

# Codeswitching and Comedy in Catalonia

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## 1. Introduction

Many case studies have contributed to the understanding of the extent to which conversational language mixing or codeswitching in bilingual communities is orderly, systematic, and meaningful. A large number of those studies that attempt to move beyond the descriptive and taxonomic draw on two important approaches, one more narrowly linguistic, the other more social in its explanatory assumptions. The first approach is that which identifies syntactic constraints on codeswitching, and takes the sentence as the level of analysis; an important example is Poplack's (1980) "equivalence constraint", which states that the order of sentence constituents at a switch point must not violate the grammar of either language involved. While the emphasis in this perspective has been on constraining rather than facilitating conditions, some attention has nonetheless been given to identifying sentence-level syntactic points that might be particularly vulnerable to codeswitching (ibid., Gumperz 1982).

From the more social orientation, the emphasis is less on constraints against and more on motivations for or functions of codeswitching; the interaction event rather than the sentence is usually the unit of analysis. One of the most influential explanatory notions in this second perspective has been that of "metaphorical codeswitching" developed by Gumperz (Blom and Gumperz 1972). Metaphorical codeswitches are seen to acquire their meaning through reference to a basic "we/they" social dichotomy that is reflected in the associated languages. The social meaning of a particular instance of language switching will vary, depending on context, but in each case meaning is captured by filtering it through this "we/they" contrast and through the typical association of each code with particular domains of use.

Both of these approaches have yielded significant insights into the organization of multilingual speech repertoires, but neither alone nor together can they account for all the codeswitching phenomena encountered in various bilingual communities. In the following pages, rather than either the sentence or the interaction, the unit of analysis emphasized is the discourse structure of narrative in an extended case of Catalan-Castilian codeswitching. The aim is to contribute to an intermediate approach to identifying the orderliness and meaning of codeswitching that combines linguistic and social concerns, and that stresses the discourse functions of language variation as a necessary preliminary step to understanding the ultimate social force of such switching (cf. Gumperz 1982, Auer and Di Luzio 1983).

While my interest ultimately lies in understanding the social effect of language mixing, an interpretive approach to codeswitching can productively address not just psychological facts and

(transitory) personal, interactional goals of participants, but the larger social and political context in which communicative exchanges occur (cf. Gal 1986). Social effects achieved can depend not only on the personal attitude or emotional stance that might be said to be encoded by a particular switched chunk of speech (cf. Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez 1978), but on the structural slotting and informational load of such switches in the development of a narrative. I will suggest (as have others, including Sankoff 1980, Scotton 1983, Auer and Di Luzio 1983) that while metaphors of "we/they" are crucial in understanding the overarching meaning of the use of two languages in a speech event, any *particular* switched phrase is best understood not by direct reference to different social worlds associated with the two languages, but to other structural demands or possibilities in the development of a discourse.

## 2. The Socio-Political Context

The winter and spring of 1980 was a tense time politically and linguistically for the people of Barcelona, Spain. The Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia had been approved by public referendum the preceding fall, and now the people would go to the polls in March for the first Catalan parliamentary elections in nearly forty years. The numerous political parties were jockeying to define and attract their own constituencies, and some were playing upon divisions between Catalan-speaking natives (all bilingually competent in the state language, Castilian) and the large population of Castilian-speaking immigrants (predominantly monolingual or at best passively bilingual). Partly at issue in the elections was the role of the two ethnolinguistic groups in creating the new Catalonia.

At the same time, language choice in and of itself was stirring considerable feeling in segments of the city. Public debate centered on a polemical publication forecasting a dismal fate for the Catalan language if it was not aggressively protected (Argente et al. 1979). Moreover, refusals on the part of public figures to speak Catalan in some cases and Castilian in others created occasional uproars. Traditional norms for language choice in this bilingual community were challenged, and the population was unclear where change would or should take them. What language to speak and how to speak it were very live issues in Barcelona (Woolard 1986).

Much talk about talk could be heard, as well as varying choices of code for conversation. But one style that did not occur with any frequency was that of extended conversational codeswitching. There are very few naturalistic studies of code selection and switching in Barcelona in that period (or any other), but those that exist indicate that the interlocutor's linguistic affiliation was the primary determinant of code choice and of conversational switching (Calsamiglia and Tuson 1980, Woolard forthcoming). While in their study of teenage groups Calsamiglia and Tuson did find instances of conversational codeswitching not attributable to interlocutor's linguistic identity, which they identified as "metaphorical", almost all the examples in their data are of single nouns, many of which may well be legitimized borrowings, or frozen formulaic expressions such as curses.

The metaphorical and rhetorical possibilities of a bilingual repertoire were rarely exploited in Barcelona in the ways that have been documented for, e.g., Spanish-speaking communities in the U. S. (Poplack 1980, Woolford 1983, Zentella 1981). Two reasons can be given for this absence: first, what might be thought of as the in-group code among active bilinguals, Catalan, had considerable prestige of its own, thus reducing the usefulness of switches to Castilian to invoke

power, authority, formality, etc. (Woolard 1984, 1985). Equally important, the predominant interlocutor cue for code choice interacted with generalized anxiety about ethnic boundaries to inhibit codeswitching strategies. Most Catalan speakers (all bilingual) habitually and automatically switched to Castilian upon detecting the presence of a native Castilian-speaking interlocutor. Thus, to introduce Castilian extensively into a conversation might too easily be taken as indicating doubt about the Catalan identity and/or Catalan loyalty of an interlocutor, an identity and loyalty much prized by most natives (Woolard 1985, forthcoming).

During this same period, a professional comedian was building toward what came to be massive popular success in Barcelona. Eugenio, a nightclub entertainer, was in demand in both live performances and on commercial tape. It was hard to be unaware of Eugenio. He first came to my attention when the waiters at my neighborhood restaurant began recounting his jokes and insisted on lending me a copy of his tape. Within the next month, Eugenio was a smash hit. In the center of the city, one of the large department stores piped the recorded jokes onto the street, and passers-by stood on the sidewalk to listen and laugh. Long lines formed outside the Club Sausalito every night that Eugenio performed. The newspapers reviewed or mentioned him frequently. By late spring, Eugenio's jokes were being recounted to me spontaneously by teenagers I interviewed in the working class suburbs of the city.

There are undoubtedly many factors that account for Eugenio's remarkable popularity: good public relations and a good media response, quick distribution of the commercial cassettes, simple faddism. There was nothing particularly new about Eugenio's jokes; most were standard set pieces of the "did you hear the one about..." variety. (Several were already known to me in an English version.) Clearly Eugenio's dry delivery and almost unfailing comic 'timing' were important factors in his success. But one feature of his performance stood out in most people's minds, and they pointed to it repeatedly to account for Eugenio's comic appeal. As one newspaper put it, the most distinctive feature of Eugenio's joketelling was his "promiscuous" mixing of Catalan and Castilian.

A variety of informants told me that what was appealing - "*la gracia*"<sup>1</sup> - about his style was that "you can't tell what language he's speaking." This judgment was heard from native Catalan speakers as well as Castilian speakers. Even when questioned immediately after listening to a commercial tape, some listeners said that Eugenio speaks basically *la barreja* - 'a mixture' - when telling his jokes.

There has been considerable discussion in the literature on how to identify particular stretches of speech as codeswitching, borrowing, interference, etc. This problem is greatly exacerbated in the case of Catalan and Castilian, which are closely related languages that share much syntax and vocabulary, and differ primarily in phonetics and phonology; moreover, due to political constraints on language learning, many Catalan speakers use nonstandard forms greatly influenced by contact with Castilian. However, even allowing for such difficulties, on examination one can identify a basic language for Eugenio's humorous narratives, and this language is Castilian. By an admittedly rough count, approximately 80% of the overall performance analyzed here is in Castilian, and only 20% in Catalan.<sup>2</sup>

This situation provides a new twist on the phenomenon of categorical perception described by Labov (1966), in which deviation from a norm is perceived as far more salient than its actual

frequency would warrant; variable performance is perceived as categorical. However, in Barcelona the norm is to use either Catalan or Castilian categorically, and conversational codeswitching is minimal and often discouraged by social forces. Therefore it seems in the case of Eugenio that any deviation towards codeswitching or mixing is categorically perceived as "mixed" and linguistically unidentifiable.

Two questions arise about this phenomenon, and these are addressed in the following analysis. First, it is of interest to know what it is that Eugenio does to create the impression that "you can't tell what language he's speaking", given that the two languages are not equally represented in his speech. Secondly, I wish to consider why this should be so funny and lead to such enormous public success. What social message did Eugenio's code manipulations create that was so appealing to so many people at that time and place?

### 3. Data and Analysis

There are several commercial cassettes of Eugenio's jokes available. This analysis is based on the first tape, the one that carried him to local fame. The tape is 51 minutes long and contains 55 different jokes, varying in length from four-second one liners to shaggy dog stories lasting 3 minutes and 40 seconds. The jokes were recorded before a live audience, and laughter, applause, and other audience responses are mostly preserved on the tape. It is not certain that all the jokes were taped on the same night or that they constitute an entire sequential performance. Much of it flows smoothly from one joke to another, and deliberate rapid sequencing is apparent, but a few splices are also obvious. Nonetheless, it does appear that most of the jokes came from the same performance, and there is clear linkage between the beginning of the performance and the last joke, which refers back to an initial comment from the audience. In any case, the tape itself became a public event to which listeners who had never seen Eugenio responded as a whole performance, and it is reasonable to analyze it as such.

While the greater part of Eugenio's performance is identifiably Castilian in lexicon, morphology and even phonology, five factors create the reasonable perception of extensive language-mixing. These are some phonological shibboleths of Catalan "accent"; characteristic Catalan prosodic patterns; morpho-syntactic "interference"; the repeated use of a small set of Catalan formulaic phrases and single lexical items (primarily terms of address) that might be viewed either as borrowings or switches; and finally innovative or "fresh" codeswitching. The first four I will discuss only briefly, in order to concentrate on the last, which is peculiar to Eugenio's performance.

**3.1 Phonology.** While Catalan and Castilian are closely related Romance languages, phonology is one of the principal systems in which they differ. In speaking Castilian, Eugenio shows the influence of Catalan in the vowel system. He tends to reduce unstressed vowels, to make monophthongs of Castilian diphthongs, and to use 'open' versions of 'o' and 'e' where they would be found in Catalan equivalents of Castilian words. Catalan influence leads Eugenio to velarize 'l' before back vowels. And finally he forms characteristic Catalan liaisons between words in Castilian utterances by eliding unstressed vowels and assimilating voiceless consonants to following voiced segments:



- (6) *Estabas a Igualada.* 'You were in Igualada'  
 Standard Castilian would be :  
*Estabas en Igualada.*  
 And prescriptively correct Catalan would be:  
*Eres a Igualada.*

However, these prepositions, *en/a*, and the *ser/estar* verb distinction, which are distributed differently across semantic space in Catalan than in Castilian, suffer considerable interference in the speech of the general population. In the context of discourse clearly marked as belonging to one of the languages, utterance (6) would not create any confusion about what language a person is speaking, although it might draw correction from language purists of either stripe. It is only because of other elements in the context that Eugenio provides that this kind of interference creates ambiguity; its interpretation is influenced by occasions when he clearly does switch languages. Elements that ordinarily would be taken as Castilian pronounced with a Catalan accent or with morphological interference are reanalyzable as Catalan when we find that they have provided a bridge from unambiguous Castilian to unambiguous Catalan.<sup>4</sup>

These phonological, prosodic, lexical, and morphological cues are partially responsible for the characteristic impression Eugenio creates. But the fact that they have such a high incidence in ordinary popular speech makes it difficult to explain why they would arouse so much commentary on his language patterns. It is possible that Eugenio's speech is indeed representative of Barcelona, and that it provokes comment not because it is unusual, but because it is heard on a public stage; perhaps audiences are accustomed toward more movement toward standard in public performers. This explanation is not generally borne out, however, by the Castilian heard from many political leaders and figures appearing on radio and television at the time, often marked by weak or strong Catalan accents.

Codeswitching proper, rather than just "interference" and borrowing, is the one variable that Eugenio does use to a much greater extent than the general population, and it is this phenomenon which gives force to his other Catalanizing strategies and lends salience to his style. There are many examples of codeswitches into Catalan in his performance, of both the inter- and intra-sentential variety. These switches are clear at central points although the borders are often fuzzy; it is sometimes possible to know that a codeswitch has taken place but quite literally not be able to identify where it began.

For example, his trademark joke introduction, so typical of Eugenio that it was taken as the title of his second cassette, is:

- (7) *El saben aquel...* 'Do you know the one...'

There is a predictable pause after every occurrence of this phrase, and it consistently evokes some laughter. *Saben* (third person plural or distant/polite second person plural of *saber*, 'to know'), is both a Catalan and a Castilian verb. The two differ only in the phonetic realization of the second vowel, which is reduced to schwa in Catalan. However, many Catalans often reduce their unstressed vowels in both languages. The important point is that the linguistic affiliation of the verb is ambiguous, and Eugenio takes advantage of this fact. *El* is the Catalan masculine object

pronoun (Castilian lo), while aquel is a Castilian demonstrative pronoun (Catalan aquell, ending in a palatal lateral).

Thus the phrase clearly begins in Catalan, and the first two words could be considered Catalan. But the third element is clearly Castilian, leading us to reanalyze the verb, which could also be Castilian. The phrase is perfectly balanced, partaking equally of both systems through the double valence of the central element. Quite literally, from this phrase alone one cannot tell what language Eugenio is speaking. From the pauses that often occur after this phrase, and the fact that it was adopted as the title of the cassette, we might infer that in this construction Eugenio is consciously exploiting the close linguistic relationship of Catalan and Castilian.

Eugenio introduces unambiguously Catalan segments into every joke he tells. This would seem quite promiscuous language behavior by community standards. However, his promiscuity is not without discretion. Some of the switches are so systematic as to be virtually categorical. Most significant of these is the distribution of the Catalan and Castilian third person singular forms of 'say' (diu and dice, respectively), an item which crops up with great frequency in stand-up jokes.

The impression created in my circle of friends in Barcelona was that these forms were frequently juxtaposed: "dice, diu, dice, diu..." was a catch phrase we used to index inside references to his jokes. A few listeners (including myself) would have sworn that this was the second most characteristic phrase in Eugenio's delivery. But in fact, in the entire 55 jokes, the immediate juxtaposition of these two verb forms occurs only once, although diu occurs 410 times and dice 62 times.

What analysis shows instead is a functional division of labor between the two forms when they are examined in terms of the discourse structure. Eugenio has taken advantage of his bilingual repertoire to create different markers for different parts of his comedic narrative. His standard framing device for the preamble to each joke is roughly 'Do you know the one that says...', Here, he uses the Castilian form invariantly:

- (8) Dice que hay un tio... 'Says there's this guy...'  
 (9) Dice que era... 'Says there was...'

The Catalan form, diu, on the other hand, is used for a very different discourse purpose. It occurs later in most narratives, after the expository preamble introduced by dice, and it indicates that quotation of a character's speech will follow (most of the complication of the jokes is developed through direct speech):

- (10) Dice que hay un tio que va al medico,  
y diu, "Hace una temporada..."

"Says there was this guy who goes to the doctor,  
 and he says, "For a while now..."

It is repeated often, and interjected frequently into the reporting of the speech:

- (11) Li diu, diu, "Oiga", diu, "le vendo un reloj."

'He says to him, he says, "Listen", he says, "I'll sell you a watch."

The use of **diu** indicates nothing about the language of the quote to follow; sometimes it is Catalan and more often Castilian. **Diu** simply indicates that speech is about to be reported.

Exceptions to this rule are extremely rare. In only four instances does dice stand immediately before a direct character quotation. In two of these, the narrative frames are collapsed. These are not jokes that begin with a general exposition and then go on to develop action and verbal exchange. Rather, the joke is a representation of three turns of speech, with no introductory exposition:

- (12) Dice, "Oiga, padre," diu, "Usted es el que aparta a las mujeres del mal?"

Diu, "Sí, hijo, sí."

Diu, "Apártame dos para el sábado, si us plau."

Says, "Listen, Father," he says, "are you the one who saves women from sin?"

He says, "Yes, son, yes."

He says, "Save me two for Saturday, please."

We can see in this joke that Eugenio does not use the two language forms to distinguish different speakers, but rather always uses the same form - **diu** - for the same narrative function of introducing a quote, regardless of the number of characters. The collapse of the narrative frames here enables and induces the apparent violation of the division of linguistic labor that I have posited. This is confirmed by the second of the three anomalous occurrences of dice before a quote, in which we see an identical collapse of the expository and quoting narrative frames:

- (13) Dice, "Oiga", diu, "Usted domina el inglés?"

"Pues, sí, si es bajito y se deja."

'Says, "Listen", he says, "Do you control (the) English?"

"Well, yes, if he's short and he allows it."

That there is a nearly categorical rule for **diu** before quotation appears to be confirmed by the other construction which occurs occasionally. In nine instances, dice is used to introduce a character's speech, but a noun phrase intervenes between the verb and the quotation:

- (14) Dice el portugués, "Qué dices..."

'The Portuguese says, "What are you saying..."'

- (15) La madre dice a los hijos, "Fills meus..."

'The mother says to the children, "My children"..."'

In seven other cases, not only does a noun phrase intervene, but the Catalan **diu** is then used as the immediate introduction to the quote:



(16) Dice el otro, diu, "Mira..."    The other says, he say, "Look..." '

(17) Dice el medico, diu, "Uy!..."    The doctor says, he says, "Uy!" '

On the few occasions when another layer is added to the narrative and a character is represented as quoting himself or another, Eugenio again uses his bilingual repertoire as well as a change in tense to separate discourse levels, and to distinguish himself from the internal, fictional narrator. For narrative-internal quotes, the past tense of the Castilian form is used:

(18) "Buho', hijo, dije 'buho'".    "Owl", son, I said "owl."

(19) Me dijeron que estabas a Igualada..  
"They told me that you were in Igualada."

The categorical assignment of a particular discourse function to Catalan, that of indicating that a character's speech is about to be reported, accounts for all the codeswitches into Catalan in 12 of the jokes (over 25%). In five more jokes, the entire presence of Catalan is accounted for by diu + indirect object pronoun: li diu ('he says to him'). And in ten more jokes, the use of Catalan is accounted for by li diu and one formulaic phrase or term of address. In all, the use of Catalan in half of the jokes is restricted to these simple and quite predictable devices. Calculated in terms of switch points, "diu" accounts for an even greater proportion of the Catalan present. Seventy percent of the switches into Catalan occur at a verb, and nearly all of these verb forms are "diu."

This extremely simple yet systematic codeswitching strategy does much to establish Eugenio's dual linguistic claim, in spite of the relatively minor presence of Catalan lexicon, because a salient part of the narrative frame is executed in each language. One slot is much higher in frequency than the other, allowing many Catalans tokens for one type, but both slots are structurally salient, thus creating the impression of juxtaposition and balance between the two languages.

No other codeswitch is as categorical or predictable as that just described. But there are other structures that are staples of Eugenio's narrative style, flexible formulas that crop up often in one form or another. These show a great propensity for codeswitching. Outstanding among these forms is any construction involving the formula "one...to the other". The most common is "one says to the other", and it naturally interacts with the use of Catalan for 'says' in this position. Often the entire clause, except for the following quote which constitutes the verb complement, is affected. But as can be seen in the examples from the tape given below, it appears that almost any switch point is permissible, underlining the almost morpheme for morpheme equivalence of Catalan and Castilian syntax and supporting Poplack's hypothesized syntactic equivalence constraint:

- (20) a. uno li dice al otro  
b. uno li diu al otro  
c. un li diu al otro  
d. uno li diu al altre  
e. un li diu al altre

Repetition and parallel structures are characteristic stylistic devices in many of Eugenio's jokes. Seven stories on the tape rely to some extent on repetition to set the scene and build anticipation for the punchline. In six of these, switching to Catalan occurs in the repeated phrases. In the seventh, codeswitching does not occur. In this joke, repetition is not simply the set-up for the punchline, it also is the punchline. Codeswitching is avoided in this case where exact repetition makes the punchline effective.

In all of the parallel structures where codeswitching is used, the first occurrence is in Castilian, and only in successive mentions is Catalan introduced. This underlines the point that Castilian is the primary language of most of the narration, and that Catalan is most often called into play as a special device to accomplish particular discourse tasks or for playful embellishment in structural slots that do not carry a significant load of new information:

(21) Y al pasar por este lado de mejilla la hace un corte. Pasa al otro lado de la galta, le hace otro corte.

'And going over this side of the cheek, he cuts it. He goes over to the other side of the cheek, he cuts him again.'

(22) ...cierto día se le acerca un individuo...  
 ... al día siguiente, un altre tio que se li acosta...  
 ... el tercer día un altro tio que se li acerca...

'...one day an individual comes up to him...  
 ...the next day another guy comes up to him...  
 ...the third day another guy comes up to him...'

Once we have extracted these strategies for switching to Catalan, one of them nearly categorical, the others fairly regular if not entirely predictable, almost no Catalan remains to explain in the majority of jokes. Eugenio creates the effect of rampant language mixture primarily through the use of a small number of devices.

However, there are three stories on the tape that involve considerable use of Catalan in unpredictable positions; positions, moreover, where some information may actually be lost for those who don't understand Catalan. In these jokes the switches are extensive, but even here Catalan does not constitute more than 35% of the narrative.

In these three stories, Catalan is used both for descriptive exposition and for character speech, although there is more of this last. (Probably simply because the jokes in general involve more quoted speech than description or reported action.) In none of these jokes is Catalan associated exclusively with one character while Castilian is used for the other, in either speech or description, although this might be our expectation from knowledge of dialect jokes elsewhere. Catalan is not used to tag or identify a character, except perhaps in one joke which involves a Catalan peasant, who is always referred to with the Catalan form, *el pagès*. But even here, Catalan is used extensively in describing the other character, who is a German tourist.

Systematic patterning of these extended switches is not readily apparent in the way that it is for the predominating switches discussed above. Although a certain amount of headway can be

made by looking at these more elaborate switches in terms of discourse functions such as summarization or elaboration of preceding information, such a tactic is not particularly fruitful overall. There is, however, one very important generalization that can be made at a relatively broad level of discourse analysis: codeswitching to Catalan does not appear in the punchline of the jokes. I believe that this generalization can lead us to an understanding of the social meaning of Eugenio's popularity. Before further discussing the switching pattern, then, I will briefly consider some sources of bilingual and interethnic humor, and their appropriateness to this case.

Other studies of intergroup humor have focused on joking as an expression of social conflict or social control (e.g., Burma 1946, Zijderveld 1968). However, that kind of analysis derives from jokes which specifically stereotype and usually denigrate an ethnic or linguistic outgroup. In this performance, Eugenio rarely draws on ethnic stereotypes to create his humorous effects. There are only two such jokes in the repertoire, one aimed at the Andalusian (the main working class immigrant group in Barcelona) and one at the Catalan. Only one joke pokes fun at language attitudes or patterns *per se*, and the target of this one is the Gallego, an Iberian ethnicity not well represented in Barcelona.

Nor is Eugenio telling "dialect jokes" about Catalans. He rarely if ever sketches a Catalan character by mimicking his speech for comic effect, although he shows that this is a tactic he is capable of when he imitates Germans, Russians, Gallegos, and in one case, Andalusians. Many of Eugenio's jokes are puns, but they are not bilingual puns and do not depend on knowledge of the two languages for their humor.

We might entertain the hypothesis that the use of Catalan itself is comic, that as a minority language it sounds funny and has the comic associations discussed by Weinreich (1974). However, because of the high prestige enjoyed by Catalan, this seems unlikely and indeed does not seem to be the case. Since audience response and laughter are captured on the tape, I was able to check for the effect of the introduction of Catalan. In almost no case is there laughter after a Catalanism or a Catalan word. This occurs in only two places on the tape, and thus seems more likely to be coincidence than indicative of a patterned source of humor. Except for these two occasions, no codeswitch draws immediate laughter, even when there are pauses that would accommodate it.

Most of these are a stand-up comedian's classic punch-line dependent jokes. People hold in their laughter throughout the exposition, waiting expectantly for the real humor. And here lies the most socially significant point about the distribution of Catalan across the narrative structure. Of the 55 jokes, the punchline comes in Catalan only one time. And the exception proves the rule: in the introduction to that one story, Eugenio explicitly disclaims it as a joke, calling it instead a fable that the audience may interpret as it wishes. Moreover, when the punchline does come in this "fable", laughter is only moderate, even though this is a favorite story that was requested by more than one audience member at the beginning of the session.

It is useful to compare this finding to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's study of English-Yiddish codeswitching in humorous narratives told in the Jewish community of Ontario (1972). Her primary generalization is the exact opposite of what is found in Eugenio's stories. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discovered that in her collection, if switching to Yiddish occurred at all, it was most likely to happen in the punchline. If one generalization can be made about the present

corpus, it is that switching to Catalan will not occur in the punchline.

The difference in the discourse slotting of switches in these two corpora is directly related to the difference in the social functions of switching. In the Yiddish case, codeswitching is a test of ingroup membership. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reports that speakers in the Ontario community are proud of their command of Yiddish and use it in structural slots that carry a high information load as a way of testing the competence of others who claim full membership in the community of Yiddish speakers. This is appropriate to what we know about codeswitching from most other sociolinguistic analyses, where it is an ingroup phenomenon restricted to those who share the same expectations and rules of interpretation for the use of the two languages. Codeswitching is thus usually seen as a device used to affirm participants' claims to membership and the solidarity of the group in contrast to outsiders.

From this significant difference in the distribution of codeswitching across the punchline, we can identify the important differences in the meaning of the speech event in the two communities. In Eugenio's performances, codeswitching is used for boundary-levelling rather than boundary-maintaining purposes, and is popular for exactly that reason. The use of the two languages in a way that doesn't obscure critical information for any listeners eases rather than emphasizes group boundaries in Barcelona, and allows the widest possible audience to participate (cf. Tuson, n.d.).

Eugenio demonstrates a use of the two languages that is different from their use in the community, and one that breaks down two of the most tension-creating associations in the socio-political context of the time: the identification of language choice with ethnic boundaries (i.e., Catalan for native Catalans only), and the entrenched but besieged norm of selecting Castilian for public uses. It is not an absence of reference to group boundaries through language use, but the explicit *overriding* of them that is appealing. A bilingual Catalan and a monolingual Castilian can equally participate in the event and not lose any enjoyment of the humor, appreciating these punchline-dependent jokes fully. They could do this in Castilian, as well. But the actual use of both languages and their varying distribution across characters is an important denial of the boundary-identifying force of the two languages.

There is, of course, ambiguity in the appeal, which is also an essential ingredient in Eugenio's success. Catalans can get special enjoyment from his jokes because they are hearing their own suppressed language used in front of a broad public audience. This use is not at their expense as would be the case in dialect jokes, nor is it associated here with the old-fashioned, the quaint, or the "corny" - Eugenio is a hip young comedian whose material is spiced with references to drugs and sex. On the other hand, a Castilian can enjoy the performance because he is listening to Catalan and "getting it", not being excluded from a (usually prestigious) Catalan ingroup event (cf. Heller 1982, Auer 1984 discussed in Gal 1986, for other uses of codeswitching for boundary-levelling rather than maintaining purposes.)

Most importantly, in Eugenio's jokes, a fictional world is modelled where the two languages have found a peaceful coexistence. Neither one has had to disappear; they are both in use, side by side, but there is no battle line between them like that encountered in the real world. The last story on the tape brings home the social symbolism that seems to be at work in Eugenio's overall performance. This is the story that members of the audience request from the very beginning of the

recorded show, and that Eugenio finally gives them at the end. It is also the one joke in which the punchline is delivered in Catalan. However, Eugenio explicitly disclaims it as a joke in his introduction, calling the story a fable, an allegory, and inviting the audience to interpret it. I thus feel entitled to do so.

The tale is a shaggy dog story, or rather a talking pigeon story. It was no doubt once a punchline-dependent joke - the joke being that the pigeon is an hour late for a date because it was such a nice day that he decided to walk. But Eugenio spins out and elaborates the exposition - this is the longest story on the tape - then rushes the punchline in a way most untypical of his usual splendid timing. What we are left with is the touching story of a man and a pigeon who meet in the central square of the city, discover that each can talk and that they can converse, and become intimate friends in spite of disbelief and disdain from the man's family; this is a friendship that puts his sanity in question at home, but he insists on inviting the pigeon to dinner. Both the pigeon, Amadeu, and the fellow, Cirili, speak Catalan and Castilian equally well, and they switch back and forth between the two.

Here we have the ultimate assertion that communication across group boundaries is not only possible but worthwhile. The group boundary in this case is that between humans and birds; the illustration may be humorous but the point is pertinent (Levi-Strauss 1969 explains the frequent appearance of birds appear in mythology as deriving from a view of the bird world is an inverted image the human society).<sup>5</sup> There is a message in this seemingly silly story that people might have been relieved and happy to hear in this city where linguistic and ethnic tensions threatened to break out. This message is both enacted and encoded, the bilingual form itself indexing the cross-boundary action, in the following bilingual exchange from the "fable":

(23) Amadeu: "*Hola, maco*".

Cirili: "*Caray! Que hablas t  ?*"

Amadeu: "*Clar que parlo. No hablas t  , tambien?*"

Amadeu: "Hi goodlooking."

Cirili: "Geez! You can speak?"

Amadeu: "Of course I can speak. Don't you speak too?"

From this initial exchange, the friendship grows, and Amadeu and Cirili delight in each other's company and conversation. Not all of Eugenio's jokes illustrate the overriding of social boundaries quite so graphically, and I make no claim that the teller was conscious of the bilingual yet boundary-free world he created. Nonetheless, in his codeswitching performances, Eugenio gave many of the people of Barcelona something that was at once amusingly abnormal and of enormous and easy appeal: a world in which the two languages could peacefully but meaningfully coexist, at no cost to anyone.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

I have argued that, as has often been shown to be the case in studies of codeswitching, the juxtaposition of two languages in Eugenio's performance conveys a social message, a message as important as the literal content in determining the comedian's success. What we have seen, however, is that the link between switched utterance and social effect is not the direct one that has

been described for many codeswitching situations. In this case, codeswitching does not index a direct association between certain topics or social realms and a specific language. Nor do Eugenio's codeswitches have the direct effect of metaphorical codeswitching, where the use of a particular language adds a connotation of, e.g. intimacy, distancing, mitigation or authority to the switched utterance itself. In the material analyzed here, the social message is not one that exploits the social contrasts between two languages or language groups to achieve rhetorical effects.

However, this is not to say that the social meaning of the event derives simply from the fact that the two languages are used, and that they could be used randomly. As we have seen the placement of the two languages is neither random nor unimportant, and this is best appreciated if we take as the unit of analysis neither the sentence nor the whole public performance as a speech or interaction event, but rather the narrative structure of the individual joke. We find that certain structural slots either demand switching to Catalan or create enabling conditions, while other structural slots in the narrative categorically constrain switching to Catalan. Although uses of Catalan are not especially frequent, they are judicious and occupy salient positions that nonetheless bear a low information load.

On the other hand, these performances have an audience with an unequal distribution of knowledge of the two languages and importantly, an increasingly anomic vision of the social distribution of the two languages. I have argued that the relatively predictable distribution of codeswitching across the narrative structure of the joke interacts with this distribution of the languages across social groups to produce in a more indirect way the social meaning of the codeswitching event. The symbolic social message, that the two languages and thus language communities can co-exist and interact peacefully, is indeed contained in the whole event rather than specifically in any of its switched parts. But it is very much a product of those specific parts, and the same social effect would not result from a different distribution of the two languages.

## NOTES

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1. Throughout the paper, Castilian forms that are cited will be underlined and Catalan forms will appear in boldface. At transition points between the two languages, words whose affiliation is ambiguous or uncertain will be italicized.

2. The proportions for Catalan and Castilian given here are based on a word count of the entire corpus. Words that are of Catalan origin but morphologically integrated into Castilian are counted as borrowings, and therefore Castilian, not codeswitches, but unintegrated words (which may well also be standard community borrowings) are counted as codeswitches.

Many words throughout the transcript are of ambiguous affiliation and conceivably could be either Catalan or Castilian. The method followed here was to count a word as Castilian if it was both preceded and followed by Castilian words; similarly, it was counted as Catalan if preceded and followed by clearly Catalan words. However, where at a transition point between Castilian and Catalan, and vice versa, words that could belong to either language were counted in a separate category as "ambiguous." While an interesting category, it is numerically relatively insignificant because of the definition used.

3. This construction is so common in Barcelona Castilian that it can cause problems for native Castilian speakers from other regions. A Castilian speaker from Valencia reported that she had to ask a Barcelona resident to help her out in an interchange with a waiter. On sitting down at a cafe table, she inquired "¿Qué se puede comer?" - "What can one eat?" - and the reply came back, "Sí" - "Yes", obviously in response to a different question, "¿Que se puede comer?" - "(Is it the case) that one can eat?" The interrogative pronoun and coordinate conjunction are pronounced identically in Castilian.

4. Because the two languages in question are so closely related, the distinction drawn by Auer and Di Luzio between codeswitching and codeshifting does not apply here. They found that abrupt alternation - switching - occurred between languages, while gradual transition - shifting - occurred only among the varieties within a language. Eugenio's deployment of Catalan and Castilian resembles their notion of code shifting perhaps more than switching.

5. Hervé Varenne first pointed out to me the relevance here of Levi-Strauss' observation.

6. In the course of preparing this article I met a young Catalan man named Amadeu whose personal experience demonstrates the extent to which Eugenio's story captured the popular imagination in Barcelona. Returning in 1980 from his stint of military service in the southern Spanish province of Granada, Amadeu bought a copy of La Vanguardia newspaper at the train station and arrived at home with it under his arm, to find family and friends rolling with laughter. Never having heard of Eugenio while in the south, he didn't know about the famous pigeon Amadeu, who turned up at Cirili's house with La Vanguardia under a wing, but he quickly learned from repeated recountings about his well-known namesake.

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