

EMOTION AND CODESWITCHING IN SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUALS

Erika Baines Garcia
BA English Language, 2026

Abstract: Codeswitching has often been conceptualised as a rational and socially strategic practice. However, less attention has been given to the role of emotion in shaping bilinguals' language behaviour. This dissertation aims to investigate how emotion influences codeswitching amongst Spanish-English bilingual speakers, with reference to the assumptions of Myers Scotton's (1993a;1993b) "MARKEDNESS MODEL" of codeswitching. Adopting a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine Spanish-English bilingual participants. The data from the interviews was analysed using a thematic analysis, where three major themes were identified: EMOTIONAL ASYMMETRY ACROSS LANGUAGES, RATIONAL AND NORM-BASED LANGUAGE CHOICE, and DISRUPTION OF RATIONAL LANGUAGE CHOICE. Overall, it was found that participants do at times align to social norms, interactional expectations, and communicative goals, therefore supporting the MARKEDNESS MODEL'S conceptualisation of codeswitching being a strategic practice. However, participants also described their languages as feeling emotionally unequal, with specific emotions, experiences, and expressions feeling more accessible in one language than the other. Also, instances of automatic and emotionally triggered switching were reported by participants, often occurring with little awareness or being outside of conscious control. It is therefore argued that codeswitching cannot be fully accounted for through rational, goal-oriented models. The findings highlight how the interaction between social, emotional, and automatic processes shape codeswitching behaviour. The present study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of codeswitching, urging future models to account for both the deliberate and less consciously monitored aspects of codeswitching.

Keywords: codeswitching, emotion, the Markedness Model, Spanish-English bilingualism, thematic analysis

Supervisor(s): Dr Emma Nguyen and Dr Rebecca Woods

1. Introduction

Codeswitching, broadly understood as the use of two or more languages, or varieties within an interaction, has been widely studied across linguistics and sociolinguistics (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Amongst the theoretical models accounting for this phenomenon, the MARKEDNESS MODEL (MM) proposed by Myers-Scotton (1993a;1993b), has been particularly influential. The MM conceptualises codeswitching as a norm-sensitive and goal-oriented practice, in which speakers select linguistic codes based on their evaluation of social norms and anticipated consequences of each choice.

However, research on bilingualism and emotion indicates that languages are often experienced as emotionally unequal, and emotional states can influence how speakers access and utilise their linguistic resources (Pavlenko, 2006; Daewe, 2010; Costa et al., 2014). Experimental studies on emotion and decision-making further support this view, demonstrating how emotion can shape, and at times, disrupt deliberative reasoning (Li et al., 2013; Koporic et al., 2020). These findings suggest that codeswitching may not be always experienced as a completely deliberate or strategic process. Despite this, the role of emotion remains underexplored within existing models of codeswitching. Whilst the MM offers a detailed account of how speakers navigate the social norms and expectations governing codeswitching behaviour; it does not address how emotional factors may influence or even interfere with these processes.

Following on from this, this dissertation investigates how Spanish-English bilinguals describe their experiences of codeswitching, with a particular focus on the role of emotion in shaping when and why they switch. This dissertation does not examine the structural features of codeswitching itself but instead focuses on speakers' subjective accounts of their codeswitching behaviours. The aim is therefore to explore how individuals interpret their own linguistic behaviour, and whether these interpretations align with or diverge from the rational and norm-oriented assumptions of the MM.

The two main research questions guiding the study are:

1. How do Spanish-English bilingual speakers describe the influence of emotion on their codeswitching behaviour?
2. To what extent do participants' accounts of their codeswitching behaviour align with, or challenge the assumptions of Myers-Scotton's (1993a;1993b) MARKEDNESS MODEL of codeswitching?

Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study, no formal hypotheses are proposed. However, the present study is guided by the expectation that participants may describe instances of codeswitching as being not completely deliberate and also shaped by emotional factors.

This dissertation is organised as follows: Section 2 will explore the literature on codeswitching, the MARKEDNESS MODEL, and emotion and decision-making. Section 3 outlines the methodology used to collect and analyse the data. The findings of the thematic analysis are then presented in Section 4, followed by Section 5 which discusses the findings in relation to the MM and the existing literature reviewed in Section 2, as well as the directions for future work. Lastly, the paper is concluded in Section 6.

2 Background

2.1 Codeswitching and Theoretical Approaches

Codeswitching has been examined from a range of theoretical perspectives, with models addressing both its structural properties, and its role in social interaction. It refers to the use of multiple languages, or varieties, within a single interaction, and occurs either within a sentence (intrasententially) or between sentences (intersententially) (Gardner- Chloros, 2009; Macswan & Faltis, 2020).

For example:

(1) y@s el@s account number ?
 cconj|y det|el-Masc-Def-Art noun|account noun|number ?
 and the account number ?

(line 2367, Herring 13; Deuchar et al., 2012)

In (1), the speaker switches from Spanish to English within the same clause, illustrating an example of intrasentential switching. Such alternation is not unusual, as for many bilingual speakers, it forms a habitual, and natural part of everyday communication (Auer & Eastman, 2010).

Structural models have primarily focused on the grammatical constraints governing where switches may occur. For example, the MATRIX LANGUAGE FRAME model accounts for the morphosyntactic organisation of bilingual speech, whereas minimalist approaches view codeswitching as reflecting the interactions within a collective grammatical system (Myers-Scotton & Jake, 2017; MacSwan, 2000). Other frameworks adopt a language contact perspective, noting that patterns of bilingual speech emerge through continued interaction between linguistic systems (Muysken, 2013).

Others, such as sociopragmatic and interactional approaches, highlight the social and interactional functions of codeswitching. Gumperz (1982) conceptualises codeswitching as a discourse strategy used by speakers to signal contextual and interpersonal meaning. Within this framework, codeswitching may be used to mark quotations, specify addressees, or reinforce a message. Similarly, interactional approaches frame codeswitching as a locally meaningful practice in which speakers organise and negotiate meaning within an interaction (Auer, 1995). Differing from structural accounts, these perspectives position the role of social context and interactional goals as central to codeswitching.

Amongst the sociopragmatic models of codeswitching, the MARKEDNESS MODEL (MM) developed by Myers-Scotton (1993a;1993b), offers a detailed account of how speakers align with social norms when selecting a language. The model aims to account for speakers' 'sociopsychological motivations when engaging in codeswitching' (Myers-Scotton, 1993b: 75). Speakers' code choices are conceptualised in terms of negotiating social relationships, where they select linguistic options according to their understanding of social norms and expectations. Codeswitching is therefore viewed as a socially meaningful practice in which speakers index identity, alignment and communicative goals.

A key concept of the MM is RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS SETS (RO sets), defined as an "*abstract construct, derived from situational factors, standing for the attitudes and expectations of participants towards one another*" (Myers-Scotton, 1993b:85). These expectations arise from factors such as the relationship between speakers, the interactional setting, and the purpose of the interaction. They are not fixed, nor universal, but are developed from community-specific norms, and shared understandings of appropriate language use. Consequently, the MM assumes that speakers possess not only linguistic competence, but also the sociolinguistic awareness required to interpret and respond to these expectations.

Furthermore, the UNMARKED choice refers to the linguistic option that aligns with the expected RO set for a given interaction (Myers-Scotton, 1993b). Speakers usually select the UNMARKED choice to affirm, or maintain an existing RO set, and is captured in the UNMARKED CHOICE MAXIM. However, speakers may wish to diverge from these expectations to renegotiate social relationships, or change the interpersonal dynamics, and this is referred to as making a MARKED choice. In doing so, the MARKED choice may signal shifts in authority, social distance, or emotional stance, highlighting the strategic potential codeswitching may serve within an interaction.

Within the model, speakers are conceptualised as rational actors, where they aim to “*achieve specific goals important to them as individuals*” (Myers-Scotton, 1998:7). This notion, formalised under the RATIONAL ACTOR MAXIM, positions code choice as a process where speakers evaluate the potential costs and rewards associated with different options. From this perspective, codeswitching is viewed as a form of optimisation, in which speakers seek to maximise social rewards, and minimise risks. More broadly, speakers manage their interpersonal relationships and communicative goals through deliberate and goal-oriented language use.

2.2 Emotion and Bilingual Language Use

Amongst bilingual speakers, emotional meaning appears to be unevenly distributed across languages. Expressions such as swearing, or saying “*I love you*”, are often reported as carrying different emotional weight, depending on the language used (Pavlenko, 2006; Daewe, 2010). Whilst this perceived asymmetry is reflected in subjective accounts, it is also evident in experimental findings. For example, advertising slogans were perceived as more emotionally impactful when presented in participants’ first language (L1), whereas memory-based experiments show participants exhibited better recall for emotionally laden words in their L1 compared to their second language (L2) (Puntoni et al., 2009; Anoushian & Hertel, 1994). Laboratory studies measuring participants’ physiological reactions, further suggest that language can shape decision making processes, by reporting that bilingual speakers made more rational decisions when evaluating dilemmas in their L2, (Harris et al., 2003; Keysar et al., 2012; Costa et al., 2014). The findings here point towards the idea that emotional resonance is often more strongly associated with an individual’s first or native language.

However, the observed pattern within the literature is not fixed, nor can it be assumed to be consistent across all speakers. The FOREIGN LANGUAGE EFFECT (FLE) is often interpreted as evidence of speakers exhibiting increased rationality in a second language. However, it appears to be dependent on factors such as language dominance and context (Keysar et al., 2012). Wong and Ng (2018) show that responses to moral dilemmas vary depending not only on the language of the task itself, but also on speakers' proficiency levels. They reported that there were greater differences between personal and impersonal judgements in English compared to Mandarin Chinese, particularly amongst participants who were more dominant in the language of the task itself. This suggests that differences in emotional responses cannot be solely attributed to the language itself and instead highlights the role of the individual's relationship with a language.

A similar pattern emerges in the context of emotional expression. The ability to articulate emotional meaning and therefore use emotional vocabulary in a second language develops alongside factors such as proficiency and sociocultural experience, in which the quality of the L2 input is directly tied to the size of a speaker's emotional vocabulary (Mavrou et al., 2023; Vano & Pennebaker, 1997). Therefore, emotional expression seems to develop through frequent use, indicating that differences between languages reflect how speakers experience and engage with them, rather than assuming there is an inherent difference between the languages themselves.

As well as emotional intensity across languages, there is evidence of language being closely tied to identity and cultural experience. Individuals who have internalised two cultures and therefore speak the language associated with each culture, are referred to as BICULTURAL individuals (Luna et al., 2008). It is understood that bicultural individuals may shift between distinct culturally specific cognitive structures, depending on the language they use, a process conceptualised as CULTURAL FRAME SWITCHING (CFS) (Briley et al., 2005). This is reflected in a study where Spanish-English bilinguals reported having different personality traits in each language, aligning with the patterns observed in monolingual speakers of Spanish and English (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2006). In this sense, language does not simply serve as a way to express identity but appears to actively shape it. Furthermore, many multilingual individuals report feeling more authentic in their L1, and more artificial in a later acquired language, where such perceptions are influenced by factors such as proficiency and age of acquisition (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013).

As a whole, the literature discussed suggests that languages are embedded within distinct emotional and cultural systems. Furthermore, they are not experienced as neutral, or emotionally comparable, but are shaped by speakers' past experiences with each language. Therefore, language use cannot be understood in a way that disregards the role of these factors. This presents a fundamental challenge for existing models of codeswitching which assume speakers to make strategic and rational evaluations of the available linguistic options, such as the MARKEDNESS MODEL, may not fully capture the processes which seem to underly language choice (Myers-Scotton, 1993b). Following from this, emotional experiences may interact with social and contextual factors, ultimately shaping codeswitching behaviour.

2.3 Emotion and Decision-Making

Early versions of rational choice theory frame decision-making as a cost benefit process, where individuals select choices that maximise expected outcomes, based on fixed preferences (Riker, 1962). Here, behaviour is understood as the optimisation of choices, aligning with an individual's goals, commonly defined as the "*maximisation of one's expected utility*" (Evans, 2019: 98). However, these accounts offer a partial view of human cognition, as they fail to address how such preferences are formed. Evans (2019) makes precisely this point, noting that whilst rational models may explain how decisions are made, they do not account for the motivations which guide these decisions. Rational choice models therefore risk disregarding the role of emotional experience in shaping what individuals perceive as desirable in a given context. This casts doubt on the assumption that decision-making is rooted in stable and internally consistent evaluations.

Further challenging the assumptions of rational choice models, more recent research has focused on the ways in which emotion contributes to decision-making processes. Emotion is not considered as interfering with decision-making but is essential to the process itself (Li et al., 2013). Emotions provide a form of subjective interpretation, meaning individuals are able to evaluate potential outcomes, particularly in contexts where objective information is inaccessible or uncertain. Emotional states can therefore shape how available choices are interpreted, prior to any conscious evaluation. This is supported by findings which reveal that emotional and motivational processes are present from the earliest stages of information processing, influencing how information is perceived and subsequently processed (Ganunthula, 2024). If emotion appears to partly shape decision making, it cannot be

explained through rational evaluation alone. Neuroscience research further aligns with this view. The SOMATIC MARKER HYPOTHESIS proposes that past experiences are visually encoded as bodily states, which are then used for the planning of future behaviours (Verweij et al., 2015). These SOMATIC MARKERS prepare individuals to anticipate the potential consequences of different choices, essentially having the capacity to influence choices, given that there is neurological significance attached to them. Whilst this process facilitates decision making, it is an automatic process, shaped by prior experience, rather than conscious evaluation. Therefore, decisions are not simply the outcome of a deliberate and cost-benefit based judgement, but appear to be influenced by internal, context dependent responses.

The emotional processes understood to influencing decision-making do not result in stable or desirable outcomes, as research demonstrates how different emotional states can bias how individuals perceive risk and form evaluations (Koporic et al., 2020). For example, anger has been associated with more optimistic risk assessments and a greater tendency to retaliate, whereas fear is linked to a heightened perception of risk, and more cautious decision making. Evans (2019) further supports this view, by noting that individuals in a positive mood, and under time constraints, are more likely to rely on cognitive shortcuts and be influenced by weaker arguments. These cognitive shortcuts involve relying upon contextual cues, such as the speaker's reputation. Accounts such as the DUAL PROCESSING THEORY propose that mental processes are divided into two distinct systems: the emotional, often subconscious process, and the rational, deliberate process (Kahneman, 2014). However, this distinction may oversimplify the apparent interaction between emotion and cognition during decision-making.

Overall, it becomes clear that the concept of individuals' consistently acting as rational and strategic decision makers is somewhat problematic. Decision-making appears to be shaped by a dynamic interaction between emotional and cognitive processes, as well as contextual factors. This in itself presents challenges for models of codeswitching which centre around stable preferences and rational evaluation, as they cannot account for the evident processes underlying language choice, which appear to be far more varied and context-dependent than is assumed by these models.

2.4 Integrating Emotion into Models of Codeswitching

In reviewing the literature, it becomes clear that there are fundamental challenges for existing models of codeswitching that emphasise rationality and strategic decision-making. In

particular, the MARKEDNESS MODEL (MM) which conceptualises codeswitching as a socially motivated and goal-oriented process based on speakers' evaluation of norms and expected outcomes (Myers-Scotton, 1993b). The MM's central assumption that speakers possess the capacity to engage in relatively stable and rational evaluations of the options available to them, appears to lack explanatory power when considering the literature discussed, as decision making is not governed solely by deliberate reasoning. Emotional and motivational factors shape how individuals perceive situations and evaluate choices (Li et al., 2013; Ganuthula, 2024). These factors do not only inform, but in some cases, disrupt or even override logical, and strategic reasoning (Evans, 2019; Koporic et al., 2020). This therefore presents challenges for the MM's assumption that speakers engage in fixed, goal-oriented evaluations when selecting linguistic codes.

Research on bilingual language use further supports the view that language choice is closely tied to emotional experience. Codeswitching has been shown to function as a tool for expressing emotion, with speakers exhibiting a tendency to favour their L1 for expressing more intense emotions and utilise their L2 to feel emotionally detached in emotionally charged contexts (Ladegaard, 2018; Williams et al., 2019). This observation aligns with accounts where the L1 is associated with personal involvement, whereas the L2 functions as the language of detachment and distance (Novakovich & Shapard, 2000, in Pavlenko, 2002). Additionally, discourse-based studies reveal how codeswitching is used to construct affective stance within interaction. In an analysis of naturalistic conversations between Galician-Spanish bilinguals, Acuña Ferreira (2017) reported that speakers switched languages in moments of heightened emotional involvement in order to maximise effectiveness, or to negotiate interpersonal dynamics. However, sociocultural norms are also understood to shape language choice, with speakers often using their L2 to minimise the social consequences of using emotionally loaded expressions such as swearing Gawinkowska et al. (2013). This aligns with accounts that emphasise norm-oriented behaviour in codeswitching yet also highlights how emotional expression is managed in relation to social expectations.

Collectively, these findings suggest that language choice is shaped by the interaction of multiple factors, rather than rational evaluation alone. Whilst some patterns of codeswitching behaviour can be understood as strategic and norm-oriented, others appear to reflect speaker's emotional responses and their perceived relationship with their languages. The MM accounts for the role of social norms and interactional expectations, but it may not fully capture how emotional processes shape the conditions under which these choices are made

(Myers-Scotton, 1993b). More specifically, if emotional responses vary across contexts and a speaker's languages, then the kind of evaluation that the MM proposes is unlikely to be wholly consistent or consciously accessible.

Although research on bilingualism has examined emotional differences between languages, and the use of codeswitching in emotional expression, such insights appear to be absent within models of codeswitching. This therefore highlights a clear gap in the literature, as there remains a limited understanding of how speakers themselves perceive their relationship with codeswitching, social context and emotion.

The present study therefore aims to investigate how Spanish-English bilinguals describe their experiences of codeswitching, in particular, how the role of emotion may shape their language use. It further examines whether participants' accounts align with, or challenge the assumptions of the MARKEDNESS MODEL, which assume codeswitching to be a socially motivated practice (Myers-Scotton, 1993b).

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Nine Spanish-English bilingual speakers participated, who all identified as bilingual in Spanish and English at the time of data collection. A small number of participants reported prior exposure to additional languages, but none reported high proficiency in a third language.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 63 years and included one male and eight females. At the time of data collection, most participants resided in the UK, with one participant temporarily living in the Netherlands. All participants had lived in both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking countries. Demographic information, including age, language dominance and self-reported proficiency in each language, was collected through a questionnaire completed prior to the interview (Appendix 1). This questionnaire was adapted from Daeweel and Pavlenko (2001-2003) (Appendix 2).

3.1.1 Participant Recruitment

Participants were primarily recruited through personal networks including friends, family members and referrals from existing contacts. One participant was recruited through a Facebook group for Spanish speakers living in the North East of England.

To be eligible for participation, individuals needed to identify as a Spanish-English bilingual. One individual who expressed interest was excluded, as they reported having only basic conversational proficiency in English, therefore failing to meet the criteria. Participation was entirely voluntary.

3.2 Data Collection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for exploration of participants' experiences of codeswitching, particularly focusing on the role of emotion in shaping language choice.

The interview schedule consisted of 23 questions, organised into five sections: codeswitching practices, identity, emotional experiences across languages, emotionally loaded linguistic items and perceptions of strategic or rational language use. The interview schedule was used as a guide; thus, not all questions were asked to each participant, and follow up prompts were used when necessary. Several of the interview questions were adapted from Daeweale and Pavlenko's (2001-2003) "Web Questionnaire on Bilingualism and Emotions" (Appendix 2). The remaining questions were developed specifically for the present study, informed by the assumptions of the Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton, 1993b).

Interviews were conducted either in person or remotely, depending on participants' preference. Six interviews took place online via Microsoft Teams, and three were conducted in person, in a quiet, private setting. Interviews typically lasted between 40 to 60 minutes. Participants were given the choice of completing the interview in either English or Spanish and were informed that they could switch between languages throughout the interview. Four interviews were conducted primarily in Spanish and five in English. As a Spanish-English bilingual, I conducted the interviews with no translation required. To ensure consistency across languages, all interview materials were prepared in both English and Spanish prior to the interview (Appendix 3 and 4).

3.3 Transcription and Data Handling

Interviews were audio recorded using a laptop and subsequently transcribed using an AI assisted software- Jamworks (2026). All transcripts were then manually checked against the original recordings and corrected where necessary. Transcription followed a basic orthographic protocol in which speaker turns were marked, and any codeswitching was retained in the transcripts. Identifying information such as workplaces and references to third parties were removed and replaced with placeholders to preserve anonymity. Participant names were replaced with pseudonyms. Following transcription, all audio recordings were deleted. Final transcripts, demographic information, and consent forms were stored securely on a password protected device, in accordance with the ethical guidelines at Newcastle University.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, where they define thematic analysis as a qualitative method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (79). Within this approach, themes are developed through the researcher's engagement with the data, rather than being predetermined before analysis. Adopting this approach seemed well suited to explore how bilingual speakers interpret and describe their codeswitching behaviour. The analysis was predominantly inductive, meaning patterns could emerge from the data itself, yet it was also informed by the study's research questions and the assumptions of the MARKEDNESS MODEL (Myers-Scotton,1993b).

The analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Six Phases of Thematic Analysis, presented in Braun and Clarke (2006:87)

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

In PHASE 1, all interviews were transcribed and read several times, ensuring close engagement with the data. Initial observations were noted, particularly where participants made reference to emotional experiences across languages, or how this was reflected in their codeswitching behaviour.

In PHASE 2, initial codes were generated across the whole dataset. Coding was systematic and involved identifying and labelling extracts relevant to the research questions. Overall, 320 extracts were coded. Codes were largely generated in a data-driven manner, capturing recurring ideas within participants' accounts, such as emotional and automatic processes, and instances that seemed to align with or challenge the assumptions of the MM (Myers-Scotton, 1993b).

In PHASE 3, codes were examined and collated into broader patterns to begin developing potential themes. Candidate themes were formed by grouping conceptually related codes. Both the recurrence across participants and conceptual relevance were considered when developing themes, ensuring they captured patterns that were recurring, but were also analytically meaningful in relation to the research question. This led to the development of multiple initial themes.

In PHASE 4, candidate themes were reviewed and subsequently refined, ensuring internal coherence and clear distinction between themes. This involved re-reading all coded extracts within each theme and evaluating whether they formed a consistent and analytically meaningful pattern. Themes and subthemes that lacked sufficient data or did not contribute to addressing the research questions were removed or collapsed. For example, initial groupings relating to general language background, or fixed language preferences, were excluded, as they did not directly contribute to understanding the relationship between emotion and codeswitching. Consequently, this resulted 219 extracts being retained within the final analysis (see Table 1 in Section 4).

In PHASE 5, each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its central concept. This process ensured that each theme captured distinct aspects of participants' accounts, whilst contributing to a coherent, overall analytical narrative.

As a Spanish-English bilingual, I share a similar linguistic background with the participants, which meant the interviews could be conducted with no need for translation, and allowed participants to move naturally between languages. However, this also informed the analysis,

particularly in interpreting how participants described emotional experiences and language use, see Section 5.5.

4. Findings

The following section presents the findings of the thematic analysis, organised into three major themes, each containing several subthemes. Themes were developed based on their recurrence across the dataset, and their relevance to the research question, see Section 3.4. An overview of the themes and their associated extract count is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes Overview & Extract Frequency

Theme Name	Number of Extracts
Theme 1: Emotional Asymmetry Across Languages	112
Theme 2: Rational and Norm-Based Language Choice	56
Theme 3: Disruption of Rational Language Choice	51
Total	219

Three interrelated themes were identified, which aimed to address how emotion may influence codeswitching among Spanish-English bilingual speakers. The first theme, EMOTIONAL ASYMMETRY ACROSS LANGUAGES, captures how participants experience their languages as differing in emotional resonance and accessibility. The second theme, RATIONAL AND NORM-BASED LANGUAGE CHOICE, reflects accounts of codeswitching being a deliberate and socially oriented practice. The third theme, DISRUPTION OF RATIONAL LANGUAGE CHOICE, captures instances where codeswitching was described as automatic, emotionally triggered, or outside of conscious control. Together, these themes indicate that participants understood their codeswitching behaviour as shaped by deliberate, socially sensitive reasoning, and less- controlled, emotionally driven responses.

4.1 Emotional Asymmetry Across Languages

Participants often described their two languages as differing in emotional weight, suggesting that Spanish and English were not experienced as emotionally equivalent. These differences were evident in how participants described emotional expression, the perceived intensity of certain expressions, and the associations formed through lived experience. EMOTIONAL ASYMMETRY ACROSS LANGUAGES is divided into three subthemes: EMOTIONAL EMBODIMENT OF LANGUAGE, EMOTIONAL SALIENCE OF LEXICAL ITEMS, AND CULTURAL AND EXPERIENTIAL EMBODIMENT.

4.1.1 Emotional Embodiment of Language

Participants often referred to feeling more emotionally aligned with one language, particularly when discussing emotional topics. Emotional expression was frequently described as more immediate, natural or authentic in one language compared to the other. This is illustrated in (2), where Miriam reflects on discussing emotional topics.

(2) Es mucho más fácil hacerlo en español que en inglés porque tienes más sentimientos o sí, tienes más emociones

(Miriam: Interview 8)

English Transcription: *It's much easier to do it in Spanish than in English because you have more feelings, or yes, you have more emotions*

Here, Spanish is framed as being more accessible for emotional expression, with references to “mas sentimientos...mas emociones” (*more feelings...more emotions*), suggesting a perception of greater emotional depth. In saying it is “mucho mas facil” (*much easier*) further positions Spanish as a more immediate or natural tool for expressing emotion, rather than an option which is consciously selected. A similar pattern is evident in (3).

(3) Pero a mi emocionalmente me estoy más conectada al español.

(Bianca: Interview 7)

English Transcription: *But for me, emotionally, I am more connected to Spanish*

English Translation: *But for me, I am more emotionally connected to Spanish*¹

In (3), Spanish is described as the language in which Bianca feels “mas conectada” (*more connected*), indicating a feeling of emotional closeness, and that certain feelings are more naturally articulated in Spanish. This description suggests that emotional alignment is experienced internally, as opposed to emerging from conscious evaluation during an interaction.

Across both accounts, emotional embodiment is framed as a subjective feeling, where one language is felt as more emotionally resonant or authentic than the other. This asymmetry appears to be rooted in how languages are experienced emotionally, rather than rooted as the outcome of deliberate choice.

4.1.2 Emotional Salience of Lexical Items

Participants also described differences in the emotional weight of specific words and expressions across Spanish and English. These accounts suggest that emotional asymmetry is not only felt at the level of the language as a whole, as discussed in Section 4.1.1, but also in the perceived weight of certain lexical items. This is illustrated in (4), where Carla contrasts expressions of affection in Spanish and English.

(4) Entonces, de repente habían cosas que yo quería decir y no existe la palabra que para mí tenga el peso que yo necesitaba comunicar.... Entonces, explicar el te quiero, te amo y [I love you]....cuando yo digo te quiero, no es un simple, [I love you].

(Carla: Interview 5)

¹ In instances where the English transcription of Spanish utterances does not fully capture the intended meaning, an additional translation is provided by the author, who is a native Spanish speaker.

English Transcription: *So, all of a sudden there were things I wanted to say, but there wasn't a word that carried the weight I needed to convey. So, explaining "te quiero, te amo" and I love you... When I say "te quiero" it isn't a simple I love you*

Here, Carla highlights that the emotional “peso” (*weight*) associated with “te quiero” is not comparable in “I love you”, despite being direct translations of one another. This difference is felt not only in terms of the meaning, but also the feeling of the intensity the expression holds. This suggests that specific terms in one language, hold an emotional depth that the other language may not.

This feeling was also referred to in (5), but in relation to swearing.

(5) Because if I translate, like *hijo de puta*, and son of a bitch, it's the same, but feels a lot stronger.

(Julia: Interview 3)

Although Julia recognises that the expressions are “the same”, she notes a difference in their emotional weight, saying it “feels a lot stronger”. The contrast felt by Julia addresses how emotional intensity is not embedded within the literal meaning of a phrase and is shaped by individuals’ subjective experience of each language.

Overall, participants emphasise that certain words and expressions carry different emotional weight depending on the language. Emotional meaning is therefore not fixed across translated expressions, yet it seems to vary, based on how these expressions are experienced and interpreted within each language.

4.1.3 Cultural and Experiential Embodiment

Participants also linked their languages to different cultural and social experiences, suggesting that emotional, or personal associations were developed through repeated use in certain contexts. In these accounts, specific experiences were described as feeling more naturally connected to one language than the other. This is illustrated in (6), where Celeste discusses processing emotions in English.

- (6) I've been so used to, like, thinking about and processing emotions and difficult experiences in English that I could do it in Spanish, but I feel more much more comfortable doing in English

(Celeste: Interview 4)

Describing this as something Celeste has “been so used to” doing in English, suggests that this is something that has developed over time through repeated engagement with, or exposure to emotional experiences in English. This is not a fixed preference used in practice, but instead, English seems to have become the more familiar or used language for managing emotional experiences.

Julia adopts a similar view, describing how she uses Spanish when making reference to personal or cultural topics.

- (7) I think definitely, like, if I'm talking about something personal or, like, about my culture or something, I will definitely put in more, like, Spanish words because it'll just, like, will make more sense because... Or it's even with some words that, like, even if I do translate them, in my head, it doesn't have the same meaning.

(Julia: Interview 3)

In (7), Spanish is framed as the more appropriate language to use when discussing culturally specific or personally meaningful experiences. The observation in which the translation “doesn’t have the same meaning” suggests that these experiences are not easily transferable across languages. Furthermore, the account in (7) highlights how a speaker’s past experiences can attribute emotional or contextual significance to linguistic codes.

Both accounts in (6) and (7) suggest that emotional associations with a language are developed through lived experience. Different aspects of life such as those presented here (emotional processing or cultural identity) become tied to particular languages, aligning with the broader picture of this theme: languages are not experienced as emotionally equivalent.

4.2 Rational and Norm-Based Language Choice

In contrast to the more emotionally focused accounts presented in Section 4.1, participants also drew on moments where language choice was consciously managed in relation to social expectations, their addressee, and communicative goals. Within this theme (RATIONAL AND NORM-BASED LANGUAGE CHOICE) codeswitching is framed as a deliberate and socially sensitive practice, as participants considered how their utterances may be interpreted, and subsequently selected the language they believed to be most appropriate, or effective. This theme is organised into two subthemes: NORM SENSITIVITY AND SOCIOPRAGMATIC MONITORING, and STRATEGIC AND RATIONAL LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT.

4.2.1 Norm Sensitivity and Sociopragmatic Monitoring

Participants discussed adjusting their language use in anticipation of how what they say may be perceived by others. Within these accounts, codeswitching was not presented as being spontaneous, but rather as a response to their concerns regarding appropriateness, tone, and potential interpretation. This is illustrated in (8), where Anna discusses the perceived consequences of using Spanish or English.

- (8) a lo mejor digo algo en inglés, y a lo mejor en inglés resulta muy brusco. Entonces para mí es más seguro utilizar el español porque sé que estoy en realidad expresando lo que yo siento y lo que yo quiero decir

(Anna: Interview 1)

English Transcription: *I might say something in English, and maybe in English it comes across as very abrupt. So, for me it's safer to use Spanish because I know I am really expressing what I feel and what I want to say*

English Translation: *I might say something in English and maybe in English it comes across as very rude or direct. So I feel its safer to use Spanish because I know I am truly expressing my feelings and what I want to say*

Anna clearly anticipates that saying something in English may be perceived as overly “brusco” (*direct*), resulting in her using Spanish which is the “mas seguro” (*safer*) option.

The account in (8) highlights an awareness of how meaning may differ across languages and suggests that selecting a language is at times shaped by a speaker's expectations of how a message will be received.

A similar concern is expressed below:

- (9) I mean, we've said about swear words, so I tend to avoid those. Obviously, in Spanish, there's certain things that I can't say. Or if I was in any doubt about... the value of a term and the weight of a term, then I'll tend to avoid it rather than risk saying something inappropriate

(Arthur: Interview 2)

Arthur discusses how he may avoid certain expressions, given his uncertainty about their “value” and “weight”. Instead of risking an unintended meaning, Arthur chooses to not use them at all. This reflects a cautious and logical approach when it comes to language use, where choices are informed by an awareness of the potential social consequences.

Across the accounts in (8) and (9), language choice is presented as a process which is actively monitored within interaction. There is explicit reference to tone, appropriateness, and interpretation, which influence Anna's and Arthur's decisions on which language to use, suggesting that codeswitching can function as a socially constrained practice.

4.2.2 Strategic and Rational Language Management

Participants also described using a specific language in order to align with their communicative goal, particularly to achieve clarity and mutual understanding. In doing so, codeswitching was framed as serving a purposeful strategy, where participants evaluated which language would best convey their intended meaning. This is evident in (10) where Carla discusses using a particular word to ensure her addressee understands.

- (10) si uso esa palabra, la voy a usar rápidamente para que me entiendan perfectamente lo que quiero decir... yo pienso en el receptor de, en mi receptor, en lo que, en la persona a la que yo me estoy dirigiendo

(Carla: Interview 5)

English Transcription: *If I use that word, I'll use it quickly so they understand perfectly what I want to say ... I think about the recipient, my recipient, about the person I am addressing*

English Translation: *If I use that word, I'll use it quickly, so they understand exactly what I mean, I think about the recipient, the person who I am talking to*

Here, Carla refers to “el receptor” (*the recipient*), emphasising that her language choice is guided by consideration of the addressee. Her decision to switch is linked to wanting to achieve full understanding, indicating that choosing a language is evaluated in relation to its communicative effectiveness.

Miriam provides similar reasoning when talking about the day on which a family gathering is taking place. This is illustrated in (11)

- (11) Se lo digo en se lo digo en inglés... no es que no yo no sepa, yo no sepa el día, es porque quiero que exactamente sepan lo que le estoy diciendo.

(Miriam: Interview 8)

English Transcription: *I will tell them in English, it's not that I don't know the day, it's because I want them to know exactly what I am saying*

Miriam notes that English is chosen not due to a lack of knowledge on the day in which the event is taking place, but to ensure that her message is understood “exactamente” (*exactly*). The emphasis on wanting to be clearly understood, again, highlights an intentional alignment between language choice and communicative intention.

Together, these accounts position codeswitching as a goal-oriented practice in which speakers draw on their linguistic resources to prioritise clarity and understanding within an interaction.

4.3 Disruption of Rational Language Choice

Participants often discussed instances where codeswitching was experienced as non-deliberate and outside of conscious control. Whilst the second theme reflects accounts of

language choice being strategically managed, or sensitive to social norms, the present theme involves moments where codeswitching appeared reactive, automatic, or recognised retrospectively. Rather than language choice being described as the outcome of conscious evaluation, it seemed to emerge in response to heightened emotional states, or habitual and less regulated processes. DISRUPTION OF RATIONAL LANGUAGE CHOICE can be further separated into two subthemes: EMOTIONALLY TRIGGERED AUTOMATIC SWITCHING, and NON-DELIBERATE AUTOMATICITY AND REDUCED AWARENESS

4.3.1 Emotionally Triggered Automatic Switching

Across several interviews, emotionally heightened moments were associated with instances of immediate codeswitching and with little explicit deliberation. In particular, feelings of anger, frustration and emotional overload were often linked to sudden switching of languages. This is illustrated by Anna in (12).

(12) Por ejemplo cuando estoy enfadada directamente me voy a utilizar el español

(Anna: Interview 1)

English Transcription: *For example, when I am angry I go directly to use Spanish*

“Directamente” (*directly*) frames the switch as being immediate, rather than being reasoned. Further, “me voy” (*I go*) presents Spanish as the default response for emotional expression. These expressions suggest that the switch occurs with no prior deliberation, positioning Spanish as the language that emerges in moments of emotional intensity.

A similar pattern was evident in Carla’s account of feeling frustration in everyday contexts.

(13) Si voy conduciendo y alguien realmente hace una tontería o o está siendo bien, bien estúpido, me va a salir en español desde lo más profundo.

(Carla: Interview 5)

English Transcription: *If I am driving and someone does something really daft or is being really really stupid, it is going to come out in Spanish from the deepest part of me*

English Translation: *If I am driving and someone does something silly or is being really really stupid, Spanish will come out from my soul*

The phrase “me va a salir” (*it is going to come out*), minimises the sense of speaker agency, suggesting the utterance is something that arises spontaneously, rather than deliberately chosen. The following “desde lo mas profundo” (*from my soul*), demonstrates how Carla associates Spanish with a deeper, more emotional part of herself.

In some cases, codeswitching was described as occurring when emotional strain exceeded their ability to control their language choice. Bianca referred to moments of negotiation with her husband. Earlier in the interview, she explained how their interactions are in English, as her husband is not a Spanish speaker.

- (14) Entonces, pues sí, la verdad es que discuto mucho en inglés porque, no discuto, pero negocio mucho con mi marido, pero llega un momento en que ya hago un default al español para cagarme en todo y me sale solo, no puedo evitarlo

(Bianca: Interview 7)

English Transcription: *So yes, the truth is that I argue a lot in English because, I don't argue, but I negotiate a lot with my husband, but it gets to a point where I do a default to Spanish to shit on everything and it comes out on its own, I can't help it*

English Translation: *So yes, the truth is that I argue a lot in English because, well not argue, but I negotiate a lot with my husband about things, but it gets to a point where I just do a default to Spanish to lash out verbally, and it comes out on its own, I can't help it*

Bianca's account is centred around emotional escalation, differentiating between typical interactional disagreements as managed in English, but at times, this management and regulation is lost “Llega un momento” (*it gets to a point*). Spanish is then described as a

default response, stating “me sale solo” (*it comes out on its own*) and “no puedo evitarlo” (*I can't help it*). This positions the switch as being something which imposes upon the speaker and is not initiated consciously, thus indicating that the emotional intensity of a situation has the capacity to disrupt, or reduce a speaker's logical reasoning regarding language choice.

Overall, these accounts suggest that emotionally heightened moments may influence how language choice is controlled and experienced by speakers. It seems that switches are not consciously managed in these moments, and codeswitching emerges rapidly and with a lack of conscious regulation. Emotional arousal therefore seems to not simply accompany codeswitching, but in some instances, trigger codeswitching.

4.3.2 Non-Deliberate Automaticity and Reduced Awareness

In addition to instances of emotionally triggered switching, participants also referred to moments where switching languages occurred with little immediate awareness. In these accounts, language choice appeared to be minimally monitored, and in some cases, was only recognised after the interaction had taken place.

A clear example of gaining awareness retrospectively is in (15), where Anna reflects on noticing language shifts after an interaction has ended.

(15) INT: ¿Te das cuenta después de una interacción de que has cambiado de idioma sin haberte dado cuenta en el momento?

Anna: Si, pienso y por que he usado el ingles? O por que he usado el espanol? no lo hago con intención a veces

(Anna: Interview 1)

English Transcription:

INT: *Do you ever realise afterwards that you have switched languages after an interaction?*

Anna: *Yes, I think and why have I used English? Or why have I used Spanish? I don't do intentionally at times*

It is notable here, that there is a delayed awareness on the language she used. It is not the case that the language choice was something attended to in real time, the participant questions

why one code rather than another was used, after the interaction had taken place. The final comment “no lo hago con intención a veces” (*I don't do intentionally at times*) further distances the switch away from conscious planning.

Likewise, in (16) there is a clear loss of awareness in this participant's description of an emotional interaction with her sister.

- (16) So when, if we start in Spanish, and it becomes emotional, it will, we won't even realise, and we'll be speaking English

(Elena: Interview 9)

This example combines emotional escalation with a reduced awareness of switching languages. In saying “we won't even realise”, suggests that the switch occurs at a level below conscious awareness, and implies they, again, become aware of this retrospectively. It is important to note that the participant describes beginning the conversation in Spanish but finds themselves speaking English once the conversation has become emotional. With this in mind, the account in (16) reveals that emotional interactions may reduce conscious monitoring of language use, as here, the language of the interaction has changed without deliberate intention.

Participants also described this type of switching as occurring in everyday interactions, despite having no communicative effectiveness

- (17) I sometimes do it by accident with [name], who's my husband. Even though I know he doesn't understand

(Sonia: Interview 6)

The fact that Sonia describes as doing it “by accident” is particularly revealing, as they recognise they have switched, despite knowing the addressee cannot understand, and ultimately, is communicatively ineffective. It seems that for Sonia codeswitching is habitual enough to override their immediate considerations of an interaction.

The accounts discussed here indicate that that some instances of codeswitching are not experienced as deliberate choices and are therefore not fully monitored. In some cases, participants frame switching languages as a normal and a potentially automatic aspect of bilingual speech, only becoming available to conscious awareness retrospectively.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated how emotion may influence codeswitching amongst Spanish-English bilinguals, and whether participants' accounts aligned with or diverged from the rational, norm-oriented assumptions of the MARKEDNESS MODEL (MM) (Myers-Scotton, 1993b). The thematic analysis in Section 4 identified three major themes: EMOTIONAL ASYMMETRY ACROSS LANGUAGES (4.1), RATIONAL AND NORM-BASED LANGUAGE CHOICE (4.2), and DISRUPTION OF RATIONAL LANGUAGE CHOICE (4.3). Overall, the findings indicate that participants understand their codeswitching behaviours as being shaped by both strategic and socially oriented reasoning, and also by less consciously managed processes. This section will discuss each of the themes identified in Section 4, with the aim of developing a theoretically informed account of how bilinguals' language choice reflects an interaction between rational evaluation, emotional experience, and automatic processes.

5.1 Emotional Influence on Language Choice

The concept of emotional asymmetry is widely established within bilingualism research (Pavlenko, 2006; Dawele, 2010), with the present findings both supporting and extending this concept. The findings suggest that emotional asymmetry does not only coexist within language choice but may shape the conditions under which codeswitching occurs. Within the MARKEDNESS MODEL (MM), speakers are assumed to evaluate the social consequences of alternative codes and select the one that offers the best interactional outcome meanings (Myers-Scotton, 1993a; 1993b). Therefore, this assumes that all linguistic options are equally available, with their differences lying primarily in their social meanings. However, the present findings suggest that availability itself may be uneven, shaped by speakers' prior emotional experiences.

As illustrated in (3) and (6), participants described one language as feeling more emotionally accessible or appropriate for certain experiences. These accounts do not reflect a deliberate

selection but rather demonstrate an underlying sense that one language feels more natural or accessible in certain contexts. In this sense, this distinction shifts the analytical focus from *which* language a speaker chooses, to *what* shapes the perceived accessibility of that language. Evans (2019) draws on this, arguing that rational choice models do not address the origins of the preferences that are assumed to guide decision making. The present findings further reinforce this limitation, suggesting that these preferences are not neutral, but are developed over time through emotional experience. This perspective is further supported by The SOMATIC MARKER HYPOTHESIS, which proposes that experiences become encoded by the brain and subsequently guide behaviour (Verweij et al., 2015). From this view, repeated use of Spanish in, for example, intimate familial contexts, or English in reflective contexts (as illustrated in (3) and (6)) may result in embodied associations that influence future language use. This is not to say speakers should be viewed as irrational, but this view positions emotional experience as being part of a broader process which informs and constrains rational evaluation.

Similarly, the lexical asymmetry described by participants when comparing affectionate expressions or swear words across languages, were experienced as unequal in their emotional weight, despite their literal meanings being the same (see Section 4.1). If the MM is able to account for such experiences, it must consider that the choices speakers make, are often shaped by the emotional weight of certain expressions. Within an emotional context, speakers may not be choosing from neutral alternatives, but between codes that vary in their ability to carry emotional meaning.

Finally, the subtheme involving experiential and cultural embodiment in Section 4.1.3 extends this argument to identity and lived experience. Participants' descriptions of certain topics "making more sense" in one language (see (7)), aligns with research on cognition amongst bicultural individuals, which demonstrates that language can activate culturally specific cognitive frames (Luna et al., 2008; Briley et al., 2005). However, the present findings expand on this, by suggesting that emotional and experiential meaning is not simply activated by a language but embedded within it. When particular domains or experiences become repeatedly associated with a specific language, code choice does not simply reflect those associations, but helps to reinforce them.

Overall, the findings do not completely invalidate the MM, but rather shed light on the ways in which it could be extended. Strategic evaluation remains relevant in the context of codeswitching, but it seems to function within a system which is already shaped by emotional

embodiment. If emotional asymmetry influences which linguistic options feel most available or meaningful prior to conscious evaluation, then the RATIONAL ACTOR MAXIM provides only a partial account of how bilingual speakers navigate their linguistic repertoires (Myers-Scotton, 1993b).

5.2 Rational and Norm-Based Codeswitching

The accounts captured in the second theme (RATIONAL AND NORM-BASED LANGUAGE CHOICE) provide clear support for the key assumptions of the MARKEDNESS MODEL (MM). In contrast to the emotionally embodied experiences discussed in 5.1, these findings demonstrate that participants do, at times, engage in the conscious and socially oriented evaluation proposed by Myers-Scotton (1993b).

The sociopragmatic monitoring identified in 4.2.1 suggests that RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS SETS (RO) sets function as meaningful constraints on bilinguals' linguistic behaviour (Myers-Scotton, 1993b). Participants demonstrated an awareness of how different codes correspond to specific social expectations within interactional contexts (see (8) and (9)). This sensitivity reflects the norm-oriented evaluation that the MM predicts, whereby speakers select codes based on their understanding of what is considered appropriate in a given interactional context.

Furthermore, the strategic language management observed in 4.2.2 supports the RATIONAL ACTOR MAXIM of the MM (Myers-Scotton, 1993b). Participants described using a language to maximise clarity or ensure effective communication (see (10) and (11)), reflecting a form of cost-benefit evaluation. In these accounts, language choice appears closely aligned with speaker's communicative goals, supporting the MM's concept of linguistic behaviour as being a form of optimisation.

However, the implications of this theme, RATIONAL AND NORM-BASED LANGUAGE CHOICE, go beyond only supporting the MM. The present findings indicate that the MM's explanatory power is limited to specific conditions, rather than providing a complete account. Any strategic evaluations appear to be most prominent when participants explicitly prioritised social appropriateness or communicative effectiveness. This therefore highlights challenges for the MM, as the findings in 4.2 only reflect one aspect of participants' reported experiences

The purpose here is not to view the MM as either being adequate or inadequate. What is important is that the present findings highlight how the MM captures only one mode of language choice amongst multiple modes. In circumstances where speakers have sufficient cognitive resources and motivation to engage in rational evaluation, the strategic mechanisms of the MM appear to function effectively. However, as the findings as a whole demonstrate, these conditions are not always met, and other processes may dominate, thus shaping language choice.

5.3 Limits of Rational Control in Codeswitching

The findings relating to the third theme (DISRUPTION OF RATIONAL LANGUAGE CHOICE) reveal that bilinguals' linguistic behaviour cannot always be accounted for as deliberate or socially strategic. Although participants described codeswitching in this way elsewhere in the dataset, the present findings demonstrate that switches between English and Spanish were also experienced as sudden and unintentional, or only recognised retrospectively. These accounts suggest that codeswitching may sometimes be triggered by processes that function below conscious awareness, as opposed to being motivated by speakers' conscious evaluations of social norms or their communicative goals (Myers- Scotton, 1993b). It is important to note that this apparent disruption appeared in two ways. Firstly, emotionally heightened moments in which anger, frustration or interpersonal tension preceded sudden switching. Secondly, more routine instances where speakers described using a language without consciously intending to do so. These findings suggest that bilingual language behaviour may involve affective triggers, and unintentional automaticity, ultimately questioning the theoretical validity of existing models which view language choice as rational or controlled, such as the MARKEDNESS MODEL (MM) (Myers-Scotton, 1993b).

The findings in 4.3.1 broadly align with research demonstrating that bilingual speakers often experience their languages as emotionally unequal. Pavlenko (2006) and Daeweile (2010) reported that emotionally loaded expressions such as swearing or intimate language, are felt differently by bilingual speakers, depending on the language used. This provides a useful basis for interpreting participants' descriptions of Spanish "*coming out*" during moments of frustration, or emotional overload (see (13) and (14)). Rather than these accounts reflecting a consciously managed, or strategic choice as might be predicted by the MM (Myers-Scotton, 1993b), they indicate that emotional arousal leads to easier access to the language carrying

stronger emotional resonance, or perhaps earlier emotional socialisation. To further support this interpretation, research has found that emotional processing can shape judgement and behaviour, and at times, bias reflective reasoning (Li et al., 2013; Koporic et al., 2020). Thus, emotion may not simply accompany codeswitching, it may be that it influences which language is most readily accessible under conditions of heightened emotion.

The second subtheme presented in 4.3.2 further complicates models of codeswitching centred on rational and conscious management (Myers-Scotton, 1993b). Participants reported only becoming aware of their codeswitching after an interaction had ended, or switching despite understanding that in doing so, it yielded no communicative advantage. Such findings challenge the RATIONAL ACTOR MAXIM of the MM, which proposes that speakers evaluate available linguistic options and select the code that maximises interactional outcomes. However, the present findings suggest that some instances of codeswitching may occur with little or no conscious monitoring. It has been argued that behaviour is not always governed by logical reasoning and can thus be affected, or even disrupted by less deliberate processes (Evans, 2019; Koporic et al., 2020). Consequently, it should be considered that codeswitching may reflect a rapid and fluid management of two linguistic systems, in which speakers may lack the full capacity to evaluate each switch in real time. This is not to say that strategic or rational models should be disregarded entirely, but the findings suggest that not all instances of codeswitching can be explained as speakers experiencing this as an intentional or fully reasoned choice.

Collectively the findings relating to the third theme, DISRUPTION OF RATIONAL LANGUAGE CHOICE, suggest that codeswitching is not consistently governed by deliberate, goal-oriented decision-making. Instead, participants' accounts reveal that language choice, at times, may emerge from emotionally driven or less monitored processes which operate in tandem with more controlled, rational forms of selection. This further reinforces the argument that bilingual language use cannot be adequately explained through a single mechanism. It appears to involve shifts between different modes of selection, which are dependent on the interactional and emotional context. In this respect, the present findings highlight a variability in how language choice is experienced, with differing degrees of perceived control, awareness, and emotional influence, all of which shape linguistic behaviour across contexts.

5.4 Rethinking the Markedness Model

Overall, the present findings suggest that codeswitching cannot be adequately accounted for through one mode of language selection but should be instead understood as a dynamic process in which different mechanisms vary in their degree of influence, depending on the interactional context.

The findings in 4.2 offer clear support for the main assumptions of the MM (Myers-Scotton, 1993b). Participants exhibited a sensitivity to social norms, addressee expectations, and communicative goals, indicating that at times, speakers engage in the rational and norm-oriented evaluation proposed by the model. In these contexts, language choice appears to reflect a form of strategic optimisation, supporting the RATIONAL ACTOR MAXIM of the MM.

However, the findings in 4.1 and 4.3 suggest that this is not the only process which shapes codeswitching behaviour. EMOTIONAL ASYMMETRY ACROSS LANGUAGES (4.1) seems to shape the perceived availability and salience of each language, prior to any conscious evaluation, whereas instances of automatic or emotionally triggered switching (4.3) suggest that, in some instances, language selection may occur with little conscious monitoring, or in response to emotional arousal, potentially bypassing this evaluation altogether.

Albeit, this does not amount to a complete rejection of the MM. Instead, the present findings highlight that the model's explanatory power may be limited to specific contexts. Participants accounts reflected that strategic and socially oriented language choice remains a meaningful and evident aspect of bilinguals' linguistic behaviour. However, it appears to operate alongside other processes which are less consciously managed. With this in mind, language choice may be better understood as involving shifts between more controlled and less controlled modes of selection, rather than a consistently rational process. At times, speakers orient to social norms, expectations, and communicative goals, yet at other times, their responses appear to be shaped by emotional resonance or habitual patterns of use. This perspective therefore extends the MM's assumptions by situating rational evaluation within a broader system which also includes emotional and automatic processes (Myers-Scotton, 1993b).

Overall, the present findings suggest that although the MM captures an important and legitimate dimension of codeswitching, it does not completely account for the variability observed in participant's experiences. A more comprehensive model of codeswitching would

benefit from integrating strategic, social, emotional, and automatic processes, rather than prioritising a single explanatory mechanism.

5.5 Limitations

Whilst the findings offer valuable insight into the processes which shape codeswitching behaviour, several limitations of the study warrant discussion.

Firstly, the sample size was relatively small ($N=9$) and predominantly female ($N=8$), limiting the generalisability of the findings to wider bilingual populations. Additionally, other variables such as age of acquisition, language dominance, and frequency of use were not systematically controlled for. Although information relating to these variables was collected through the demographic questionnaire their effects were not explicitly controlled for, meaning it is possible that individual differences in linguistic experience may have influenced the patterns observed.

Secondly, the study relies on self-reported data, capturing participants' reflections on their own language use, rather than observing their language use within naturally occurring interaction. Accounts of automaticity, emotional influence or lack of awareness may be subject to retrospective interpretation, and do not reflect these descriptions in real time.

It is important to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher. As a Spanish-English bilingual speaker, I recognise how my own sensitivity to the study's focus may have informed the interpretation of the data, and also the identification of themes. Although this may be considered as a strength in qualitative analysis, I also acknowledge the possibility of interpretative bias. However, the qualitative and exploratory nature of this study allowed for a detailed approach for investigating bilinguals' subjective experiences, providing insights into other aspects of codeswitching which may not be as easily captured through more objective or quantitative approaches.

5.6 Future Directions

The present findings point towards the need for a more integrated model of codeswitching, particularly in considering the role of emotion and automaticity in language choice. Given the prominence of emotionally triggered and less consciously monitored switching in participants' accounts, it would be useful to combine more qualitative approaches with

experimental or corpus- based methods. Such approaches could help investigate how these processes occur in naturally occurring interaction, ultimately providing a more detailed understanding of when and how emotionally driven, or automatic codeswitching occurs. Furthermore, longitudinal studies may provide insights into how emotional associations are established and developed overtime. In particular, it may be useful to consider how variables such as age of acquisition, frequency of use, and language dominance contribute in shaping emotional asymmetry.

More broadly, the present findings highlight the importance, and the need to integrate insights from sociolinguistic models of codeswitching with research on emotion and cognition. Integrating these perspectives would aid in accounting for both the controlled, and the less monitored aspects of bilinguals' language use, in turn, contributing to a more comprehensive model of how speakers navigate their linguistic repertoires within interactions.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how emotion influences codeswitching amongst Spanish-English bilingual speakers with reference to the assumptions of the Markedness Model (MM) (Myers-Scotton, 1993a; 1993b; 1998). Through thematic analysis of participants' accounts, the findings demonstrate that codeswitching cannot be understood as a uniform or purely rational behaviour.

Whilst participants' accounts reflected instances of socially sensitive and goal-oriented language choice, as the MM predicts, this reflects only one aspect of their codeswitching behaviour. The findings demonstrate that language is further shaped by emotionally grounded experiences, which influence how languages are perceived, accessed, and ultimately used. Additionally, instances of automatic and emotionally triggered switching suggest that not all language selection is governed by conscious evaluation or strategic control. As a whole, the present findings indicate that codeswitching is better understood as a dynamic process, sensitive to context, and one that involves the interaction of multiple mechanisms. Rather than codeswitching reflecting speakers' deliberate optimisation, bilingual language use appears to involve shifts between more controlled and less consciously monitored modes of selection.

The present findings highlight the role of emotional and automatic processes as operating in parallel with strategic reasoning, hoping to contribute to a more nuanced account of codeswitching. In doing so, it emphasises the need for theoretical approaches to build upon existing models, in order to fully capture the complexity of bilingual language use.

Reference List

- Acuña Ferreira, A.V. (2017) 'Code-switching and emotions display in Spanish/Galician bilingual conversation', *Text & Talk*, 37(1),.
- Anooshian, L.J. & Hertel, P.T. (1994) 'Emotionality in free recall: Language specificity in bilingual memory', *Cognition & Emotion*, 8(6), pp. 503–514.
- Auer, P. (1995) 'The pragmatics of code-switching: a sequential approach', in Lesley Milroy & Pieter Muysken (eds.) *One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Code-Switching*. [Online]. Cambridge University Press.
- Auer, P. & Eastman, C. (2010) *Code-switching*.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101.
- Briley, D.A., Morris, M.W. & Simonson, I. (2005) 'Cultural Chameleons: Biculturals, Conformity Motives, and Decision Making', *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(4), pp. 351–362.
- Costa, A., Foucart, A., Hayakawa, S., Aparici, M., Apesteguia, J., Heafner, J. & Keysar, B. (2014) 'Your Morals Depend on Language' Mariano Sigman (ed.), *PLoS ONE*, 9(4), p. e94842.
- Deuchar, M., Davies, P., Herring, J., Carter, D. & Parafita Couto, M.C. (2012) TalkBank Browser. [Online] [online]. Available from:
<https://sla.talkbank.org/TBB/biling/Bangor/Miami>
- Dewaele, J.-M. (2010) *Emotions in Multiple Languages*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Dewaele, J.-M. & Nakano, S. (2013) 'Multilinguals' perceptions of feeling different when switching languages', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34(2), pp. 107–120.
- Dewaele, J.-M. and Pavlenko, A. (2001-2003) Web questionnaire Bilingualism and Emotions. University of London.

- Evans, D. (2019) *Emotion: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Ganuthula, V.R.R. (2024) 'Beyond cognitive rationality: integrating motivation and affect in human decision-making', *DECISION*, 51.
- Gardner-Chloros, P. (2009) *Code-switching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gawinkowska, M., Paradowski, M.B. & Bilewicz, M. (2013) 'Second Language as an Exemptor from Sociocultural Norms. Emotion-Related Language Choice Revisited' Mark Aronoff (ed.), *PLoS ONE*, 8(12), p. e81225.
- Gumperz, J.J. (1982) *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harris, C.L., Aycicegi, A. & Gleason, J.B. (2003) 'Taboo words and reprimands elicit greater autonomic reactivity in a first language than in a second language', *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 24(4), pp. 561–579.
- Irini Mavrou, Bustos, F. & Chao, J. (2023) 'Emotional vocabulary in immigrants' L2 written discourse: is linguistic distance a proxy for L2 emotionality?', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 46pp. 1–17.
- Jamworks (2026) *Jamworks - Personalised Note Taking & Learning*. [Online] [online]. Available from: <https://www.jamworks.com/> (Accessed 5 May 2026).
- Kahneman, D. (2014) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.
- Keysar, B., Hayakawa, S. & An, S. (2012) 'Psychological Science The Foreign-Language Effect : Thinking in a Foreign Tongue Reduces Decision Biases On behalf of: Association for Psychological Science', *Sage Journals*, 23(6),.
- Koporcic, N., Nietola, M. & Nicholson, J.D. (2020) 'IMP: it's time to get emotional! Understanding the role of negative emotions in dynamic decision-making processes', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 35(12), pp. 2151–2163.
- Ladegaard, H.J. (2018) 'Codeswitching and emotional alignment: Talking about abuse in domestic migrant-worker returnee narratives', *Language in Society*, 47(5), pp. 693–714.

- Li, Y., Ashkanasy, N.M. & Ahlstrom, D. (2013) 'The rationality of emotions: A hybrid process model of decision-making under uncertainty', *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 31(1), pp. 293–308.
- Luna, D., Ringberg, T. & Peracchio, L.A. (2008) 'One Individual, Two Identities: Frame Switching among Biculturals', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(2), pp. 279–293.
- MacSwan, J. (2000) 'The architecture of the bilingual language faculty: evidence from intrasentential code switching', *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 3(1), pp. 37–54.
- Macswan, J. & Faltis, C. (2020) *Codeswitching in the classroom : critical perspectives on teaching, learning, policy, and ideology*. New York: Routledge.
- MUYSKEN, P. (2013) 'Language contact outcomes as the result of bilingual optimization strategies', *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 16(4), pp. 709–730.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (1998) *Codes and Consequences*. Oxford University Press.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (1993a) 'Common and uncommon ground: Social and structural factors in codeswitching', *Language in Society*, 22(4), pp. 475–503.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (1993b) *Social motivations for codeswitching : evidence from Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Myers-Scotton, C.M. & Jake, J.L. (2017) 'Revisiting the 4-M model: Codeswitching and morpheme election at the abstract level', *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 21pp. 340–366.
- Novakovich, J. & Shapard, R. (2000) *Stories in the Stepmother Tongue*. White Pine Press.
- Pavlenko, A. (2002) 'Bilingualism and emotions', *Multilingua - Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 21(1), pp. 45–78.
- Pavlenko, A. (2006) 'Emotions and Multilingualism', *Cambridge University Press*,
- Puntoni, S., de Langhe, B. & van Osselaer, S.M.J. (2009) 'Bilingualism and the Emotional Intensity of Advertising Language', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(6), pp. 1012–1025.

- Ramírez-Esparza, N., Gosling, S.D., Benet-Martínez, V., Potter, J.P. & Pennebaker, J.W. (2006) 'Do bilinguals have two personalities? A special case of cultural frame switching', *Journal of Research in Personality*, 40(2), pp. 99–120.
- Riker, W.H. (1962) *The theory of political coalitions*. New Haven, ©, Pr.
- Vano, A.M. & Pennebaker, J.W. (1997) 'Emotion Vocabulary in Bilingual Hispanic Children', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16(2), pp. 191–200.
- Verweij, M., Senior, T.J., Domínguez D., J.F. & Turner, R. (2015) 'Emotion, rationality, and decision-making: how to link affective and social neuroscience with social theory', *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 9.
- Williams, A., Srinivasan, M., Liu, C., Lee, P. & Zhou, Q. (2019) 'Why do bilinguals code-switch when emotional? Insights from immigrant parent–child interactions.', *Emotion*, 20(5),.
- Wong, G. & Ng, B.C. (2018) 'Moral Judgement in Early Bilinguals: Language Dominance Influences Responses to Moral Dilemmas', *Frontiers in Psychology*,

Appendix

Appendix 1

Demographic Questionnaire:

Background Information

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Education level:

Occupation:

Is your occupation related to your bilingualism or languages in any way?

Language Background

Do you speak any other languages apart from English and Spanish?

Which language do you consider your dominant language?

What language do you think in?

What language do you dream in?

What language(s) does the person(s) you live with speak? (partner/ family)

The place you live now, is your dominant language spoken there? (L1/L2 environment)

Name all the places you have lived and for how long, in order

English

At what age did you acquire/learn English?

How did you acquire English? Was it naturalistic (outside of education) or instructed (in education), or both?

On a scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent) how do you rate yourself in:

Speaking:

Comprehension:

Reading:

Writing:

How frequently do you use English (e.g every day, every week etc)

In what situations/ contexts do you use English?

Spanish

At what age did you acquire/ learn Spanish?

How did you acquire Spanish? Was it naturalistic (outside education) or instructed (in education) or both?

On a scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent) how do you rate yourself in:

Speaking:

Comprehension:

Reading:

Writing:

How frequently do you use Spanish? (e.g every day, every week etc)

In what situations/ contexts do you use Spanish?

Appendix 2

Dewaele, J.-M. and Pavlenko, A. (2001-2003) Web questionnaire Bilingualism and Emotions. University of London.

Available at:

[Web Questionnaire Bilingualism and Emoti | PDF | Multilingualism | Second Language](#)

[Accessed 15/12/2025]

Appendix 3

Interview Questions (English)

Code mixing/switching

1. How often do you switch between languages within a conversation?
2. When would you switch between languages within a conversation? (with friends and family, with strangers, at work)
3. Would you switch between languages depending on the context (Neutral matters, personal matters, emotional matters)

Identity

4. What language do you feel most culturally connected to? Why?
5. Do you feel like a different person for each language?

Emotions

6. Which language do you feel most emotional in? Why?
7. If you were to discuss some bad or difficult memories, which language would you prefer to use? Why?
8. Is it easier to talk about emotional topics in one language over another? Why?
9. Which language would you prefer to argue in?
10. Do you ever feel that one language feels 'too strong' for certain emotions?

Swearing, taboo and emotionally weighted items

11. Which language do you typically swear in? Why?
12. Do swear words/ taboo words have the same emotional weight to you in each language? Why?
13. When you swear or use an insult, does the language you use feel like a deliberate choice or an automatic reaction?
14. Does the phrase 'I love you' have the same emotional weight in each language? Why?
15. Do you have a preference for which language to use for terms of endearment/ emotional terms? Why
16. Are there certain things you feel you 'can't' say in one language?

Rationality and Strategic choice

17. Have you ever switched languages in an emotional moment without intending to?
18. Do you ever switch languages automatically, rather than choosing when to switch?
19. Do emotional moments ever push you to use a language you would usually avoid in that context?
20. Do you ever deviate from your usual language choice when you are emotional?
21. Do you ever realise afterwards that you have switched languages after an interaction?
22. Would you avoid talking about certain topics in one language?
23. Does this depend on who you are speaking to, or is it consistent across situations?

Appendix 4

Interview Questions (Spanish)

Alternancia de código (Code mixing/switching)

1. ¿Con qué frecuencia cambias de idioma dentro de una misma conversación?
2. ¿En qué momentos cambiarías de idioma en una conversación? (con amigos y familia, con desconocidos, en el trabajo).
3. ¿Cambiarías de idioma según el contexto? (temas neutros, temas personales, temas emocionales).

Identidad (Identity)

4. ¿Con qué idioma te sientes más conectado culturalmente? ¿Por qué?
5. ¿Sientes que eres una persona diferente según el idioma que hablas?

Emociones (Emotions)

6. ¿En qué idioma te sientes más emocional? ¿Por qué?
7. Si tuvieras que hablar de recuerdos malos o difíciles, ¿qué idioma preferirías usar? ¿Por qué?
8. ¿Te resulta más fácil hablar de temas emocionales en un idioma que en otro? ¿Por qué?
9. ¿En qué idioma preferirías discutir?
10. ¿Sientes alguna vez que un idioma es "demasiado fuerte" para ciertas emociones?

Tacos, tabúes y carga emocional (Swearing, taboo and emotionally weighted items)

11. ¿En qué idioma sueles decir palabrotas? ¿Por qué?
12. ¿Tienen los tacos o las palabras tabú el mismo peso emocional para ti en ambos idiomas? ¿Por qué?
13. Cuando dices una palabrota o un insulto, ¿sientes que es una elección deliberada o una reacción automática?
14. ¿Tiene la frase "te quiero" o "te amo" el mismo peso emocional en cada idioma? ¿Por qué?
15. ¿Prefieres usar un idioma concreto para los términos cariñosos o afectuosos? ¿Por qué?
16. ¿Hay cosas que sientes que "no puedes" decir en un idioma determinado?

Racionalidad y elección estratégica (Rationality and Strategic choice)

17. ¿Alguna vez has cambiado de idioma en un momento emocional sin quererlo?
18. ¿A veces cambias de idioma de forma automática, en lugar de elegir cuándo hacerlo?
19. ¿Los momentos emocionales te empujan alguna vez a usar un idioma que normalmente evitarías en ese contexto?

20. ¿Sueles desviarte de tu elección de idioma habitual cuando estás emocionado?
21. ¿Te das cuenta después de una interacción de que has cambiado de idioma sin haberte dado cuenta en el momento?
22. ¿Evitarías hablar de ciertos temas en un idioma concreto?
23. ¿Depende esto de con quién estés hablando o es algo constante en cualquier situación?

Appendix 5

Accessible URL Link for the dataset:

Final Dataset.xlsx

Note that Themes are organised by colour: Theme 1 (Pink), Theme 2 (Blue), Theme 3 (Green)