms and constituents. There are actually two processes at the basis of the hybridization: 1) lexical borrowing, i.e. importation of certain linguistic properties from a language *A* to a language *B,* and 2) Code (language) switching, i.e. the alternate use of two languages including everything from the introduction of a single unassimilated word to one full or even more sentences in the context of another language[1]. This paper is based on a range of data I collected a) from the available literary production, b) from other linguistic studies on Spanish/English Code switching and c) from an interview conducted with a native Spanglish speaker living in Mexico City. My study aims at demonstrating that the Spanish/English hybridization is not random, but it rather follows a set of precise rules of the grammar of the two languages. The main opposition of academics against Spanglish consists in their considering it an ungrammatical jargon. Most of the time, however, the grammaticality of its expressions is undisputable.

First of all, I will examine Code switching as the most important aspect of the contamination between Spanish and English, classifying it, according to Myers Scotton (1993), Muysken (2000) and Poplack (1980), as either inter-sentential or intra-sentential. I will mostly deal with intra-sentential Code switching because it is the most common pattern found in Spanglish. Inter-sentential Code switching is, in fact, the simple juxtaposition of two distinct sentences, whilst intra-sentential Code switching is obviously a more complex phenomenon, which can be differentiated in diverse processes that are usually considered to characterize different types of bilingual behavior.

Secondly, I will take into account the phenomenon of lexical borrowing by illustrating the process by which English words are incorporated into the Spanish language. Finally, I will draw my conclusions about the syntactic restrictions on where Spanish/English switching can occur.

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[1] In order to distinguish borrowing phenomena from Code switching it is necessary to specify the degree of assimilation of a given word. That is, if a single word is embedded within a sentence, the more this word is assimilated into the language at issue the more the phenomenon is borrowing. On the contrary, the less the word is assimilated the more the phenomenon is Code switching.

Constraints on Code switching attracted quite a bit of attention throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Many models propose principles or constraints ruling out certain types of mixing. Other models propose general constraints, which are supposed to hold for the majority of cases. Some researchers (DiSciullo, Muysken & Singh [1986]) make absolute, all-or-nothing constraints, while in more recent work, a probabilistic perspective is taken: that is, rather than trying to state which mixes are ungrammatical, an attempt is made to establish which types of mixes are the most frequent (Muysken [2000]; Shankoff & Poplack [1981]).

In this paper, the grammaticality of the Spanglish structure will be highlighted. Specifically, I will propose a set of constraints whose purpose is twofold: a) to predict which Spanish/English mixes are more frequent and b) to understand the reason why. Furthermore, I will attempt to establish which types of Code switching are disallowed according to the X-bar theory and to the theory of agreement.

1. Theorizing Code-switching

By Code switching (or mixing, according to Muysken [2000]) is meant the selection of forms from an embedded variety *B* in utterances of a matrix variety *A*, by bilingual or multilingual speakers. The matrix language *A* is the base language in sentences in which the number of words in language *A* is higher than the number of words in language *B*. The term embedded language, instead, refers to the language (or languages) participating in the Code switching with a lesser role. Within this model, it is assumed that the matrix language sets the morphosyntactic frame of the sentences showing Code switching. Specifically, the matrix language specifies the order of words and supplies the syntactically relevant morphemes in constituents composed of items from both participating languages (Myers Scotton [1993]).

Code switching differs from borrowing because the former involves inserting alien words or constituents into a clause, whilst the latter involves entering alien elements into the lexicon. Borrowing can be seen as a form of vocabulary extension that shows the influence of one culture onto another, whilst Code switching has primarily the symbolic function of marking a mixed cultural identity (Muysken [2000]). Another difference between the two phenomena is that Code switching could be defined as an on-line process (i.e. it is performed while an individual is speaking and organizing the sentence), whilst borrowing is the insertion of fixed lexical items.

Code switching may be either inter-sentential or intra-sentential. Inter-sentential Code switching involves switches from one language to the other between sentences (for example: I'm

fine. *¿Tú como estás?*[2]) i.e. a whole sentence (or more than one sentence) is produced entirely in one language before there is a switch to the other language.

Intra-sentential Code switching, instead, occurs within the same sentence or fragment (for example: I visit *mi abuelo*[3] on the weekends). These types of switches can produce three different sorts of constituents: those entirely in the matrix language, those with material from two languages occurring within the same constituent, or those entirely in the embedded language (Myers Scotton [1993]; Milroy & Muysken [1995]).

The patterns of intra-sentential Code switching are often rather different from one another. The following are the distinct processes at work:

A. "Insertion" of material (lexical items or entire constituents) from language A into a structure of language B.

(1) Este *jaiwei* es muy peligroso

            highway

B. "Alternation" between structures of the two languages (*A*, *B*).

(2) I mean, *cuando voy a comprar algo al pueblo*, I don't like to take them with me

            when I go shopping in the village

C. "Congruent lexicalization" of material from different lexical inventories into a shared grammatical structure.

(3) The water *está* boil-*ando*[4]

            is   boiling

These three processes are operating to a different extent and in different ways in a given bilingual setting. Code switching is possible because two languages can share the same morphosyntactic structure: if we take the example in (3), the water *está* boil-*ando*, we can notice that the sentence with that particular structure would be correct in both English and Spanish (i.e. the water is boil-ing, *el agua está hirvi-endo*). Poplack (1980) has developed the equivalence constraint I am presenting below in (4) in order to describe the proper use of Code switching:

(4)   "Equivalence constraint": the order of the sentence constituents immediately adjacent to and on both sides of the switch point must be grammatical with respect to both languages involved simultaneously[5].

In fact, Code switching seems to occur more often where the constituents order is the same. For example:

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[2] "How are you?".
[3] "My grandfather".
[4] MUYSKEN (2000, 32-4).
[5] POPLACK (1980, 27s.).

(5)   It's a wonderful holiday *tradición* getting together with *familia* to whip up a *tamalada*[6].

                          tradition   family

On the basis of Spanish/English data, several researchers, such as Pfaff (1979) and Timm (1975), argued that switching does not occur between a verb and its auxiliary, or between a verb and a negative element. According to the data I collected, this seems to be correct, as we will see in more details further in this paper.

 Lipsky (1978) also proposed a constraint which states that it is unlikely to switch within a Prepositional Phrase (in *la casa*), and between article and noun (the *casa*). Timm (1975), instead, proposed that it is impossible to switch between:

(6)   a.   Subject and verb

           b.   Object pronoun and verb

Nevertheless, for all these observations many counterexamples can be found.

Some other researchers (Di Sciullo, Muysken & Singh [1986]; Berk-Seligson [1986]; Sankoff & Poplack [1981]) have also worked on establishing similar specific linguistic constraints on patterns of Code switching, generally aiming at contributing to the understanding of language universals. Constraints provide a mechanism whereby two languages may be integrated together in the conversation between two bilingual speakers, by excluding certain combinations. In this paper I will propose some restrictions on possible combinations of strings from the two languages.

2. Adaptation of English borrowings

Adaptation is a phonological expedient used to overcome the differences in pronunciation existing between Spanish and English, and to supply the morphosyntactic information that the English language does not realize (*rufo*, from roof).

According to Espinosa (1975), the processes by which English words are adapted to Spanish are three, reported below in (7).

(7)   A.   Translation

           B.   Phonological adaptation

           C.   Adaptation with the addition of native morphological elements[7]

The first type includes forms like *escuela alta* for "high school", while words like *lonchi* "lunch" and *baysbol* "baseball" are phonologically adapted. *Performear* is a form deriving from "to perform" and *rufo* from "roof" with the addition of a Spanish inflectional morpheme. An additional mechanism by which English words are incorporated into the Spanish lexicon is the most common

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[6] A mexican meat dish.

"intact importation": words like "surf", for example, are incorporated without changes. This type of borrowings are words whose meaning are objects or concepts for which the Spanish lexicon does not have a viable equivalent, these borrowings are also present in many other languages. Both adaptation and intact importation are example of incorporation.

Forms like *fueron puestos libres* "they were set free" or *consiste de* "to consist of" are called "grammatical transfer" (Lance 1969). This seems to be matter of lexicon rather than a matter of grammar, even if a bilingual speaker using such a construction seems to borrow the form of an entire constituent rather than a single word.

As regards the first group of borrowings, listed above in (7 A.), we can notice that Spanish inflectional morphemes provide the English words with gender labels (as in *rufo*, where – o is the singular masculine inflection). Further information about gender is provided in Spanglish by the Spanish definite article realizing the gender label (*la Internet*, where *la* is the feminine definite article).

3. Evaluating hypotheses on the presence of a Spanglish syntax

Blom and Gumperz (1972) were the founders of the modern perspective of Code switching, which accepts that Code switching is a sign of fluency rather than a sign of verbal deficiency. The present section aims at demonstrating that Code switching is not a naive phenomenon because it requires fluency in both languages involved in the process.

I will take the example reported here in (8) to show that Code mixing is not a sign of lack of vocabulary:

(8) The water *está* boil-*ando*

              is   boiling

While observing this sentence, I noticed that a Spanish speaker must know what both "water" and "(to) boil" mean in order to produce a meaningful sentence, so the processes of mixing are indicative of a good bilingual knowledge. In fact, where monolinguals only have one vocabulary (and syntax) available to them, bilinguals have two, and they use them both to their fullest potential.

Thus, Code switching and adaptation of English borrowings require a certain degree of bilingual proficiency because they involve both English and Spanish grammatical rules and vocabulary. Hence it seems that bilingual speakers, having the advantage of exploiting their wider linguistic knowledge to express meaningful thoughts and ideas, can choose to combine languages or make a shift from one language to another, whenever the situation is appropriate.

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[7] HERNADEZ CHAVEZ (1975, 214-16).

Furthermore, the matrix language model I have presented serves as a cue to understand whether there is a grammar ruling Spanglish sentences and discourses. According to Myers Scotton (1993), even if Spanglish does not have a grammar of its own, a Spanglish discourse follows the grammar of its matrix language, while in cases of congruent lexicalization (in which the two languages have an equal role in the sentence, i.e. there are half words of one language and half of the other) the constituents order is to be identical. Now I will illustrate what I propose to be a counterexample to this theory.

4. Counterexamples to the Matrix Language Model

According to Poplack (1980) and Myers Scotton (1993), the matrix language sets the morphosyntactic frame of the sentence showing Code switching.

In the sentence:

(9)   *Ponte los zapatos* red

         Put the red shoes on

Since Spanish is the matrix language, it establishes the constituents order, so the most common "noun" + "adjective" structure is followed. If we consider this model valid, it can be argued that Spanglish is ruled at least by one grammar at a time, i.e. the grammar of the matrix language present in the sentence. However, in the course of my research, I noticed that sentences with "adjective + noun", as in the example (10) are more frequent than sentences with "noun + adjective" such as that in (9).

(10)   *Ponte los* red *zapatos*

On the basis of this evidence I would argue that Spanglish is bound by two grammars and not by one grammar at a time. It is thus possible to formulate a first constraint.

(11)   "Constituents order constraint": when the two languages have two different constituents order, even if the sentence showing Code switching presents a matrix language, when there is a rule that does not break any of the two grammars, this rule is to be preferred over an unmarked[8] rule of the matrix language.

Therefore, since the formula "adjective + noun" is accepted in Spanish, at least in poetry, while "noun + adjective" is not accepted in English, in Spanglish the order "adjective + noun" is more productive. The interest of this constraint for the present proposal is that it makes reference to two grammatical systems.

In the following section I will show that subject/verb Code switching is a regular linguistic process.

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[8] More productive.

5. Subject-verb Code switching

According to Poplack (1980), the occurrence of Code switching is limited to a point in the sentence where the structure is shared by both languages. In this paper, I aim at understanding what happens when though the structure of a sentence showing Code switching is equivalent in the two languages, it lacks the morphosyntactic information that is necessary to the Spanish structure.

The present section provides some counterexamples to Timm's (1975) constraint in (6) on subject-verb Code switching. On the basis of the data I collected, I propose that a subject-verb switching can be grammatical, provided that it responds to certain requirements.

Consider the following sentence:

(12)   *El agua* boils

           the water

We see that both languages share the syntactic structure, i.e. the constituents order is the same in this case, i.e. subject-verb. Thus, according to the equivalence constraint (Poplack [1980]), the switching is grammatical.

The sentences in (13) and (14) share the same syntactic structure, but still there are several differences between the two morphologies at issue.

(13)   They read the newspaper

(14)   *Ellos leen el periódico*

The constituents order is the same, i.e. subject-verb; nevertheless, Spanish realizes agreement in person and number whilst English does not; that is, in English there are no inflections containing morphosyntactic information about the subject.

The following examples show the differences between Spanish and English morphology, in patterns with equivalent syntactic structure:

(15)   *El chico* reads the newspaper

           the guy

(16)   **Los chicos* read the newspaper

           the guys

The difference between the two sentences lies in the fact that in (15) the functional head –s (in read-s) contains morphosyntactic information realized in the subject *El chico*, whereas in (16) the verb does not contain these morphosyntactic features. Therefore, switching as in (15) is allowed whilst switching as in (16) (**Los chicos* read the newspaper) is disallowed.

In order to fill this gap, Spanglish is provided with the so-called adaptation of English borrowings I have discussed above. When the structure of the two languages is different, in cases in which Spanish requires agreement, the English verb is phonologically adapted with the addition of a

Spanish inflectional morpheme carrying the morphosyntactic information needed (as in *performear* [7 C.]). To account for these facts, I propose the following constraint.

(17)   "3rd person constraint": in patterns showing identical constituents order, a Spanish subject + English verb mixing without any adaptation expedient is disallowed for any person other than the third singular.

Therefore, Spanish/English subject-verb Code switching is allowed only when the English verb contains the morphosyntactic information needed by the Spanish structure.

The following section introduces another pattern in which the theory of agreement plays an important role in Spanish/English Code switching.

6. Article-noun switching

As a comparative case study, I consider here mixing within a Determinant Phrase. This section contains a counterexample to Pfaff's (1978) constraint on article and noun Code switching given above in section 1. In my perspective, the grammaticality of definite article and noun switching is bounded by specific restrictions.

Let us consider the two examples given in (18) and (19).

(18)   * The *casa*

(19)   *La* house

The constituents order is the same in the two sentences, but Spanish is provided with grammatical morphemes containing morphosyntactic information: in this case the morpheme /a/ contains information about gender and number. English, on the contrary, is not provided with gender grammatical morphemes so that agreement, a necessary requirement for a Spanish Determinant Phrase to be grammatical, is not possible.

In the example (18) the English definite article ("the") lacks the morphosyntactic information required by the Spanish noun *casa* in order for the phrase to be grammatical, thus constructions such as that in (18) are ungrammatical, whereas constructions such as that in (19) are grammatical, because the noun "house" takes the gender label of its definite article. This leads me to propose a further restriction.

(20)   "Article-noun constraint"*:* in constructions with an identical word order in the two languages, it is ungrammatical to switch from English definite article to a Spanish noun because of the lack of morphosyntactic information on the article.

This prediction is supported by evidence available in the Spanish lexicon. In fact, English borrowings assimilated in the Spanish lexicon, as for example *la Internet, el plot, el hamburger,* are always preceded by a Spanish definite article. On the contrary, Spanish borrowings introduced into

the English lexicon are preceded by English indefinite article but they are never preceded by the definite article *the* (*the *sombrero*[9], *the *tortilla*).

To account for my proposal I will now illustrate how X-bar theory is involved in establishing the grammaticality of Spanish/English Code switching.

7. Subject-verb Code switching related to the X-bar theory

Above I have discussed some examples about subject-verb switching, I will now give the X-bar representation (Chomsky [1981]) of these examples to account for my proposal.

The X-bar representation of the sentence in (12) *el agua* boils, is the following:

(21)
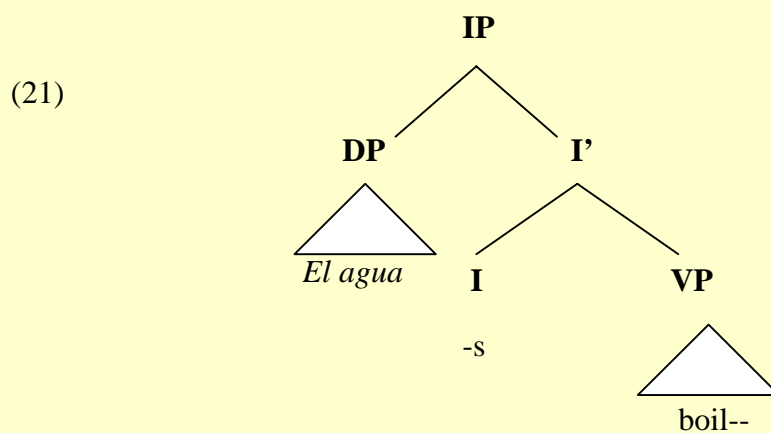
In Haegeman (1998) it is proposed that the X-bar notation can account also for the mechanism of "feature checking" of the constituents. Feature checking is a necessary requirement when words are put together in sentences. The morphosyntactic information of a lexical (or functional) head consists of features. A head, thus, contains the features belonging to both its specifier and its complement, i.e. the head projects its features within the phrase (Di Sciullo, Muysken and Singh [1986]). To check features means to verify if a head contains the same features contained by its specifier and complement (Haegeman [1998]).

In feature checking, the relation between an element and its syntactic environment plays a very important role. For the purpose of this paper, which is to analyze the grammaticality of Spanish/English subject-verb and article-noun switching, I will concentrate on the head-specifier relationship and on the head-complement relationship, to account for subject-verb switching and article-noun switching, respectively. A head, projecting its features to its specifier and complement,

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[9] On the basis of an observation by Laura Bafile concerning this example, I asked to a native speaker how she would say "I can't find the sombrero my father bought last year". She said that Spanglish would probably say "I can't find that sombrero my father bought last year".

determines the structure of the whole constituent. To simplify we can argue that the head of any constituent is the most important element.

The auxiliary, the verb, or a non-realized head of any Inflectional Phrase is often assumed to govern the subject, assigning a nominative case to it. So the head-specifier relationship is the pattern at issue in order to explain why in some cases subject-verb switching is grammatical whereas in other cases it is ungrammatical.

The X-bar scheme of the examples in (13) and (14) is structured as follows:

(22)   They read the newspaper

(23)   *Ellos leen el periódico*

(24)
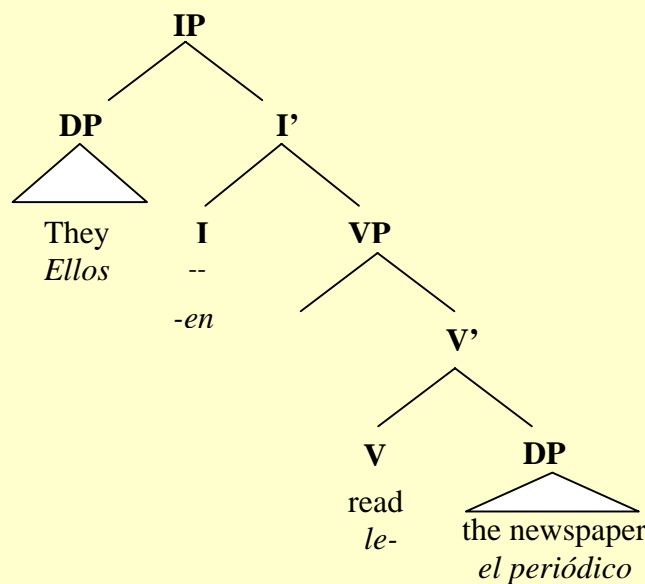
Spanish realizes the head of the Inflectional Phrase (*-en*) that agrees with its specifier, and contains morphosyntactic information related to both specifier and complement. On the contrary, in English the head of the Inflectional Phrase is not realized[11] as seen in the sentence in (13) and (22).

For the sentence to be grammatical, the specifier must contain the same morphosyntactic information its head contains. In (12) *el agua* being 3rd person singular checks the feature of its head, i.e. the head projects its feature to the phrase, and Code switching is thus allowed.

The X-bar representation of the two examples in (15) and (16), reported here in (25) and (26), is given below in (27) to account for the "3rd person constraint" I formulated above.
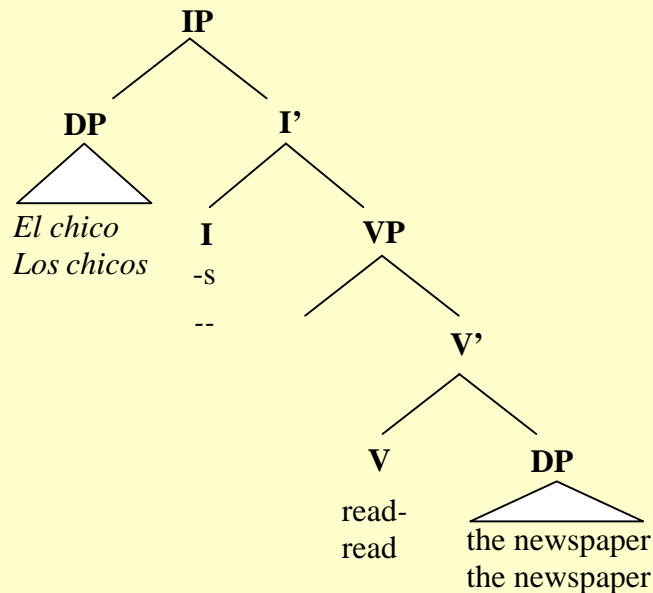
(25)   *El chico* reads the newspaper

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[11] The Inflectional Phrase head is not realized because there is no inflection; an auxiliary could possibly fill that place. In our specific case this auxiliary is not realized.

the guy

(26)   *Los chicos* read the newspaper

the guys

(27)

IP

DP   I'

El chico   I   VP
Los chicos -s

--

V'

V   DP

read-   the newspaper
read   the newspaper

The functional head –s in the Inflectional phrase's head contains morphosyntactic information realized in the subject *El chico*, whereas in (16) the verb (read) does not realize these morphosyntactic features. Therefore, Spanish/English subject-verb Code switching is allowed only when the English verb realizes the features its specifier contains.
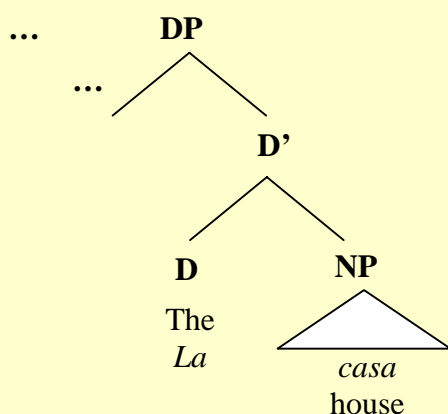
7.1 Article-noun Code switching related to X-bar theory

In the present section I will concentrate on the relation between head and complement within the Determinant Phrase. The X-bar representation of the examples in (18) and (19), reported below in (28) and (29) is given in (30).

(28)   * The *casa*

(29)   *La* house

(30)

...   DP

...   D'

D   NP

The   *casa*
La   house

Being the left periphery of any Noun Phrase richer than the right periphery in terms of syntactic information about features as gender and number, and being the Spanish definite article richer (in terms of morphology) than the English definite article, I would argue that the determiner (which is the functional head of the constituent and it is located in the left periphery of the Noun Phrase) is the most important element to be taken into account. This is the reason why its complement takes the gender label of its head. The "Spanish definite article + English noun" mixing is therefore allowed.

8. Discussions and issues for further research

As far as the mixing of English subject and Spanish verb is concerned, Code switching seems to be allowed for any person because Spanish finite verbs always contain morphosyntactic information realized in the head of the Inflectional Phrase and projected into its specifier and complement.

Let us consider the two sentences in (25) and (26)

(31)   The guy *lee el periódico*

                    reads the newspaper

(32)   The guys *leen el periódico*

                    read

We could argue that in this perspective both sentences would be grammatical[12].

Nevertheless, a further problem for this assertion is constituted by subject (personal) pronouns. In fact, during my research on this subject, I have not found Code switching sentences, as for example, the following two:

(33)   He *lee el periódico*

(34)   They *leen el periódico*

Hence it could be interesting to study why subject pronouns appear to complicate English subject and Spanish verb mixing, and furthermore, why Code switching from Spanish to English is much more frequent than Code switching from English to Spanish, i.e. why when the head is Spanish (as in: *la* house) more types of Code switching appear to be allowed.

9. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to illustrate some characteristics of Spanish/English Code switching that led me to think that processes of hybridization are grammatical linguistic phenomena that are not left to chance.

In order to reach this objective, I have analyzed some examples of Spanglish sentences I drew from literary production[13], interviews, reviews and data on the net (available in the references).

I have related these examples first to the theory of agreement and then to the X-bar theory, to be as close as possible to studies on language universals, in order to prove that there can be a structure governing Spanglish speech production. Furthermore, I have presented some restrictions on where Code switching between Spanish and English can occur, with respect to the examples mentioned above.

Since the purpose of this study is to argue that a hypothetical standardization of Spanglish grammar is empirically possible, I focused on previous studies on Spanish/English Code switching comparing some grammatical restrictions with the empirical data available. Moreover, I have provided a counterexample to the Matrix Language Model, which is a constraint on "constituents' order", which says that the constituents order has to be grammatical with respect to both grammars.

A deeper analysis led me to establish a "3rd person constraint" related to agreement and X-bar theory, particularly with respect to linguistic features, and a "Determinant Phrase constraint" related to definite article-noun switching.

As a general conclusion, I argue that if the structure showing Code switching lacks the morphosyntactic information relevant for the Spanish language, mixing is not allowed. Specifically, Code switching sentences must not lack the realization of morphosyntactic information necessary for one of the two languages involved in the switching process.

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[12] Other examples can be found in the *Don Quijote* translated by I. Stavans, present in the Appendix of the book by STAVANS (2003).

[13] Other examples can be found in: VEGA (1977) and Vega in THOMAS (1967) and also in other articles from *Latina* magazine, and in Ilan Stavans' articles cited in references.

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