

Code-switching in bilinguals: Behavioral and electrophysiological studies

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A unique feature of bilingual speech is that bilinguals often produce utterances that switch between languages, such as “I ate *huevos para el desayuno*” [eggs for breakfast]. The large majority of psycholinguistic and neurocognitive studies examining switching between languages have focused on the processing of a series of single, unrelated items (e.g., unrelated words, numbers, or pictures) rather than switching between languages in a meaningful utterance (e.g., a sentence). However, an emergent body of studies seek to examine the cognitive and neural correlates of language switching in more naturally occurring situations: language switching within meaningful sentences. I will present recent psycholinguistic and electrophysiological studies that examined intra-sentential code-switching in production and comprehension. What are the mechanisms that drive bilinguals to switch into the other language when interacting with other bilinguals? Furthermore, in comprehension, reading or listening to code-switched sentences incurs increased processing demands when compared to single-language sentences. I will discuss evidence showing that switching direction (switching from the first language to the second language, or vice versa) and accented speech modulate switching costs when bilinguals read or listen to code-switched sentences. Together these studies attest to the value of integrating psycholinguistic and neurocognitive approaches to gain more insight into the neural and cognitive mechanisms of intra-sentential code-switching in comprehension and production.