

Playing school in Mauritius

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The development in Mauritius's three major languages is essentially sequential for most of the population: Creole, French, English. In schools, English is used alongside French (and some Creole) in Primary Standards One (ages 5-6) to Three (ages 7-8). English is officially the sole medium of instruction from Primary Standard Four (ages 8-9), though this is not the case in practice.

Two Mauritian cousins (aged 6 and 8 years) in the initial stages of the development of English were filmed playing school. The children are native speakers of Creole and (to a varying extent) French, have some exposure to Bhojpuri (used among older family members) and Hindi, and have attended French-medium nursery schools. Although older family members speak English, it is little used in the home domain, and the children's major exposure to English is in the classroom.

The children were told that the rule of the game was that they would use only English while playing school. However, they sometimes broke the rule. Code-switching in the enacted English lessons is compared to that of actual teachers and pupils who were observed in classrooms. Both children show realistic knowledge of how different languages have different domains and functions in the classroom.

Introduction

Children growing up in a multilingual society in which languages have associated domains can demonstrate their understanding of language allocation even at a stage when their proficiency in one or more of the languages is limited. The paper uses a description of the sociodramatic play of two children in Mauritius to illustrate how children make good use of limited linguistic resources in a replication of a real-life classroom experience that involves three languages, only one of which is likely to be known by all children, and the other two of which are the appropriate languages of education.

Lakshmi and Tushita are two ethnically Indian cousins and playmates who live in Mauritius, a “linguistically very heterogeneous” (Corne 1999:163) country. Lakshmi is eight years old and is a Primary Standard Four (Std4) pupil while Tushita is six years old and is a Primary Standard One (Std1) pupil. Their principal native language is the French-lexifier creole, Mauritian Creole, (henceforth referred to as ‘Creole’, as this is what it is called in Mauritius). Before attending a French-medium nursery school at the age of three, Lakshmi stayed at home, where her parents rarely used French to talk to her. She therefore developed only passive skills in French, mainly through its use in play by elder siblings and exposure to TV. Tushita had more exposure to French than Lakshmi because French was used at the day-care centre she attended from the age of 7 months. Thus, for Tushita, French developed as a native language, though Creole was her dominant native language. At home both girls are also slightly exposed to Bhojpuri, a North Indian language closely related to Hindi. Bhojpuri is the native language of their parents, but the parents use it only to speak to older relatives and community members, and not to each other or to members of the children’s age-group. The children therefore hear Bhojpuri when it is being used to and by elderly family members. In nursery school (ages 3 to 5), they were exposed to more French, much of it in a pedagogic context, and to some English. Since Std1, they have been learning English, French and Hindi at school. Although Hindi is not used in the family circle, the girls are aware of their parents’ knowledge of Hindi. Indeed, Tushita’s mother is a teacher of Hindi and Lakshmi’s parents use Hindi to speak to friends from India. Lakshmi and Tushita are also exposed to Hindi in film, television and music from India. At the time the recordings were made, both children probably know more Hindi than they do English. In the wider family, most family members have the same language inventory (Bhojpuri, Creole, Hindi, French and English), though pattern of acquisition, use and skills differ from one member to another.

Although there is individual diversity in language repertoire and use in the ethnically Indian population of Mauritius, the children’s pattern of language development in Creole, French and English is similar to that of many children of all ethnicities in Mauritius:

- Creole is the dominant native language and is closely associated with informal domains. According to *The 2000 Housing and Population Census* (Central Statistics Office 2006), it is spoken in more than 68% of Mauritian homes. This may be an under-estimate, as Creole is “the basic vehicle of interethnic communication” (Corne 1999:166). However, no formal education is given in Creole at school.

- French is the second language to which the majority of children have been exposed. Many parents in Mauritius use French to their children before they embark upon primary schooling. French is the preferred language of teachers in kindergarten (Tirvassen 2001:35) and the fact that Creole derives the major part of its vocabulary from French also seems to make it the ideal second language for teachers to use in the initial exposure to formal education. From kindergarten onwards, French is taught as a subject as well as being used as a medium of education. Furthermore, French dominates the mass media, especially TV programmes where, for example, most cartoons are in French. French in fact covers a wide range of domains of all levels of formality.
- English is the sole official language of Mauritius, but is seldom a native language. It is associated with formal domains and is not used “as a community language” (Corne 1999:165) in Mauritius. Tirvassen (2001:35) observes that the only exposure to English in many Mauritian kindergartens is the repetition of elementary structures and limited vocabulary. Although Tirvassen does not say what these are constituted of, they are likely to include greetings and the alphabet. Stein (1997:77), using ‘diglossia’ in Fishman’s sense (1967) says that English “shows the typical picture of a socially higher variety in a diglossic situation”, alongside the other high (H) variety, French. This pattern of language use is the heritage of a complex migration and colonial history.

In the first three years of primary school “any one language may be employed as the medium of instruction, being a language which in the opinion of the Minister is most suitable for the pupils” (1957 Education Ordinance of Mauritius, quoted by Tirvassen 2001: 33). In Mauritian schools, French, the preferred choice of teachers, is used alongside English and a little Creole in Standards One (ages 5-6) to Three (ages 7-8). English is officially the sole medium of instruction from Std4 (ages 8-9), though in practice, teachers, in order to communicate effectively with their pupils, do not restrict themselves to English. The use of French continues unofficially after Std4. Lakshmi is in the school year at which the transition to more English must officially take place, while Tushita is in the earliest primary school year, when teachers are expected to exploit whatever linguistic resources are useful.

The classroom setting is a major indicator of the social roles and values associated with languages in Mauritius. The relationship between French and Creole could be thought of as something like Ferguson’s (1959) classic diglossia, with two closely

related varieties functioning as H and L. However, French and Creole are usually treated as separate languages, and the added complication of the role of English leads to a move towards Fishman's extension of 'diglossia' to allow for role of H and L being taken by separate languages. There are, in the classroom, as in the wider Mauritius, two H languages (English and French) and one L language (Creole). The classroom is the locus for the learning of both H languages.

Methodology

Children's play has been used to help researchers tease out a number of aspects of children's creativity with language, metalinguistic knowledge, and ability to demonstrate knowledge of sociolinguistic norms (Gillen 2006, Gupta 2006). Sociodramatic play is especially rich as a source of analytic data because, in sociodramatic play, children place themselves in roles they cannot take up in real life (such as teacher, doctor, parent, shopkeeper). They use language to enact their dramas in a way that reflects their understanding of sociolinguistic rules in real life. The classroom is a place in which children participate in real life and they take pleasure in dramatising the structures of the classroom in their play. It also shapes their linguistic behaviour. Children have to be acculturated into the norms of language in their own society and wherever they have access to education, the classroom is a site of explicit language socialisation.

The video recordings on which this study is based were collected by Rajkomar, who is related to the children¹. The children were to engage in 'sociodramatic play': "mini-dramas, enactments, suitably modified ... from events of everyday life" (Gillen 2006:173). Rajkomar asked the children to pretend to be in a classroom where English is being taught, one being the teacher and the other being the pupil. Both children undertook both roles though, not surprisingly, the elder child, Lakshmi, was the more frequent teacher. They were free to play at any classroom activity, but Rajkomar suggested it might be a good idea to use a Std1 textbook as a prop. The rule of the game initially was that they would speak only English, but very soon they started code-switching between English, Creole and French. When it became apparent that restricting themselves to English caused discomfort, especially to the younger child, Rajkomar asked them to speak in any language they felt comfortable with, without forgetting that this was an English class.

The role play took place over the course of one day in the garage at Lakshmi's home (a familiar playing space). The children used suitable props: a Std1 English textbook, a whiteboard, some markers, a piece of cloth to wipe the whiteboard and a stool. There were occasional disturbances from other household members. Seven

episodes were recorded, in the form of .MOV files (*Quicktime*). The total time recorded was 46 minutes. In order to be able to compare the enacted school with a real-life classroom for the same age groups, Rajkomar also observed two Std1 classes (Mathematics and English) and one English Std4 class (not the classes actually attended by Lakshmi and Tushita, due to failure to get consent from the school), in which she took notes. She also did a face to face interview with the teachers of these classes, in an informal setting, at which she took notes. The teachers were invited to elaborate on the strategies they consciously use, and their reasons for using them, while teaching English to children of the relevant age groups.ⁱⁱ

All transcription is in normal orthography, with the Creole orthography being that developed by Dev Virahsawmy, and taught by him to Rajkomar. This paper takes an ethnographic rather than a quantitative approach in the sense that it is a culturally-situated analysis. It was generally possible to identify the languages easily. Grammatical and pronunciation differences allowed Rajkomar (a native speaker of Creole and French) to confidently distinguish Creole from French. In the transcriptions, English is shown in plain type, Creole in italics, and French in underlined italics. Additional information and glosses are in bold, and translations are in inverted commas. Three full stops indicate stammering and breaks in utterances. In the glosses, parenthetic ‘T’ and ‘V’ indicate the use of the T and V second person forms in French and Creole (Brown & Gilman 1966). As in other languages with this distinction, the V forms are used for all plural address and for respectful address in the singular, while the T form is used in the singular only to social equals or to inferiors.

Classroom-conditioned rituals and formulae

Creative play with language “is an activity children engage in that is always embedded in particular social and cultural contexts and which has certain meanings and values for speakers” (Gillen 2006:157). The classroom is such a “social and cultural context”, or ‘domain’, whose linguistic patterns Lakshmi and Tushita are aware of, and their sociodramatic play uses different languages in a way that reflects and perpetuates these linguistic norms. Classroom-conditioned rituals and formulaic expressions uttered only in English are part of the linguistic patterns that Lakshmi and Tushita adopt, not only in the first five sessions, where the two girls are most determined to use solely English despite nervousness and lack of confidence, but also in the last two sessions, where they use the different languages in their repertoire liberally.

Lakshmi and Tushita's sociodramatic play brings out the impact of the classroom on young children as they "take the daily routines of the school day and embed them into dramas which incorporate the language shift that is part of their experience" (Gupta 2006:202). Language shift is a daily experience in the life of multilingual children in various forms: the shift in repertoire from one generation to another; the additions to repertoire as part of growing up; and the daily shift from one language to another in the different settings that constitute the everyday lives of all who live in a multicultural society. In the sociodramatic play, the children's movement from one language to another involves speaking a language which they have not been learning for long and for which they find no use outside the classroom. Although they do not have much English, they know when it should be used and do their best to replicate this use of English in the classroom, thus showing considerable will-power in their effort to use the appropriate language in this particular setting.

Rituals and formulae that shape the school day are at the heart of language acquisition and pedagogy, as they help not only in learning a language (Peters and Boggs 1986), but also in nurturing "correct classroom behaviour" (Gupta 1994:163), which children need to give them a sense of comfort, security and routine at school. Classroom behaviour is also important in the acquisition of social skills, for "learning to speak and learning to behave are inseparable" (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975:113). As they enact the rituals and use the formulae, there is cooperation, understanding and respect between Lakshmi and Tushita, which comes not only from the fact that they are playmates, but also from their own experiences as pupils and their observations of teachers.

Introduction rituals

Three of the seven episodes of play enact a class that is introduced with two linked rituals: a 'morning greeting' and the establishment of the date and the subject of the class. In the first session, Tushita is the teacher and she greets her pupil with "Children" as soon as she enters. Automatically, Lakshmi jumps to her feet to greet her with "Good morning Miss". Although she is smiling, Tushita is clearly uncomfortable and does not respond any further. She moves directly to the proceedings of the class.

In the second session, Lakshmi is now teacher and seems to be more worried by the camera than she had been when she was the pupil. She is nervous and stammers, but she still succeeds in asking after the welfare of her pupil (Example 1, line 1). Tushita, now at ease in her role as student, helps her playmate to fulfil her role as teacher (line 3). Lakshmi indeed develops confidence and takes great care to perform

the ritual of the morning greeting. There is no hesitation thereafter, and English flows smoothly from the mouths of both Lakshmi and Tushita, resulting in a highly polite exchange:

(1)

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| Lakshmi | Uhm uh...how are you?...uh ah | 1 |
| | [Lakshmi points at Tushita, indicating that she is expecting an answer] | |
| Tushita | Uh...how?... | 2 |
| | [Tushita gets a grip on herself and stands up] | |
| Tushita | Good morning Miss. | 3 |
| Lakshmi | Good morning children. | 4 |
| Tushita | How are you Miss? | 5 |
| Lakshmi | I'm fine, thank you. How are you? | 6 |
| Tushita | I am very fine, thank you Miss. | 7 |

The ritual is completed again in the sixth session, with great effort and cheerfulness despite nervousness. Lakshmi sees that her 'pupil' is searching for the formula (line 3) and comes to her help by supplying it (line 4):

(2)

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Tushita | Good morning teach...good morning Miss. | 1 |
| Lakshmi | Good morning. | 2 |
| Tushita | How uhm...uh... | 3 |
| Lakshmi | How are you? | 4 |
| Tushita | Uh...how are you Miss? | 5 |
| Lakshmi | I'm fine. How are you? | 6 |
| Tushita | I am [gulps] ...I am very well thank you Miss. | 7 |

The girls succeed in creating a shared platform of understanding and cooperation right at the beginning of a class. This platform is also important as a basis of a safe learning environment in an actual class. The morning greeting is an intrinsic part of the classroom in Mauritius. As Rajkomar saw in the classroom observations, as soon as any adult entered the class, the pupils promptly and respectfully got up to greet the visitor, and the ritual took place in exactly the same way as it does in Lakshmi and Tushita's sociodramatic play.

The first thing that Tushita and Lakshmi usually do after the greeting is to write the date and the subject which is going to be taught on the whiteboard. This is the second ritual and it is usually the pupil who demonstrates her knowledge by writing

these two details on the board. However, she has to wait for the teacher to nominate her (line 1) and then ask her to do it (line 2), and, indeed, in the first session, this is the first task:

(3)

- | | | |
|--|---|--------|
| Tushita | Uhm... Lakshmi come here. | 1 |
| [Lakshmi gets up from her seat on the stool and comes next to Tushita] | | |
| Tushita | Write, write huh...write, write 'English for... for the...for Tuesday' in ... in... on the whiteboard. | 2 3 |
| [Lakshmi writes "English for Tuesday 09 August 2005" while Tushita looks on at her and at the camera] | | |

The discomfort of Tushita is great as she directs Lakshmi: she fiddles with her book and looks at the camera for support. Nevertheless, she is determined to go on and succeeds in articulating her thoughts. Lakshmi, also nervous, assigns the same task to Tushita in the second session, which in fact revolves solely around the two rituals. In the sixth session, Lakshmi herself writes the subject and date on the whiteboard after the morning greeting. This ritual also takes place when the whiteboard has just been wiped clean and the teacher is about to write another exercise. It is a significant ritual, for it acts as a reminder of two key details – the subject to be taught and the date – which are relevant not only to the class, but also to the general knowledge of the child.

Both of the Std1 classes that were observed start with exactly the same question about the day of the week:

(4)

- | | | |
|---------|------------------------|---|
| Teacher | What is the day today? | 1 |
| Pupils | Today is Monday. | 2 |

(5)

- | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|---|
| Teacher | What is the day today? | 1 |
| Pupils | Tuesday. | 2 |
| Teacher | What was the day yesterday? | 3 |
| Pupils | Monday. | 4 |

It is not long before both teachers write the same details on their own whiteboards, as Lakshmi and Tushita do. Lakshmi and Tushita's cultural knowledge of classroom proceedings highlights the impact of classroom behaviour on young children and the influence of the teacher as a role-model. This practical knowledge of the use of

English by teachers, who are linguistically free at this stage of language teaching, is even more significant when we take into account the first session recorded where Tushita initiates and respects both rituals, though she has attended primary schooling for only seven months.

Disciplinary routines

Lakshmi and Tushita use formulaic English expressions to praise the accomplishment of a task and to respond to this praise. In the first session, Tushita is the teacher. When Lakshmi has just finished the second ritual of writing the name of the subject and the date on the whiteboard, the following takes place:

(6)

| | | |
|---------|--------------------|---|
| Tushita | Very good Lakshmi. | 1 |
| Lakshmi | Thank you Miss. | 2 |

In all the recordings, the child who is enacting the teacher uses the same formula and the child enacting the pupil uses the same reply, if there is any response. This is the case even if the utterances before this feedback have been in Creole. There is only one exception to this pattern when, in the seventh session, Lakshmi praises Tushita in Creole with 'Bien bon' (= 'Very good'). The medium of instruction just before was Creole, but Lakshmi does not forget the formula and, after ticking all the correct answers in the exercise, she writes "v.good" on the whiteboard.

Praise was given in the same way in the Std4 class observed, when the teacher was correcting some exercises she had given to the pupils the day before as homework. It was not noted in the Std1 class, but personal experiences of Rajkomar, as well as Lakshmi and Tushita's constant use of it, suggest it is common practice. The praise in English not only encourages the child, but also develops the concept of English as a classroom language.

Moreover, directives are often in English in the sessions, and the pupil acknowledges the directive, if there is any acknowledgement, by replying 'Yes' or 'Yes Miss'. As teacher in the first session, Tushita calls the pupil from her seat to the teacher's side:

(7)

| | | |
|---------|--------------------|---|
| Tushita | Lakshmi come here. | 1 |
| Lakshmi | Yes Miss. | 2 |

[Lakshmi comes to Tushita's side]

This directive is often followed or replaced by a call to the whiteboard to do an exercise which the teacher has put there, as in the sixth session:

(8)

| | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Lakshmi | Tushita...come here and do this work. | 1 |
| Tushita | Yes Miss. | 2 |

Another directive typically in English is the request to wipe the whiteboard after the end of an exercise so that the date, subject and a new exercise can be written on the board. For example, in the sixth session, despite tiredness at having been filmed for over forty minutes and despite some ill feeling manifested in bickering in Creole earlier on the part of the two girls, the request, which is made by Lakshmi throughout the sessions, gets the same answer as the directives above:

(9)

| | | |
|---------|-------------------------------|---|
| Lakshmi | You can clean the whiteboard? | 1 |
| Tushita | Yes Miss. | 2 |

The Std1 teacher uses the same formulaic directive as Lakshmi and Tushita to call a student to the front of the classroom: 'Come here Keshav'. The familiar routines in English shape the school day and manage the classroom. Lakshmi and Tushita, both being real pupils outside the world of play, again show knowledge of this integral aspect of the classroom, which is showing obedience to the directives of the teacher. But as well as controlling behaviour, teachers are engaged in the teaching of English (among other subjects).

Modelling and repetition

The child in the role of teacher frequently models full sentences in English, which the pupil repeats to show that she understands the convention of the pedagogic use of full sentences. In the first session, Tushita has made some drawings on the whiteboard. She expects Lakshmi to name each drawing (including a badminton racket which Lakshmi calls 'badmiton'). Lakshmi writes the answers in full sentences: "This is a badmiton"; "This is a ruler"; "This is a girl"; "This is a flower".

In the sixth session, Lakshmi writes two full sentences on the whiteboard so that Tushita can say them out loud: “I am eating” and “You are eating”. She then writes another sentence, starting with “He is” and expects Tushita to complete the verb phrase. She gives instructions in Creole (line 1):

(10)

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Lakshmi | <i>Dir moi enn verb ki nou kav dir</i> He is. | 1 |
| | [Tell me a verb that we can say] | |
| | ‘Tell me a verb that we can say [after] “He is”.’ | |
| | [Lakshmi writes ‘He is’ on the whiteboard] | |
| Lakshmi | He is... | 2 |
| Tushita | He is eating. | 3 |
| Lakshmi | <i>Non, enn lot verb.</i> | 4 |
| | [No one other verb] | |
| | ‘No, another verb’. | |
| Tushita | He is [two seconds’ pause] a boy. He is a boy! | 5 |
| | [Both girls smile] | |
| Lakshmi | One verb, not a [three seconds’ pause] name. | 6 |

A lot is going on here. Lakshmi prompts Tushita (line 2) by providing the frame of the sentence with the noun phrase and the copular verb, based on the model of the two earlier sentences of the exercise. Tushita supplies the same sentence (line 3), understanding the requirement for a full sentence, but not Lakshmi’s directive (line 4) to give a verb other than ‘eating’. So Lakshmi asks Tushita specifically for another verb (line 4). This is probably beyond Tushita’s metalinguistic knowledge, as she then supplies a noun phrase (line 5). However, as expected, she once again produces a full sentence and retains the frame provided by Lakshmi. The repeated formula thus “provide[s] a scaffold to create English sentences” (Gupta 1994:168), resulting in a creative and entertaining situation for both girls. All the sentences Tushita produces are correct, even if they are not what Lakshmi wants.

When Tushita does not answer in full sentences, she follows Lakshmi’s lead and repeats what Lakshmi has just said, even if it is only one word (line 3):

(11)

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| Tushita | Uhm, He is... | 1 |
| | [She looks at Lakshmi for help] | |
| Lakshmi | Drinking. | 2 |
| Tushita | Drinking. | 3 |
| Tushita | She is uhm... | 4 |

| | | |
|---------|----------|---|
| Lakshmi | Talking. | 5 |
| Tushita | Talking. | 6 |

For Tushita, creativity in English, a language which she has only very recently started learning, is formulaic. She has quickly picked up, within a few months of primary schooling, enough formulae to use while acting both as a pupil and as a teacher. Moreover, though she had told Rajkomar before the filming, which was during the last week of three weeks' holidays, that she could not remember her lessons in English, she knows that, as a pupil, both in an actual classroom and in the make-believe one, not much English is required of her.

Lakshmi uses the same model of classroom discourse as the Std1 teacher, except that the real teacher uses the familiar H language, French, rather than Creole, as the language of explanation (Example 12, line 2). The Std1 teacher supplies the answer to both her questions (lines 1,2), not waiting for an answer from the class. The children repeat the word (line 3), then she models a whole sentence for them (line 4), which they repeat (line 5):

(12)

| | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Teacher | What can you do with your hands? | 1 |
| | <i>Ecrire. Comment on dit? Write.</i> | 2 |
| | [Write How we say?] | |
| | 'Write. How do we say it?' | |
| Pupils | Write. | 3 |
| Teacher | I write with my hands. | 4 |
| Pupils | I write with my hands. | 5 |

Throughout both of her classes, this teacher models sentences or says words in English which she asks her pupils to repeat over and over again by asking them 'Again?' constantly. Both the real teacher and Lakshmi as teacher expect their pupils to repeat what they say, just as their pupils know what is expected of them. This dual expectation is typical of the classroom (Mercer with Barnes 1996:140). In fact, rituals and formulae which Lakshmi and Tushita have learned constitute "ground rules" (1996:132) of the classroom in societies where English is only taught as a classroom subject. They are "disciplinary routines", for they not only ensure the smooth running of the class, as pointed out before, but also act as "a locus for learning, developing a vocabulary essential to daily life, and providing formulaic routines and structures that can act as scaffolds for future learning".

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975:132) state that such formulae or lack of long responses on the part of the student further shows the “acceptance of the domination of another”. It is also clear that Tushita is using the scaffolds to make good use of what English she knows, as children do when acquiring a native language (Cruttenden 1981, Peters 1983).

Code-switching in the classroom

Code-switching, in the sense of using more than one language over the course of a conversation, is characteristic of communication in classrooms in a bilingual or multilingual setting such as Mauritius, and is a strategy for communicating (Tirvassen 2001:38). It also is another important tool in “the process of teaching and learning” (Mercer with Barnes 1996:120).

The main reason for teachers’ code-switching during lessons in Mauritius seems to be practical. Teachers exploit the potential of the languages the students already know and of the ones they are learning in order to create a common terrain of understanding between themselves and pupils. Languages are certainly used in Mauritius as part of a complex system of Acts of Identity, as in Belize (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). It is likely that in some contexts (especially outside formal lessons) teachers use Creole as an expression of solidarity and friendliness, but this type of code-switching was not prominent in the formal lessons that were observed in this study. The use of languages other than English is motivated by the norms and needs of the real classroom. Code-switching is therefore to be expected on the part of two children who are playing school and who are making every effort of staying within the real-world rules of language use.

It seems appropriate in analysing our data to use Myers-Scotton’s terms (Myers-Scotton 1983, Myers-Scotton 2006:234) and refer to utterances as having one language as Matrix and another as Embedded. The Matrix language is determined on the premise that “only one of the the participating languages supplies the morphosyntactic frame of the bilingual clause in codeswitching” (Myers-Scotton 2006:243). The protocol for establishing which language is the Matrix is thoroughly developed by Myers-Scotton, as in some texts identifying the Matrix can be problematic, but none of the examples in our data were unclear in terms of which language was Matrix and which Embedded.

Definitions, explanations and translations

The need to code-switch arises in the Mauritius classroom especially where the teachers are aware that “il existe des contraintes lexicales dès qu’on passe à

l'essentiel de la leçon, c'est-à-dire les termes qui posent le plus de problème” (Tirvassen 2001:38)ⁱⁱⁱ. There are specialised words used in the lesson that the pupils need to understand. Lakshmi again reveals great knowledge of this, not only because she has observed her teachers using one language to explain terms from another language, but also because she has to make full use of the resources she has at hand to communicate with Tushita.

In the third session, where Tushita indicates which of the English words written by Lakshmi on the whiteboard she does not understand, Lakshmi gives her pupil the French translation of the difficult word, or ‘name’, as Lakshmi calls it:

(13)

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Lakshmi | Tushita what do...uh...name you do not understand? | 1 |
| | [Eight seconds' silence. Tushita points at the word 'ruler'] | |
| Lakshmi | Ruler. Ruler means ' <i>la règle</i> '. | 2 |
| | [the ruler] | |
| Tushita | Yes Miss. | 3 |

As Lakshmi becomes more used to having her class recorded, she becomes consistent in using Creole and French to translate, define or explain concepts which are in English and which are unknown to Tushita. This is powerfully seen in the sixth session. Tushita has to complete the exercise on the whiteboard which involves choosing the first letter of a word from one of two letters. Lakshmi has already given the rest of the word and a drawing of the concept as guidance in the correct direction. The drawings are perhaps not all entirely clear.

Tushita completes all words from the list except the last one, which is ‘dog’, where the choices given to her are ‘d’ and ‘b’. Despite Lakshmi’s help in making Tushita realise that the correct answer is ‘d’, Tushita writes ‘b’ and starts laughing, obviously more in the mood for play than studies. This exchange follows:

(14)

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Lakshmi | Dog. <i>Ou pa trouve enn lisien sa?</i> | 1 |
| | [You (V) not see a dog this] | |
| | <i>Get enn lisien.</i> | 2 |
| | [Look a dog] | |
| | ‘Dog. Can’t you see it as a dog? Look, a dog.’ | |
| | [Lakshmi points at the dog she has drawn on the whiteboard. Tushita points back and laughs.] | |

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| Lakshmi | is <i>enn dimounn sa,</i> are <i>de dimounn sa,</i> | 1 |
| | [one person DET two persons DET] | |
| | <i>ou soi boucou dimounn.</i> | 2 |
| | [or many persons] | |
| | “‘Is” refers to one person; “are” refers to two people or to a lot of people.’ | |

Creole being the normal language of home and social life for the two girls, it creates a sense of intimacy between them. However, its use here is primarily functional, because complex explanations must be in a language the addressee understands. The Std1 teacher told Rajkomar in a conversation they had following her classes that some concepts are sometimes ‘trop avancés’ (‘too advanced’), for pupils of Tushita’s age to understand in English. Therefore, it is important to either translate or explain an English word or concept into French or Creole. Though the Std4 teacher is officially not allowed to use any other language than English in the classroom, she told Rajkomar that she also switches to French when she is certain that none of the children in her class understand the concept as it has been taught in English.

An example of the use of French for explanation and definition occurred in the Std1 mathematics class around the words and concepts ‘before’ and ‘after’. Here we have to contend with the “teacher’s concern with the learning of English as well as the learning of the curriculum subject being taught through English” (Mercer with Barnes 1996:9):

(16)

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| Teacher | <i>On a fait</i> before and after, <i>n’est-ce pas?</i> | 1 |
| | [We have done] [NEG-is it not] | |
| | Two is after one, one is before two. | 2 |
| | <i>Que veut dire</i> before? | 3 |
| | [What want say] | |
| | ‘We have done “before” and “after”, haven’t we? Two is after one, one is before two. What does “before” mean?’ | |
| | [Pupils mumble] | |
| Teacher | <i>Avant. Que veut dire</i> before? | 4 |
| | [Before. What want say] | |
| | ‘Before. What does “before” mean?’ | |
| Pupils | <i>Avant.</i> | 5 |

[Before]

The teacher (lines 1, 3, 4) explores the children’s understanding of ‘before’ and ‘after’ by inserting these, as well as the conjunction ‘and’, in a French Matrix (Myers-Scotton 1983, Myers-Scotton 2006:234). Line 2 repeats the English wording that has not been understood. The pupils cannot supply the French translation of ‘before’, as invited (line 3), so the teacher supplies it herself (line 4) as a model for their successful response (line 5). As we saw in the children’s play (Examples 13, 14 and 15), the teacher here uses the more familiar language to explain, though unlike Lakshmi, she opts for the H variety, French, which she assumes most of the children know.

Still concerned with teaching the mathematical concepts ‘before’ and ‘after’ later in the same class, the teacher uses the English preposition ‘after’ in a French question. This time, the children answer in English, perhaps showing their understanding of what language is expected of them as well as their understanding of the meaning of a word they have already been taught:

(17)

| | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|---|
| Teacher | <i>Qui est</i> after Geetanjali? | 1 |
| | [Who is] | |
| Pupils | Vishita is after Geetanjali. | 2 |

The Std4 teacher does the same in the following exchange, where she hints at the meaning of ‘same level’ by translating the word ‘same’ from English to the French ‘même’, and using ‘même’, and not ‘same’, to further prompt a response in French from her students:

(18)

| | | |
|-----------|----------------------------------|---|
| Teacher | Equal means ‘on the same level’. | 1 |
| | <i>C’est quoi même</i> level? | 2 |
| | [DET-is what same] | |
| | ‘What is ‘same level’?’ | |
| One pupil | <i>Même quantité.</i> | 3 |
| | [Same amount.] | |

When her pupils start giving random answers to her question (Example 19, line 1), the Std4 teacher realises that they do not understand the meaning of ‘wasp’ – a very

common insect in Mauritius – and switches to French to invite the children to translate ‘wasp’ into French (line 2), supplying the French word herself when they do not respond (line 4):

(19)

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| Teacher | What is a wasp? What is the colour of a wasp? | 1 |
| | [The children start saying any colour that comes to their mind] | |
| Teacher | <i>En français alors, comment on dit</i> wasp | 2 |
| | [In French then, how we say | |
| | <i>en français?</i> | 3 |
| | in French] | |
| | ‘In French then, how do we say ‘wasp’ in French?’ | |
| | [The children remain silent] | |
| Teacher | <i>Guêpe.</i> | 4 |
| | [Wasp] | |
| | [The children start making sounds of recognition] | |

In both the actual and pretend classes, French is used to ask questions that test knowledge, to explain foreign concepts and to translate unknown English words. This not only teaches side by side both English and the subject being taught, but also checks on and develops the pupils’ knowledge of French. For these functions, the actual teachers rarely use Creole, while Lakshmi and Tushita use both French and Creole.

Letter names

A word belonging to one language may be spelled using the letter names of another language. This form of code-switching in the use of letter names, which is based on the memorised alphabets of English and French, is present in the school context in Mauritius, where, in nursery school, the alphabet is usually recited in French rather than English. It is not until Std1, when pupils throughout the island follow the same syllabus set by the Mauritius Institute of Education, that all learn the alphabet in English.

Thus, at this stage, Tushita is more familiar with the French letter names than with the English ones. In the second session, when Lakshmi calls Tushita to the whiteboard to write “English for Tuesday” and the date, Lakshmi spells the letters of the words “English”, “for” and “Tuesday” for Tushita and uses the English letter

names. Tushita understands her, but when she herself is expected to spell English words in the sixth session, she uses the French letter names most of the time:^{iv}

(20)

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Tushita | Ball. | 1 |
| Lakshmi | <i>Koma ekrir?</i> | 2 |
| | [How write] | |
| | ‘How is it written?’ | |
| Tushita | Uhm, <i>b (= /be/), a (= /a/), l (= /ɛl/), l (= /ɛl/)</i> | 3 |

The next word to be spelt is ‘bag’ and while Lakshmi uses the English letter name, /bi/, Tushita still sticks to the French, /be/.

This goes on until Lakshmi herself uses French letter names in spelling the word ‘ruler’, either because she has been subconsciously influenced by Tushita or because she purposefully seeks to create a shared platform of communication again, using the letter names with which Tushita is most familiar:

(21)

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Lakshmi | Ruler. | 1 |
| Lakshmi | ‘ru’, <i>ki to tende ar</i> ‘ru’? | 2 |
| | [what you (T) hear with] | |
| | <i>Ki to tende?</i> | 3 |
| | [What you (T) hear] | |
| | “‘Ru”, what do you hear in “ru”? What do you hear?” | |
| Tushita | <i>r (= /ɛ:/).</i> | 4 |
| Lakshmi | <i>o (= /o/) u (= /y/) ou soi u (= /y/)?</i> | 5 |
| | ‘O and u or only u?’ | |
| Tushita | <i>u (= /y/).</i> | 6 |

Here, Lakshmi is drawing on French phonics, and using French letter names to address English phonics. Lakshmi has been taught that in French the combination of the letters ‘o’ and ‘u’ make up the sound /u/. However, in the English word ‘ruler’, it is the letter ‘u’ that corresponds to /u/. Lakshmi again builds on the knowledge of French of her student to aid the learning of English.

Although eight months after the beginning of the academic year the Std1 children spell the word ‘standing’ using English letter names, a similar mixture of French and English letter names still occurs in the Mathematics class. When the teacher points at the letter ‘a’ on a poster listing the letters of the English alphabet and asks her

students ‘What letter is this?’, some pupils supply the French letter name and others supply the English letter name. The teacher then starts saying the English letter names and the children repeat what she says. The intertwining of French and English in pedagogy is complex, but there is a sense that initial pedagogy is in French, with a transition to English as the child progresses through primary school.

Solidarity, power and role

Imagining that they are in a classroom situation affects the way Lakshmi and Tushita speak. However, as they are young children who are playing, there are frequent overlaps between the pretended selves and the real selves which further affect their linguistic behaviour. The clearest example of this is in the sixth session, which is the longest, and which shows how “much code-switching ... can be viewed as indexing bids for changes in the salience of power or solidarity” Myers-Scotton’s (2006:151). Brown and Gilman (1966:255) define ‘power’ as the ability to control the behaviour of the other and solidarity as the result of frequency of contact and “objective similarities” between addressor and addressee.

It is Lakshmi as the teacher who makes bids to increase the feeling of solidarity between the two girls. She uses Creole not only to explain difficult concepts, but also to show her sympathy towards Tushita when she is facing difficulties both in completing the exercises on the whiteboard and in writing on the whiteboard, which she is too short to reach the top of. Lakshmi jokes with Tushita as she would with her cousin / playmate, and not as a teacher would with a student. This is an example of a switch to Creole signalling warmth and solidarity, unlike the practically motivated switches that dominate language choice in the data.

Linguistic resources are also used to gain control of the discourse in the classroom sociodrama where the role of teacher confers power. The initial rules for role play were established by Rajkomar, but it is Lakshmi who is most concerned with policing the game and with keeping Tushita on task, both as teacher and as responsible elder child.

Tushita’s own bids for power become stronger as the filming session goes on and she starts shifting in and out of role. Tushita is the eldest child at home and is used to having authority over her two siblings. This may influence her wish for more agency, because in this session Lakshmi is in a position of multiple power: she is older than Tushita; she is the teacher; and she is (implicity, at least) the self-appointed policer of the sociodrama. Tushita becomes more and more talkative and restless. She giggles and laughs virtually all the time. She gets bored while Lakshmi

has her back turned and is writing out exercises on the whiteboard. This usually happens immediately after Tushita has been subjected to completing an exercise, in which situation, she was in role as a student who needed the help of her teacher.

As the formality of the situation is greatly reduced, Tushita uses Creole to make fun of Lakshmi and to challenge Lakshmi's authority. A power struggle between the two girls emerges. There is a lot of bickering where both girls use Creole. The L code in the diglossia of Mauritius, which is also a native language of the two girls, is thus the language used "in moments of emotional engagement" (Gupta 2006:198).

The use of Creole to get the upper hand becomes even more interesting because Creole, unlike English, has T and V forms of address (Brown and Gilman 1966:254) inherited from French. Brown and Gilman establish how such pronouns have a "close association with two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of all social life – the dimensions of power and solidarity" (1966:253), that is, the use of the T and V forms of address are dependent on the relations of power and solidarity, just as the choice of a linguistic code is.

The T form is used to a single addressee, whom one considers one's equal or one's inferior, and the V form, as well as being the plural form, is used to a single addressee whom one considers one's superior, or with a stranger. Brown and Gilman (1966:273f) explain how there are norms for the choice of pronouns, dependent upon "practices within a group" which, if broken between two people, "must be caused by variations in their attitudes toward one another". In Creole the T form is 'to' and the V form is 'ou'.

The norm of address for Lakshmi and Tushita as cousins and playmates is the mutual use of the T form of address. For teachers and pupils, the norm is that the teacher uses the T form to the pupil and the pupil uses the V form to address the teacher. While there are examples in the data of the child in the role of teacher using the T form of address to her pupil, there is no example of the child in the role of pupil using the respectful V form to the child in the role of teacher, which is probably the result of frequent PRO-drop in Creole.

When the 'pupil' unexpectedly uses the T form to the 'teacher', it may be because the 'pupil' is out of role. This happens in the fifth session where Tushita, as the student, sees that Lakshmi lacks confidence and is unable to articulate her thoughts without stammering. She addresses Lakshmi with the T form:

(22)

| | | |
|---------|---------------------------------|---|
| Lakshmi | Uhm...uh... <i>Il y a...</i> | 1 |
| | [There is] | |
| Tushita | <i>Il y a... ki tonn dir ?</i> | 2 |
| | [There is what you(T)-PAST say] | |
| | ‘What did you say?’ | |

Tushita does this again in the sixth session. She seems to forget that she is supposed to be a respectful and obedient student and instead sees Lakshmi as her equal. She could also be deliberately seeking more of the power which is in Lakshmi’s hands as the teacher, because her tone is authoritative, exasperated or mocking when she uses the T form with Lakshmi.

But when the child in the role of teacher uses the V form to the child in the role of pupil, we see something even more marked. To retaliate to Tushita’s subversive behaviour, Lakshmi breaks the norm of solidarity to demonstrate a withdrawal of sympathy (Brown and Gilman 1966:274) by using another technique often used in Creole while two people who usually use the T form to address each other are having a verbal duel. This is the switch to the V form to indicate temporary estrangement and to regain control over her insubordinate and mischievous pupil Tushita:

(23)

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Tushita | <i>Koumsa lame! Baap re baap.</i> | 1 |
| | [like-this hand! INTERJECTION] | |
| | <i>Pa konn fer lame mem.</i> | 2 |
| | [NEG know do hand even] | |
| | ‘What a hand! Oh my God, you don’t even know how to draw a hand.’ | |
| | [Lakshmi has been provoked] | |
| Lakshmi | <i>Ouai, mo pa konn fer narie.</i> | 3 |
| | [yes I NEG know do anything] | |
| | ‘Yes, I don’t know how to do anything.’ | |
| Tushita | <i>Oui, to pa konn fer narie.</i> | 4 |
| | [yes you (T) NEG know do anything] | |
| | <i>Nek ekrir to kone.</i> | 5 |
| | [only writing you (T) know] | |
| | ‘Yes, you don’t know how to do anything. You only know how to write.’ | |

| | | |
|---------|--|----|
| Lakshmi | <i>E Tushita, mo pa</i> [two seconds' pause] | 6 |
| | [INTERJ. I NEG] | |
| | <i>anvi krie, hein? Ou kone la ?</i> | 7 |
| | [want shout ok? You (V) know EMP] | |
| | 'Hey Tushita, I don't want to shout, ok? | |
| | You know this?' | |
| Tushita | <i>Moi mo pe anvi bien rie mem !</i> | 8 |
| | [Me I CONT want very laugh EMP] | |
| | 'I really want to laugh!' | |
| Lakshmi | <i>Be ou kav res trankil?</i> | 9 |
| | [So you (V) can remain quiet] | |
| | 'So can you keep quiet?' | |
| Tushita | <i>Non.</i> [two seconds' pause] <i>Mo bizin get ou.</i> | 10 |
| | [No. I need look you (V)] | |
| | 'No. I have to look at you.' | |

Lakshmi's first use of 'ou' (line 7) is a reaction to Tushita's slight in which (presumably out of character) she used 'to' (line 4). In an attempt to regain control over her student, Lakshmi keeps using 'ou' to ask Tushita to stop talking (line 9) as Tushita continues to provoke her. Tushita's reaction (line 10) is disconcerting as she not only flatly refuses to comply to Lakshmi's order, but she also herself uses the V form as Lakshmi had done, apparently in an act of mock reverence. There are many other occasions in which Lakshmi manipulates the use of T and V pronouns, consistently using the V form, when being (or pretending to be) exasperated by Tushita.

Lakshmi also uses English to exercise power over Tushita, probably because she has noticed that Tushita is usually quiet, respectful and more reluctant to use English when she is in role as a student and when Lakshmi, as her teacher who has more knowledge both of the lesson and of English, is supervising her. Lakshmi thus shows awareness of the symbolic power English, the H code in Mauritius, gives her. She knows Tushita cannot keep up with her if they start a conversation in English, for Tushita lacks confidence while she speaks English. However, Lakshmi's use of English to abash Tushita does not always work in her favour as can be seen in the following exchange:

(24)

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| Lakshmi | Please talk English, not [four seconds' pause] | 1 |
|---------|--|---|

| | | |
|---------|------------------|---|
| Tushita | <i>Ayo mama.</i> | 2 |
| | [INTERJ. mother] | |
| | ‘Oh my God.’ | |
| Lakshmi | Creole. | 3 |
| Tushita | Creole? | 4 |

Tushita shows her refusal to comply in an overt (Creole) expression of exasperation at Lakshmi’s long pause in saying the English word ‘Creole’, though in fact Tushita does comply with a whiteboard exercise soon after. As soon as the exercise is completed, Tushita switches back to Creole and to her rebellious self. Asking Tushita to speak in English, which is done both in Creole and in English in the sixth session, yields no results and even Lakshmi’s threatening ‘You can shut up your mouth?’, which is uttered four times, fails to impose silence and her authority upon Tushita, who reacts in an exasperated way:

(25)

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| Lakshmi | You can shut up your mouth? | 1 |
| Tushita | <i>Ouf, komie foi li pou dir moi sa?</i> | 2 |
| | [INT how-many times she will tell me DET] | |
| | ‘Oh, how many times will she ask me that?’ | |

It is the dominant native language Creole that gives power to the girls when they are out of role and are competing for the upper hand over the sessions. This is because they have the skill to manipulate its linguistic resources effectively. On the other hand, it is English as a language that confers power to the teacher, not by what is said in it but by its societally attributed status.

Conclusion

Code-switching in a multilingual context occurs both because it is the norm and it is functional, as can be seen in Lakshmi and Tushita’s sociodramatic play and in the observed classes. As both girls take on voices which interact with their own and which give rise to creative utterances and a set of exchanges this is, overall, entertaining, as well as insightful, we see how different languages have different domains and functions in the classroom, of which both girls show knowledge. Lakshmi and Tushita exploit their knowledge of the diglossia of Mauritius, as it is manifested in the classroom domain.

Although Lakshmi and Tushita spoke barely any English when they entered primary school, and although Lakshmi’s French was limited, they come from a

home in which Creole, French, English and Bhojpuri are supported. What we see in this study are children who are succeeding, as have other family members, in attaining high-level skills in both English and French, while maintaining Creole as a principal language of socialisation. It must be remembered that many children in Mauritius do not succeed in this demanding educational context. But it is useful to see how academically successful children from socially prestigious homes can succeed in developing skills in two school languages, neither of which is their dominant native language and one of which is little used in the community.

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ⁱⁱⁱ “There exist lexical constraints as soon as we move to the essential part of the lesson, that is, the terms which pose most problems” (Our translation)

^{iv} The letter names in Creole are the same as in French.