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**Learning from Movies -
'Slumdog Millionaire' and Language Awareness**

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Abstract

It is important for language teachers and students in multilingual societies to know when, why and with whom a language should be chosen. In this way teachers and students can make links between their linguistic repertoire and the discourse norms of the various interlocutors in such a diverse society. Those with limited language proficiency when speaking to someone who speak a different language might have to use various communicative strategies acquired from their first language to compensate for their lack of proficiency in their speech partner's language. This paper describes the communicative strategies in interactions as used in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* to show how an audience outside India, could actually understand the movie which is not entirely in English. This paper shows how a diverse audience who can speak English but not Hindi are able to negotiate meanings through the dialogues which display the use of unique communicative strategies. Learners and teachers can learn from movies such as *Slumdog Millionaire* and become sociolinguistically competent in a multilingual society. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, which will be discussed, the characters who are young urbanites code mix many English lexical items in their Hindi dialogues.

Keywords: *teacher, learner, communicative strategies, movies*

Introduction

Teachers and students in a multilingual society must be aware of the various discourse norms in a multilingual society. One such norm is the choice of the correct language to use with different

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 7 July 2010

Maya David, Ph.D. and Caesar DeAlwis, Ph.D.

Learning from Movies – “Slumdog Millionaire” and Language Awareness

interlocutors depending on the setting and objective of the discourse. Communicative strategies are normally employed to overcome inadequacies in communication and these strategies should be taught to students to cope with sociolinguistic variables in multilingual societies. According to Fishman (1972), a community is expected to be sensitive to the domain in which interactions take place. The language used a domain depends on the participants or interlocutors, their role relationships, the topics under discussion and the setting. Hence, teachers and students through the use of movies, may acquire such language awareness.

One easy way of making language teachers and learners aware of the sociolinguistic norms of when, where, why a particular language should be used is to extract excerpts of spoken discourse. Taking examples from 'Slumdog Millionaire', the writers will show how such language awareness can be realized. English teachers and students in multilingual settings will benefit from using such instructional materials.

Communicative strategies

A number of communicative strategies are used in *Slumdog Millionaire* to connect with an international audience. The concept of communicative strategies is not foreign in sociolinguistics. Bialystok (1983:103) defines communicative strategies as 'all attempts to manipulate a limited linguistic system in order to promote communication.' In addition, Tarone (1983: 64) states that communicative strategies are used to compensate for some lack in the linguistic system, and focus on exploring alternate ways of using what one does not know for the transmission of a message, without necessarily considering situational appropriateness. Although Thao Le (2005) says that communicative strategies are often used in daily interaction. David (2001) is of the opinion that they serve to compensate for the inadequacies of speakers and listeners in the target language which is being used. To summarize, communicative strategies are strategies employed by speakers when they counter a communication problem during conversation.

As Crystal says (1998: 137) "even if new Englishes did become increasingly different, as years went by, the consequences for World English would not necessarily be fatal." The movie, as a product, succeeds in showcasing its ability to show the needs of linguistic pragmatism.

Boyle (2006) says that he has taken the stand to face the challenges head-on through his aspirations to make the movie appealing to an international audience. According to him, his team had to monitor the language used by the actors and work out appropriate and acceptable standards of English/Hindi for both their Indian and international audience. By saying that the use of English in the movie is for international comprehensibility it largely means that it has a linguistic standard in order to get the message across effectively to the international audience. To achieve this various communicative strategies such as code-switching, code-convergence, translation and code-mixing are used to retain its Indian identity and to communicate with the international audience.

This paper will show how ESL teachers can make use of movies like *Slumdog Millionaire* to create language awareness and make students aware of language usage. The materials culled from the movie can be used to discuss issues like with them when , where, why, and who uses code-switching as a communicative strategy.

Code-switching a universal phenomenon

Gumperz (1982, p.97) defines code-switching as a discourse phenomenon in which speakers rely on juxtapositions of grammatically distinct subsystems to generate conversational inferences. Conversational code-switching is defined by Gumperz (1982, p.59) as a situation when a speaker may switch code, that is , varieties , within a single sentence, and may even do so several times.

For this paper, code-switching, as a communicative strategy will be focused on as it is the most common strategy used in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. Code-switching in movie dialogues is a common phenomenon in Bollywood movies nowadays. Perhaps, it would not have been written if it does not sound natural to native Hindi speakers. However, such code-switching practices have indirectly made it easier for an international audience to comprehend the movies from Bollywood. Danny Boyle, the British director of *Slumdog Millionaire*, script writer Simon Beaufoy and co-director in India Loveleen Tandan, have also adopted code-switching for the dialogues without any qualms about using English in the Hindi movie dialogues.

Code-switching in the classroom is frowned upon. Nevertheless code-switching can be used as a pedagogical strategy for the less proficient pupils who are learning the target language. Martin (1996, pp.140-141) argued that code-switching can contribute to the accomplishment of teaching and learning in the classroom. Jacobson (1983, cited in Cook, 1991) advocates the ‘New Concurrent Approach’ that outlines the use of code-switching as a pedagogical tool.

Slumdog Millionaire has these criteria to be used as a pedagogical tool

- i. The content of the movie is not to be interrupted even though English is used intermittently with Hindi.
- ii. Both languages are used throughout the movie.
- iii. The decisions to switch relate to when, who is speaking to who and where it happens.

Synopsis of the Movie *Slumdog Millionaire*

Jamal Malik (Dev Patel), an 18 year old orphan from the slums of Mumbai, is about to experience the biggest day of his life when he is merely a question away from winning a staggering twenty million rupees on India’s version of “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” However, when the show breaks for the night, police arrest him of suspicion of cheating simply because a slum boy could not have known all the answers to all the questions asked. Desperate, Jamal tells the police about his life in the slums and how he cleverly

answered the questions in the show as they were related to his life and experience. He tells of adventures on the road, of vicious encounters with local gangs, and of Latika, the girl he loves. Every chapter of his story reveals the key to the questions posed. Recounting his life history to the police, Jamal is close to winning twenty million rupees. He proves his innocence and continues with the game. He confidently answers the final question but not before a series of incidents befalling his brother Salim and Latika.

Why This Analysis of *Slumdog Millionaire*

Slumdog Millionaire has been chosen for analysis because it is highly popular and has been watched by millions of people around the world. The use of English code-switches in *Slumdog Millionaire* subconsciously reminded that English has “acquired unparalleled functional and societal depth” (Kachru, 1994: 3) as it has its own distinctive roles in the Indian multilingual society. Simon Beaufoy’s script was originally entirely in English, but film director Boyle’s decision to have the children speak Hindi, instead, is the right call. Having the children speak in their native language makes perfect sense, especially because Boyle and Beaufoy depict the realism of the children’s lives.

How to use code-switching in *Slumdog Millionaire* in the classroom

i. Exploitation of the learners’ L1

Cole (1998, p.11) points out that the learning of an L2 can be enhanced through the exploitation of the learners’ L1. In other words, the L2 can act as a scaffold or bridge linking the unknown to the known. Learners and teachers should be aware that code-switching in *Slumdog Millionaire* takes place without the interlocutors being consciously aware of it. Code-switching is, therefore, as shown in *Slumdog Millionaire*, an occurrence that may sometimes not even be a conscious choice. The code-switching practices in *Slumdog Millionaire* takes place unconsciously as a strategy to communicate more effectively among the interlocutors in the movie. Thus, through *Slumdog Millionaire*, new knowledge and language awareness is also conveyed to teachers and learners through code-switching as a strategy that expedites teaching and learning of English to those who already know Hindi but little English.

ii. To build a bridge between old and new

Code-switching in *Slumdog Millionaire* is also used by the interlocutors to reiterate a new point. In this repetition function, teachers can help learners by building a bridge between old and new knowledge. One of the main aims of code-switching in *Slumdog Millionaire* is to ensure international audience comprehensibility. Thus, the teachers and learners should be aware that code-switching as used in the movie helps to convey a more exact meaning to the audience. It also helps to ease communication with those who are less proficient in the target language.

Apart from reiterating a point, code-switching in *Slumdog Millionaire* also tells the teachers and learners that it is a useful strategy to capture someone's attention and to communicate more effectively. The more matured Jamal and educated group in the movie code-switched to identify with a particular group of urbanites.

Below are examples to show how code-switching is used to create language awareness by referring to *who*, *when*, *where* and *why* the language(s) is used.

In the movie, code-switching is used in at least two ways. Firstly, it is used to communicate to the audience the different phases of what is going on in the movie. In parts of the movie where the flashbacks occur and the audience is shown the lives of the children in the slums, the language used is Hindi. However, as the movie progresses to show the children becoming adults in a better world than the slums, more of English is used. The predominance of the English language is relatively a compensation to the non-Hindi speaking audience who would have to read subtitles in the earlier part of the movie. This is an indication to signal to the audience of the changes that have taken place in the lives of the characters. English could be used to show that the characters now have better lives than before since using English has been associated with better education and quality of life, given the economic opportunities that come with the ability to use the language.

A further illustration of this is when the brothers discover that they can earn a living by becoming English-speaking tour guides for foreign tourists visiting the Taj Mahal. Code-switching occurs due to economic reasons. The switch to English, in so far as it is explained, hinges on Salim and Jamal's ability to extemporize the language in the city of Mumbai. The movie portrays India as a socio-linguistic giant of which multilingualism is the nerve system. So, code-switching and translation in different parts of the movie help to ensure that the audience is able to follow the direction of the story.

The language teacher can capitalize on this point to show language learners the importance of learning a target language like English. Knowledge of such an international language helps in earning a livelihood. There is no greater motivating factor for a child from a deprived environment who may not understand the importance of learning what to him/her appears as a foreign language.

Codeswitching is also seen to take place within the characters' interactions in certain scenes from the movie i.e. between the speakers, code-switching occurs. The policemen who interrogated Jamal Malik, the contestant of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* ("*Kaun Banega Crorepati*"), used Hindi code-switches in dominant English, to motivate the audience to watch the movie until the end. The conversation between the two police officers who interrogated and tortured Jamal shows instances of Hindi code-switches in dominant English to depict social distance between the speakers and the victim (see Example 1).

Policeman: The *motherchud* is overthere.
Police Sergeant: He's unconscious, *chutiya*, what good is that? *Are wa*, Siniwas,
we'll Amnesty international in here next.
(To Jamal): Your name, *ben chod*.

In the talk between Jamal and Prem Kumar, the host of the show, Hindi and English are used intermittently. Prem Kumar uses Hindi when he talks to Jamal privately before and during the show but immediately switches to English when the rounds begin. Although the setting influences his language choice, Prem Kumar does not forget to establish rapport with the audience in the two languages by greeting them with “Good evening, *namasca*, *saska racha*”. He also introduces the game show as “*Kaun Banega Crorepati*-Who Wants to Be a Millionaire”. The newscaster on television reporting the show, also uses a mixed code of more Hindi and less English. According to Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) participant roles and relationship play an important role in language use. Prem Kumar, sticks to the phrase *tea chaiwalla* which means ‘a boy who serves tea’ when referring to Jamal (see Example 2).

Prem: And what does an assistant phone basher do exactly?
Jamal: I get tea for people and...
Prem: *Chaiwalla*. A *chaiwalla*. Well ladies and gentlemen, Jamal *Malik garmal ga ram chai chare walla*’ from Mumbai, let’s play “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?”

He continuously repeated the phrase with the purpose of making fun of Jamal whom he believes will never be able to win the game show. Prem is trying to depict Jamal as an uneducated young man.

The different ways of addressing Jamal Malik show the relationship between Jamal and the people around him. Most of the time, the characters in the movie address him as Jamal. Salim calls him Jamal and so does Latika. The only time when he is referred to as ‘*bhai*’ by Salim is when the later wants to make amends with him for the wrong he (Salim) did i.e. robbing him of Latika. Prem Kumar addresses him as ‘*chaiwalla*’ and the police officers use derogatory terms by calling him ‘*benchod*’ and ‘*motherchud*’. The superiority shown by Prem Kumar and the policemen are obvious as seen in their forms of addressing Jamal who comes from one of the slums of Mumbai.

When Mister Nandha utters ‘*Ram nan satya hai, Babri Masjid dhvasthan hai*’, it is understood that both Jamal and Salim will know the meaning since Hindi is their mother tongue. However, to make it comprehensible to the audience, the movie director makes Mister Nandha go on to clarify and translate in English (see Example 3).

Mister Nandha: *Ram nan satya hai, Babri Masjid dhvasthan hai*.
Jamal: Mister Nandha?
Mister Nandha: We have destroyed your mosque. Now the followers of Ram will drive you dogs out of the city.

In *Slumdog Millionaire*, English is used to show power or authority. In the very first part of the movie two policemen on motorcycles were chasing the young Jamal and his friends who were playing on the airfield, and they shouted with authority, “Private ka-land”. It is also not surprising that the police officer who interrogates Jamal speaks mostly in English to his subordinate and to Jamal. In another scene, Maman, the gangster speaks English to show that he has power over Salim, Jamal and Latika when he says (see Example 4)

Maman: Hello again... Jamal, Salim. Really thought that you could just walk in and take my prize away..

Before killing Maman, Salim shows his power when he utters words Maman normally used “Maman never forgets ... isn’t that right?”. The police officer provokes and makes Jamal speak up by using English (see Example 5).

Police Officer: Was she pretty?
Jamal : (No response)
Police Officer: I guess not.
Jamal: She’s the most beautiful woman in the world

Later the police officer shows his power when he emphasizes the message that Jamal should take the ten million rupees rather than going for more (see Example 6).

Inspector: But you. You’ve got ten million rupees *ek dum* guaranteed, *yaar*? And who knows how much further? Fancy the twenty million, do you?

Code-switching at single lexical level occurs when certain lexical items like helicopter, autograph, gunfighter, future’ become habitual. Arvin speaks Hindi to Jamal but switches when referring to the money note as ‘dollar’ and ‘Benjamin Franklin’. The shift from English to Hindi mimics the linguistic code-switching that Indians of a certain class use, and this depends on who they are speaking to as well as the things they are talking about. So it is not surprising that one might ask for a wine-list in English but use Hindi to order a plate of *bhelpuri*. In a childhood scene Salim and Maman converse in Hindi but single English lexical items are noted in their discourse (see Example 7).

Maman: *Jamal, ap time malgia he, professional mandega.* (It’s time to go professional.)
Salim: *Kia? Satchi?* (What? Really)

Hindi lexicals for curses are abundantly used in the dominant English dialogues. For example when Salim goes to see Javed, the chief gangster in Mumbai, one of Javed’s man answered Salim using Hindi curse words (see Example 8)

Salim: I’m looking for Javed.

Javed's man: *Motherchud!* He is not looking for you.

Code-switching in *Slumdog Millionaire*, is used with unfamiliar strangers although they share the same ethno-cultural identity. For instance Jamal switches to English when speaking to the guard at Javed's house.

When apologizing and showing appreciation, English is also used even by the child characters. When the grown up Jamal expresses his sympathy to the blind Arvin, he uses English and says 'I'm sorry'. He says 'Thanks when he expresses his gratitude to Arvin for telling him where to find Latika. According to Annamalai (2001) that English greetings are very much Hindi in character too, especially the mention of 'Thanks'.

Setting plays a significant role which trigger code-switching in *Slumdog Millionaire*. Ervin (1964) observes the various situations (settings) may be restricted with respect to the participants, the physical setting, the topics and functions and style employed. Although English is the official language in the game show, Prem Kumar often slips into Hindi. According to Gumperz (1982) a speaker switches to another language as a signal of a group membership and shared ethnicity with an addressee (see Example 9).

Prem: Surdas... *ap ka* final answer?

Jamal: B

Prem: Computer *jee*, lock key *ajai*.

According to Kachru (1978:108) code-switching can be a marker of an attitude, intensity of emotions. In the scene in the classroom the teacher used English to teach 'The Three Musketeers' formally but switched to Hindi informally to show his disapproval when he saw Jamal and Salim entering late. The teacher switches to Hindi after saying 'here comes our very own three musketeers' and scolded the brothers.

Sridhar (1996: 53) believes that in a multilingual society, each language uniquely fulfills certain roles and represents distinct identities, and all of them complement one another to serve the complex communicative demands of a pluralistic society. *Slumdog Millionaire* shows that although Hindi and English are widely spoken in Mumbai, they are often used as code-switches, either more of one less of the other depending on interlocutors and topics and settings. However, English is the more prestigious language and has economic value compared to Hindi. This could explain why Jamal and Salim picked up English, as tour guides. The brothers have to accommodate to foreign tourists and learn their language for survival. This also corresponds to the speech accommodation theory (Giles, 1978) whereby the less powerful language user tends to converge to the speech styles or language choices of the more powerful interlocutor. The higher ranking police officer uses more English in his interrogation but his assistant uses more Hindi.

Even the soundtrack at the end of the movie is made up of a mixed lyric of Indian and Hindi and this is a strategy for promoting the movie and for accommodating English and non-English speaking audiences.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

23

10 : 7 July 2010

Maya David, Ph.D. and Caesar DeAlwis, Ph.D.

Learning from Movies – "Slumdog Millionaire" and Language Awareness

The language teacher can make use of such snippets to depict the symbolic power of the English language. Learners will easily understand the need to use different language with different interlocutors for specific reasons when such snippets are shown. Teachers can ask questions like “Which language is used? Why? Who uses it with whom? How does setting influence language choice? How do speech acts influence language choice?”

Conclusion

Although *Slumdog Millionaire* appears to be a good movie to show how code-switching is employed unconsciously by different interlocutors as well as unconsciously, there are several pre-requisites for the movie to be used as a teaching aid. Cook (2002, p. 333) notes that there is one very important pre-requisite when using code-switching to create language awareness, and that is the students and teachers must all share the same L1. If this pre-requisite is not fulfilled then there will be students who will be left behind. Such a scenario could lead to the problem of the onset of semilingualism. Furthermore the teacher must have a sufficient level of competence in L1. This is again to reduce the risk of semilingualism.

Students may have optimal language awareness success if teachers made students aware of the different languages use by who with whom why, where and when. Textbooks are generally not a good source of input for students who want to be aware of the functions of certain language as the examples given are not real. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, code-switching can be perceived as an achievement strategy in order to get meaning across to the audience. Even though the movie was made by non-Indian film makers, *Slumdog Millionaire* has managed to depict the real life situations of a society probably unfamiliar to the audience. One of the factors that has played an important role in the audience comprehension (thus, enjoyment of the film) is the use of language. Although Hindi and English were both used, the overall effects as a result of code-switching as a communicative strategy employed to initiate and maintain comprehension has been successful.

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Maya David, Ph.D.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 7 July 2010

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