ABSTRACT

JUAN DAVID GUTIERREZ HINCAPIE. Code-switching and the Optimal Grammar of Six Spanish Lessons. (Under the direction of Professor Agnes Bolonyai.)

This research paper focuses on the socio-pragmatic functions of code-switching in six beginning Spanish lessons at the postsecondary level. Based on the Optimality Theory framework proposed by Bhatt & Bolonyai (2011), I argue that there is a sociolinguistic grammar which is represented by a set of principles, their interaction and community-specific hierarchy, which account for patterns of bilingual code-switching. This research provides linguistic evidence to explain the bases of code-switching in the light of the sociolinguistic grammar composed of five general principles (Interpretive Faithfulness, Symbolic Dominance, Social Concurrence, Face Management and Perspective Taking) to describe how and under what circumstances code-switching takes place in the process of meaning construction in these Spanish language lessons. This study provides insight into code-switching in six beginning foreign language lessons by identifying the instances of code-switching that are governed by the five general principles and by demonstrating how they facilitate interaction in the foreign language classroom. The research questions of this study are: (1) how do native English-speaking students use code-switching at an American university in the Spanish foreign language classroom? (2) What are the pedagogical functions of code-switching in these lessons? And (3) What is the social grammar of code-switching based on the Optimality Theory framework? The findings suggest that the instructors’ and students’ switches serve mostly to clarify, reformulate, elaborate, and reiterate which are some of the subcategories of the Perspective Taking constraint within the framework presented on Bhatt & Bolonyai (2011).