Code-switching in Computer-Mediated Communication

The use of Swedish and English in an Internet discussion forum
Abstract

This essay investigates cases of Swedish-English code-switching in a bilingual discussion forum on the Internet. *Code-switching* is a linguistic term used to describe switches from one language to another in discourse. The material consists of excerpts from the forum which have been analyzed and presents various cases of code-switching which appeared in the forum. The examples from the forum presented in this essay are chosen due to their relevance to code-switching and bilingualism. The examples were analyzed according to Romaine’s (1989) and Klintborg’s (1999) classifications of code-switching.

The research questions sought to find out if, how and why the bilingual users in this forum code-switch when communicating. The results proved that the bilingual users do code-switch, and that the most common switch is the insertion of one word, or several words, in another language into an otherwise monolingual sentence. The discussion part also consists of a summary of the switches in the forum.

The conclusion of the study is that code-switching does exist in this forum, and the participants code-switch in different ways, however mainly to show hospitality and to signal a belonging to the group.

**Keywords:** code-switching, bilingualism, forum, computer-mediated communication, Swedish, English
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1. Introduction

The basic idea of computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) is nothing new. Ever since the Internet started to develop in the 1960s it has functioned as a global medium, inheriting features from other communication methods such as the telephone and the television (Crystal, 2006:3). The more space the Internet takes up in our everyday lives, the more it affects our language use. Languages change and develop over time, as everything else.

The idea of inventive language as a negative development is a controversial area of discussion. Erickson ponders this in his article Cyberspeak: the Death of Diversity (Erickson 2001). Erickson is afraid that minor languages will diminish or even disappear with the increasing use of computers and the Internet, where the dominant language is English (Babel 1997). Contrary to Erickson’s fear that English will make other languages disappear, studies indicate that English may soon have competition as a ‘world language’. A recent study published on the BBC News website states that Chinese, Arabic and Spanish are, or are soon going to be, international languages with a worldwide power equal to that of English. Native speakers of English who do not have knowledge of any other language may have problems in the future, since the world is becoming multilingual, the study concludes (Coughlan 2004). Therefore it is important to follow the development of CMC and find out if there is a preference for English when there are other languages to choose from. This issue will be investigated in this essay in terms of code-switching between Swedish and English in a discussion forum online (see Sections 1.1 and 2).

The area of study concerns people who have two languages to choose from, i.e. bilinguals. Romaine follows Mackey’s definition (1968:555 in Romaine 1989:11) that bilingualism is “the alternate use of two or more languages” (ibid). The concept of bilingualism will be further elaborated in Section 2.1. In Section 1.1 below, the aim and research questions of this study are presented.

1.1. Aim and research questions

This essay highlights the ongoing process of language change due to online communication in one particular forum thread where bilingual persons are active. The hypothesis is that English is preferable in online communication due to reasons of convenience; English is a means of reaching out to more people. The comparison will deal with Swedish and English since the
participants chosen in this thread master these two languages to varying degrees. The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. Do Swedish speakers tend to use English extensively when communicating online, and if that is the case, why?
2. How do bilingual users switch between Swedish and English when communicating online?
3. What kind of switches are the most common in this forum?

Below, a discussion on perhaps unfamiliar terms is presented in Section 2.1. Previous studies on CMC, bilingualism and code-switching will be presented in Section 2.2.

2. Theoretical background

The area of CMC has been a topic of interest for many linguists ever since the Internet first came to be a part of our lives. The Internet has come to affect language to a greater extent than anyone could imagine. Today there are a great number of books and studies on the topic, such as the ones consulted in preparing this study, Crystal (2006), Hård af Segerstad (2004) and Maricic (2005). Section 2.2 will provide background information on CMC, code-switching and bilingualism. Before introducing the previous research that has been used in this essay, unfamiliar terminology will be explained in Section 2.1 below.

2.1 Terminology
The concept of bilingualism needs to be looked upon from different angles of incidence. According to Romaine (1989:10), the speaker’s degree of bilingualism depends on how proficient the speaker is in the second language. Moreover, different scholars have different opinions on when a person becomes a bilingual. For example, Romaine discusses Bloomfield’s (1933) view that a bilingual has “native-like control of two languages” (1933:56 in Romaine 1989:10). Diebold (1964) gives the definition of bilingualism as being able to understand utterances in a second language without having a productive control, so called incipient bilingualism (1964 in Romaine 1989:10). In conclusion, the consensus among most linguists is that a bilingual person is able to communicate more or less fluently in two or more languages (Romaine 1989:11).
Code-switching, one of the notions used in this study, is defined by Klintborg as “[…] the inclusion of an element from one language into another language without any adaptation of that element to the other language” (1999:36). This term, or switch, is also adopted to describe the same phenomena in the present study. Moreover, Klintborg makes a distinction between the terms code-switching and transfer. Historically, transfer meant structural borrowing from one language into another (Klintborg 1999:34, Romaine 1989:51). Klintborg concludes that most of his research indicates that the term transfer (or interference) is primarily used to describe influences from the first to the second language (1999:34). In sum, it is not easy to distinguish the two terms from each other since different linguists have chosen to define them differently. In this study, the term code-switching will be used for all switches between the two languages English and Swedish.

Romaine (1989) discusses different types of code-switching and distinguishes between tag-switching, intrasentential and intersentential switches. These notions will be used to analyze the results, hence they need to be explained in this section. Tag-switching is the least serious form of code-switching. It is an insertion of a word or a short phrase from another language into an otherwise monolingual sentence, e.g. you know, I mean etc. (Romaine 1989:112). An intersentential switch is a clause or sentence in another language than the rest of the discourse. The following example of an intersentential switch is from the Motheringdotcommune forum, where the addresser expressed a feeling followed by the switch:

(1) *Ooh, stockholm är så nära* [Stockholm is so close]. *Yeah, I am tired of BVC-norm, everything they tell others tends to make me mad.*

After the sentence in Swedish, the rest of the posting was written in English, except for the acronym, which stands for Barnavårdscentralen (Baby Clinic). The habit of not translating familiar words or expressions (such as BVC in this case) is common in the MDC forum, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 4. This switch requires greater proficiency in both languages than tag-switching do. The most serious switch is called intrasentential and involves a greater syntactic risk than the former two. An intrasentential switch occurs within a clause or a sentence, or even within a word. An example from Romaine in Tok Pisin/English is illustrated as follows: *What’s so funny? Come, be good. Otherwise, yu bai go long kot.* – ‘What’s so funny? Come, be good. Otherwise, you’ll go to court.’ (Romaine 1989:113). The examples presented in Section 4 will be discussed in terms of these types of switches.
2.2 Previous research

An important distinction is that between *synchronous* and *asynchronous* CMC. *Asynchronous* communication online means that the sender and the receiver of a message do not need to be online at the same time, neither do they need to respond immediately to a received message (Hård af Segerstad 2002:4). Hård af Segerstad (2004) concludes that this makes *asynchronous* CMC more similar to traditional writing than speech. Examples of *asynchronous* CMC are email and SMS (Short Message Service, sending text messages with a cellular phone) (ibid). Included in this term is also the present area of study, forum discussions, which are similar to email group conversations. The opposite term, *synchronous* CMC, refers to an interactive mode of communicating where participants have to be online at the same time and active in producing a discussion. Hård af Segerstad concludes that *synchronous* CMC shares features with spoken language (2002:4).

Crystal (2006) deals with the phenomenon of online communication in his book *Language and the Internet*, where he categorizes this form of communication depending on where it is used. Crystal’s (2006) classification includes the language of e-mail, chatgroups, virtual worlds and the Web. The relevant part for this study is the chapter on chatgroup language, where he makes a distinction between asynchronous and synchronous chatgroups (Crystal 2006:135ff). A discussion forum on the Internet, such as the one chosen for this study, falls into the branch of asynchronous chatgroups. Crystal (2006:135ff) introduces the chapter with some facts on how the number and sizes of chatgroups increases at a remarkable speed, to illustrate their popularity. Basically, what this chapter tells us is that the phenomenon of chatgroups, discussion forums and the like, is too much for us to appreciate as a unit. Everything one can imagine as being discussed in real life all over the world, between all sorts of people, is simultaneously being discussed in different places on the Internet.

Compiling a comparative study in code-switching between English and Swedish would seem incomplete without taking into account the work of Klintborg (1999). He studied the language of Swedish emigrants in the United States by using tape recordings from the Emigrant Institute in Växjö, Sweden. These recordings were originally used to map the history of the Swedish emigration phenomenon; however they proved to be a useful resource to Klintborg’s investigation (Klintborg 1999:4ff). In stating his aims, Klintborg explains the restrictions of his study; “Previous work by others as well as my own interest and experience dictated that phonology be excluded from this study. This still leaves us with the core of language, that is to say lexicon and grammar […]”(1999:7). Since studying tape recordings is quite different from observing entries on a discussion forum on the Internet, it is interesting
that Klintborg chooses to focus on lexicon and grammar, the two features available in an Internet forum. However, this study will focus mainly on the lexicon and to some extent grammar.

The use of articles (which proved to be frequently mixed up in an interesting way in the chosen forum) will be analyzed in this study. This area of code-switching or borrowing is also acknowledged by Klintborg: “Generally speaking, the use of the indefinite article is a very fuzzy area, revealing great uncertainty in many speakers” (1999:57). Klintborg states that the Swedish indefinite article *en* is attached to English nouns in many cases, whereas using the English article *the* with Swedish nouns, is not as widespread (1999:58). This claim is supported by Klintborg’s examples *en* [an] architect, *en* [an] attorney and *en* [a] colored (1999:57-58) and examples from this investigation such as:

(2) *Jag är en amerikan som har bott här i ca. 12 år* [I am an American who has lived here for c. 12 years].

In English, the indefinite article *a/an* is used when classifying a person’s nationality, profession etc. This is not the case in Swedish (Ljung & Olander 1992:40), therefore the sentence structure above indicates a switch. The next section will describe the material used in this study and how it was analyzed.

3. Material and method

The primary source of the study is a discussion forum on the Internet called *Motheringdotcommune* (henceforth MDC). The title is a play upon words; the forum is based on a magazine called *Mothering*, the Internet address ends with “dot com” and it is a community. The main topic of the forum is alternative methods of bringing up children, hence the subtitle *The Natural Family Living Community*. The forum consists of six topical areas. Each area contains sub-groups which in their turn contain threads, i.e. a discussion with two or more participants. In total, the six groups contain over 41,000 threads and over 722,000 postings (MDC 2007) (figures estimated in April 2007). In the present study, only one thread from one of the sub-groups was chosen. This specific thread consisted of 124 postings at the time of the study. The reason why this thread was chosen is that it contains examples of bilingualism and code-switching in practice that proved to be useful for the investigation.
Actually, the current study started with the observation of this thread and has developed from it. This thread is the primary source used; additional material such as books, reports and articles have been used as secondary sources to support the findings. The forum is special in that it only consists of female users, which is interesting from a sociolinguistic point of view. Thus, comparisons between genders will not be possible.

Before introducing the method of this investigation a note must be made on the ethical issues one must consider when carrying out a study of this type. This study follows the same guidelines that were applied in Maricic (2005:71f). These guidelines state that informed consent from the participants is not necessary if:

- the material is collected from a public forum with no password or membership requirements
- the thread does not handle a sensitive topic that might harm the participants if disclosed
- the participants themselves do not represent a group of people in a vulnerable position.

Moreover, anything in the findings that can identify the participants should be edited out (ibid). Taking these guidelines into consideration, the names of the participants have been replaced with letters. Moreover, any cases where a participant’s identity is exposed in some way, have been removed from the examples.

In Section 3.1 below, additional information on the thread in focus follows. Section 3.2 presents the participants who are included in this study and the reasons why they were chosen.

3.1. The thread
The thread in focus has been active since August 2003. The extracts are taken from the initiation of the thread until February 2007 when, at the time of this study, the discussion in the thread seems to have ceased. Contributions from the entire time period will be presented and used in the investigation. As seen in Table 1 below, the chosen participants have contributed to the thread with a total of 74 postings, or 59.6 %. The thread was initiated by an American woman expressing interest in finding peers in Sweden where she lived at the time. Her request for contact came to be replied to in many ways, by parents, particularly mothers, with some kind of connection to Sweden. The background is important to know in order to analyze the results, which are based on the participants’ interaction with each other in two languages, Swedish and English.
3.2. The participants

The choice of participants is motivated by their activity in the forum and their creativity when using the language. In many cases they mix English and Swedish vocabulary in the same posting or post a complete message in one language and then switch to the other language when addressing someone else. Some participants were more active on the thread than others. The reason for choosing some of them despite their low number of postings is that their language use proved to be interesting and relevant for this study, for example they used a large number of switches or a particularly interesting switch (see Section 4). Seven of the contributors to the thread were found to be the most appropriate candidates for analysis. These will be presented in Table 1, arranged in order from the one who contributed the most to the one who wrote the least number of postings. One exception needs to be mentioned here, the participant in example (9), called X, is not included in the table due to the limited information available on her background and nationality. Moreover, all the participants presented in the table are female.

Table 1. A selection of participants of the *Motheringdotcommune* forum thread

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>No of postings</th>
<th>Percent of total no of postings</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21 %</td>
<td>Has been living in Sweden for twelve years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>Lived in the US for five years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4 %</td>
<td>Has been living in Sweden for four years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6 %</td>
<td>Lived in Sweden for three years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8 %</td>
<td>Lived in Sweden for three years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8 %</td>
<td>Lives in Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>59.7 %</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in Table 1 above, there is a fairly even distribution of nationalities among the participants in this study, three participants are from the USA, one is from Canada and three are from Sweden. This selection was deliberately made to make the results representative for both native speakers of English and of Swedish. In the next section, 3.3, follows a discussion on positive and negative aspects of this kind of material.

3.3. Advantages and disadvantages of material and method
The choice of material was based on the fact that almost all the active participants were bilingual, and communicated in both English and Swedish. Their discussions proved to be a useful resource when studying code-switching. From the beginning, the intention was to find another forum with a similar kind of bilingual communication for comparison. However, as the work went on, this one forum provided sufficient material for a study. A discussion forum on the Internet is a useful resource for a linguistic study, in that the material is easily accessible and is often saved on the website so that one can return and collect more data if needed. Moreover, the material is convenient because of the fact that the participants are not aware that they are being observed (Maricic 2005:68) and that makes the conversations more natural.

The disadvantage of this type of data may be that the forum provided little information about the users. If this was to be a complete qualitative study, more information about the participants would be needed. On the other hand, that would require informed consent from the participants, which was not needed in this case (see Section 3). Another disadvantage that is also mentioned in Maricic (2005:68) is the need to process and edit the discourse before presenting it in a study. Participants often quote each other and send multiple messages for various reasons, and this is preferably not included in the analysis for practical reasons.

4. Results

The second research question, formulated in Section 1.1, is how bilingual users switch between Swedish and English when communicating online. The chosen thread provides numerous examples of this phenomenon. Excerpts from the thread, with a short analysis after each example, will be presented below. The letter before the example indicates which participant created the posting (see Table 1 for the participants). The instances of code-switching in the postings are underlined for the sake of clarity. When a string of Swedish words appears, an English translation is provided within square brackets immediately after the excerpt, except
when the specific word, or string of words, has been translated within the following analysis. Words that have been translated once will not be translated again, as *Hej* in example (3) which is a common greeting in many of the postings. An analysis of all the examples and some concluding remarks will be provided in Section 4.1 and 4.2.

(3) B: *Hej! Tar lite på svenska för skojs skull.* [Hi! I write some in Swedish just for fun.]

I thought it's be [sic] easier living in Sweden as an alternative parent, but I was mistaken.

Example (3) illustrates an intersentential switch (Romaine 1989:113), a sentence in another language than the rest of the discourse. B’s Swedish is fluent, which is easily explainable by the fact that she is a native speaker of Swedish, and has lived in the US for only five years. She begins her posting with a greeting in Swedish and an explanation for her switch (*för skojs skull*, just for fun). The greeting may either be in Swedish because that is her native language, or it could be meant to signal hospitality toward the Swedish-speaking addressees (Holmes 2001:35). It could also be her wish to belong to the group.

The explanation (*för skojs skull*) is similar to what Klintborg (1999:143) calls a *flag*, that is, announcing one’s switch to the other language. A grammar or spelling error (*it’s be*) may indicate an uncertainty in using English, but could as well be a casual mistake. The next example (4) illustrates a more serious type of switch.

(4) A: *Det är väldigt svårt att hitta en riktig "community" tycker jag, en grupp med flera som tycker och tänker ungefär likadant* [It is very hard to find a real “community” I think, a group with people that has similar opinions and thinks in the same way] oj [oh], *now I am rambling! Interesting to meet you.*

In example (4), the most serious type of code-switch is shown, namely the manner of inserting an English word in the middle of a Swedish sentence, which indicates an intrasentential switch (Romaine 1989:113). A mixes English and Swedish extensively, and tends to switch language when she does not find an appropriate expression in Swedish, such as when she uses *community* in this example. A announces her switch with quotation marks, and they function in the same way as a flag, i.e. an excuse for one’s switch (Klintborg 1999:143). She finishes her posting with a switch back to her native language, English; even though she has lived in Sweden for 12 years this shows that she prefers to use her mother tongue when communicating emotional expressions, as with her ending: *oj, now I am rambling! Interesting to meet you.*
first word in the last sentence, *oj*, can be labelled a tag-switch, in terms of Romaine’s (1989) explanation stated in Section 2.1. The next example (5) comes from an American participant whose Swedish is not very proficient, an assumption that will be further elaborated below the example.

(5) D: So nice to read a little Swedish... *Hej alla! Jag måste hämta min svensk ordbok!*
   *Faktisk jag kan förstå nästan allt, men föråt om min dålig stavning* [Hi everybody! I have to get my Swedish dictionary! Actually I can understand almost everything, but sorry for my poor spelling].

After the Swedish sentences (20 words in total) shown in this example, D carries out the rest of her posting in English (155 words in total). Example (5) only exhibits the excerpt where she switches from English to Swedish, because that is the relevant part. Before the greeting, D expresses her joy in English to read Swedish, which is a bit strange. However, it reflects a personal thought and that may be the reason that it is in her native tongue. The switches in this example are intersentential, complete sentences in another language than the rest of the message.

D is not fluent in Swedish due to the fact that she lived only three years in Sweden, which is clearly shown by this posting. D misses the definite suffix –*a* in the adjective *svensk* [Swedish] and the plural suffix –*a* in the adjective *dålig* [poor]. Also, she uses the English word order as seen in *faktisk jag kan förstå nästan allt* [Actually I can understand almost everything]. In her remaining six postings she uses English except for a few Swedish place names and one more code-switch.

In the next example (6), A expresses her excitement for another participant’s new-born baby. This is followed by a discussion of their children and bilingualism.

(6) A: Another little one?? Do tell. *Grattis!* [Congratulations] How exciting. […] but unlike your dh, mine has never really lived in the States except for the three months directly after we got married when I was finishing grad school.

Example (6) is interesting because A’s native language is English, and she addresses D, another native speaker of English. Even so, she uses the Swedish congratulation *grattis* when expressing her joy for D’s new-born baby. The same strategy was applied in (4), where she
chose code-switching to express a feeling (*oj*). This way of inserting small words, tags, can be explained by Romaine’s (1989) term tag-switching.

The acronym *dhs* is used here, in plural which is a bit confusing since it means *darling husband*. This is a sign of creativity but can also be labelled as incorrect given the explanation of the acronym, since she probably referred to her children. However, the rules of spelling and grammar is something that the participants in this forum take lightly upon. The next example is from B’s posting when she discusses Montessori education.

(7) B: Något jag har undrat lite över med Montessori är att grundaren skulle ha sagt att man ska "discourage" (min svenska lider lite av att jag mest pratar engelska även här i Sverige) barnets lek. Att tex the pink tower endast får användas till det syfte det var avsett för.

[Something I have been wondering about Montessori is that the founder supposedly said that you should ”discourage” (my Swedish is suffering from the fact that I mostly speak English even here in Sweden) the child’s play. That for example the pink tower is only to be used for its original purpose.]

In (7), a native speaker of Swedish switches to English in the middle of a sentence (*discourage*). This switch is of the intrasentential type. Then follows a complete sentence within a parenthesis in Swedish, which is an intersentential switch. She emphasizes, flags, the first switch by inserting quotation marks. Moreover, she adds an apology in parentheses after the word. Both these markers indicate flagging. In the second sentence B uses English again (*the pink tower*), this time without any quotation marks or excuse. This makes the switch intrasentential, like the first one.

The next example is taken from a discussion on homeschooling. The switch here is of a typical kind in this forum, which one will be discussed after the example.

(8) A: There is a hemskola [homeschool] site by a man who has homeschooled his children, but as I understood it you can only be granted permission in certain circumstances […]

(8) is an example of the opposite of (7), i.e. a native speaker of English inserts a Swedish word in the middle of an English sentence. However, the switch is still intrasentential. A chooses to use the Swedish term *hemskola* instead of *homeschooling*, probably because she has been
living in Sweden for twelve years and hemskola is a well-known and familiar term for her. The habit of not translating familiar terms is a phenomenon that is commonly seen in this forum. The cause of this is probably that these are words which occur often in her and her family’s everyday speech. The example below is another one about Montessori and schooling, and involves two sorts of switches.

(9) A: I am no expert on Montessori (fast jag har precis blivit invald som ledamot i Montessoriföreningens styrelse här i X, så kanske jag kan mer snart!) [although I was recently appointed a seat in the Montessori association board here in X, so maybe I will know more soon] but there are a lot of good sites in Sweden about the pedagogies and the local schools. Our school also has a "friluftsprofil" [outdoor-profile] and they have a lot of friluftscenter [out-door days] with play in the woods, skiing, ice-skating, etc.

In (9), A inserts two Swedish clauses within a parenthesis in the middle of a sentence in English. This switch is intersentential. The switch might be due to the fact that the described event in the parenthesis is directly related to her life in Sweden, hence the message is conveyed in Swedish. The first sentence, except for the parenthesis, deals with pedagogies in general, hence she uses her native tongue. The same phenomenon of switching to Swedish when discussing something that is closely related to her occurs again in the second sentence, where she emphasizes, flags, the first switch friluftsprofil with quotation marks. These switches are intrasentential e.g. they appear within the clauses.

In (10), participant X provides an interesting example of an intrasentential switch. Similar to the main topic of the MDC, the discussion is about motherhood.

(10) X: im on mammaledig right now, but will go back to work soon :( thats the downside of a 50/50 society, i have to share the parental leave.

Sender X is not a participant in the current investigation due to the fact that this was her only posting and no information on her bilingual proficiency could be detected. Even so, this posting was included due to one specific word. The phrase on mammaledig [on mother’s leave] is interesting, because of the use of the English preposition on before the switch to the Swedish noun mammaledig. Moreover, it is followed by a switch to Swedish instead of using on mother’s leave as she probably intended when starting the sentence.
Two postings from the same participant are presented in (11) and (12) below. E makes an effort to write in Swedish in example (12).

(11) E: HEJ! This is my first post on Mothering, but I was interested in the thread about Sweden.

The greeting in (11) is in Swedish, as in five other postings in this study. The reason for that is probably to signal a common ground and sisterhood. The Swedish greeting shows hospitality toward the other participants, moreover participant E probably wants to feel that she belongs to the group by using Swedish. She also uses capital letters to emphasize the word.


[Hi again. We have a 20-month-old child, and she will be bilingual. She does not talk much now, but it is mainly Swedish even now after the move to Canada. We were a little afraid that she would lose her Swedish when we moved, but we found a Swedish school in our town where she can start at the age of 3 years.]

In (12), we see that the same participant E seems rather insecure when using Swedish; if a native Swede were to write a message like this it would not look as rigid. The sentences are very correctly structured and she uses the conjunctions och [and] and men [but] in the right places. Still, it is exactly this great effort she makes to get her spelling and grammar right that results in the inflexible style. Despite her carefulness, E tends to misuse some suffixes such as those in flyttan [the move] and skulla [would] which seem consistent for all Americans and Canadians in this particular study. The reason for the problem with word endings is that in Swedish, the definite form of a noun is a suffix, rather than an article before the word, as in English. In some cases, Swedes use an article to signal the definite form as well (Ljung & Ohlander 1992:37).

E is one of the few participants who never use Swedish except when she “has to” i.e. when she wants to claim her belonging to the group. In the other postings analyzed the participants tend to switch back and forth for various reasons.
The next example is an excerpt from G’s only contribution to the MDC thread. The rest of her posting (395 words in total) was written entirely in English, therefore this switch is interesting.

(13) G: Hej, [...] i speak swedish fluently but my swedish writing is disgusting (just like my english) [...] Min pappa och Farmor och Farfar still live in Sweden so I visit them about every two years.

As in five other postings, the greeting is in Swedish while the rest of the message is in English, except for the part where she mentions her relatives in Sweden. G refers to her Swedish relatives using the Swedish nouns pappa [dad], farmor [grandmother] and farfar [grandfather]. The reason for this is probably that these words signal familiarity to her; the same phenomenon is seen in a number of other examples, such as (8), (9) and (10).

G also uses Swedish conjunctions, och [and] and a pronoun, min [my]. To switch to English conjunctions right in the middle of a bundle of Swedish nouns would seem rather incoherent, so it is understandable that she stays with Swedish at least between the nouns pappa, farmor and farfar. The switch is of the intrasentential type, because there is a Swedish clause within an English sentence. The next example is a response from F to another participant, discussing intolerance concerning extended breastfeeding (the acronym bf means breastfeeding).

(14) F: hej igen! Yes, I know... I am a hjälpmamma in Amningshjälpen [mother support in the Swedish Nursing Mothers’ Support Group] so I get lots of phonecalls from desperate moms who have been told they must stop bf or they [sic] baby will NEVER start eating solids :angry

Even though F is Swedish, she also seems as secure when using English as when using Swedish. In (14), we see the intrasentential code-switch, typical for this forum, which involves using the native language Swedish when there is no fitting word in English. A practises the same strategy in example (4) when she cannot find the appropriate word in Swedish for community. Moreover, the same phenomenon is seen in example (7), where B uses discourage instead of the Swedish equivalent nedslå (Prismas 1993). F does not accentuate the switch with quotation marks or excuses, and that manner is the most common in this study. The switch is
flagged in some manner in only four cases, whereas it is not flagged in 13 cases. The next example is of a similar nature as the one discussed above.

(15) C: hi all, i am american, moved to sweden in winter '03 with my swedish sambo maybe one of you can help me- how do you find out if your landsting will pay for a midwife for a homebirth?

C is not very particular about spelling (small I’s etc.). She prefers the Swedish word *sambo* [common law husband], which may best describe her current situation (the *sambo* is neither called a boyfriend nor husband). Another typical area of code-switching in this forum is the use of Swedish words within the field of political and social domains, for example *landsting* and *kommun*. There are words for these in English (*county council* and *municipality*, Norstedts 1993); however the participants in this forum seem to prefer the Swedish words. This is understandable due to the fact that they discuss the Swedish system and they are probably used to the words from contacts with authorities etc. The last example in this study, presented below, is also from C.

(16) C: hej i am trying to engineer a trip back to the US next year for me and the sambo and the baby; he’ll be pappaledig […]

Again this participant chooses the Swedish words *sambo* and *pappaledig*, not *common law husband* or *father’s leave*. As in the previous examples, this is explained by the fact that *pappaledighet* is a common and widely debated issue in Sweden, therefore the word probably sounds more familiar to C than the English equivalent. In her other postings overall in the forum, C is very consistent in her use of English without many other switches (of a total of 1392 words, five were Swedish).

As for greetings, C stays with the English greeting *hi* throughout 50% of her postings in this study. Although when C starts a dialogue with B, they greet each other with *hi*. Then B switches to *hej* and in the following posting C also chooses to use *hej* instead, probably influenced by B’s usage of the Swedish greeting.

The number of switches and the total number of words presented in these examples are summarized in Table 2. The number of occurrences indicates how many times the switch occurred, not how many words the switch included; for example, the line in example (13), *Min pappa och Farmor och Farfar*, is counted as one switch.
Table 2. Number of switches in the MDC forum thread

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of switch</th>
<th>Number of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tag-switch / greeting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersentential</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrasentential</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of switches</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Swedish words</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of English words</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following section, the instances of code-switching in examples (3) - (16) will be discussed and analyzed in more detail.

4.1. Discussion

Some characteristics are visible in many of the examples presented above and these will be listed and discussed in the following subsections. Section 4.2 brings up the one most important issue in this study, namely code-switching.

4.1.1. Greetings

All the participants in the MDC use greetings from their second language at some point. It is in the greetings that the code-switching becomes most visible. Out of a total of eight greetings in this study, seven were in Swedish (hej) and one in English (hi). Of the Swedish greetings, four were written by native speakers of English. A reason for the preference for Swedish greetings may be that the participants want to signal their belonging to the group, a kind of a test for being included in the thread. This phenomenon is discussed by Holmes (2001:35), who states that short tags like these are used primarily for social reasons.

4.1.2 Flagging

Another strategy used in these examples is to accentuate or make excuses for one’s switch from one language to another, the phenomenon which Klintborg calls flagging (1999:143).
Klintborg’s examples are based on spoken language, where the flag is more naturally inserted into the dialogue. In this forum, the users do not take the time to ask each other about the correct word. However, the phenomenon of flagging only occurs in four of the examples, namely (2), (3), (6) and (8). In the other 13 cases the participants chose not to emphasize their switch. They may not be aware of the switch at all, or they just accept these switches, both from themselves and from others.

4.2. Code-switching

The most visible phenomenon in all the examples is code-switching, including one element of a language into another language (Klintborg 1999:36). In all the postings exhibited in this study, either tag-switching, intrasentential or intersentential switches were present. One specific phenomenon, that of well-known words in one language which are not translated into the other language, for example Swedish nouns like *sambo* [common law husband/wife] and *landsting* [county council] (Prismas 1993), were highly present in the study. As many as eight of the 15 examples contain this type of words that are familiar in a Swedish context.

The investigation sought to find out if, how and why participants in a bilingual discussion forum code-switch, and these examples provided proof that code-switching not only exists, but is also very common in bilingual forums. See Section 5.1 for an elaborated discussion on this conclusion.

5. Conclusion

This section starts with a short review of the main topic of the essay and discusses the hypothesis stated in Section 1.1. Moreover, the section compares the research questions to the findings from the investigation. Finally, Section 5.1 gives suggestions for further research on CMC and bilingualism.

This essay has investigated code-switching between Swedish and English in a bilingual forum on the Internet. The hypothesis, stated in Section 1.1, that English is preferable in online communication even for native speakers of Swedish was proved to be correct. As seen in Table 2, the majority of the context in the forum thread was written in English.

The first research question was whether Swedish speakers tend to use English extensively when communicating online, and if so, why? Based on the results, the answer to this question is that users whose mother tongue is Swedish do use English when communicating online. The
reason for their usage varies; they may have spent a long time in an English-speaking country like G and are comfortable with using English. Another reason may be that the Swedish participants are aware of the fact that the official language of the MDC is English and they feel that it is more appropriate to use English. The native speakers of English in this forum use Swedish either because they have lived in Sweden for a long period of time, like participant A, or to signal a belonging, for example by using Swedish greetings.

The second research question was formulated as follows: how do bilingual users switch between Swedish and English when communicating online? The results presented in Section 4 provide extended examples of how bilingual users code-switch in CMC. However, only conclusions from this specific forum can be drawn. The bilingual users in this thread switch between Swedish and English by inserting short phrases from the other language into an otherwise monolingual posting. The main point is that the users tend to switch to signal their belonging to the group, and this phenomenon was most visible when they were greeting each other. As stated in Section 4.2, code-switching proved to be the most common phenomenon in the studied examples.

The third research question was: what kind of switches are the most common in this forum? As stated above, the results show that the most common switch is of the intrasentential type, when the switch occurs within a sentence or a clause. The reason for this switch being the most common is probably that most participants in the forum are fairly fluent in both English and Swedish, and therefore the switches become a natural part of their conversation. As Romaine (1989:113) states, intrasentential switches should be avoided by everyone except the most fluent bilinguals.

5.1 Further research topics
Investigating CMC from various points of view is a topic that is not exhausted in any way, rather the opposite. The area of CMC is growing with the development of the Internet and its functions in our lives. According to Crystal (2006:259) the future of CMC will connect means of communication together even more, such as vision and sound. That connection is probably going to affect CMC in that the users can see each other when interacting. It would be interesting to compile a study similar to this one, yet in a more interactive channel such as interactive messaging with video connection. The fact that the users can see each other will probably change the behaviour of the users and make it more similar to real life conversation.

Concerning bilingualism in CMC, there are probably many sources on the Internet to investigate code-switching in more detailed ways. If there is a forum with a more ‘conflict-
oriented’ topic and more active discussions, it would be interesting to know if, and why, the participants code-switch in that case, and to take the aspects of social patterns into more consideration.
References

Primary sources

Motheringdotcommune Anyone from Sweden?:

Secondary sources


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