Do speakers speak a language?

Evidence from two bilingual settings

by

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Among linguists, it is generally agreed that *language* is a multidimensional phenomenon. Two of its dimensions, each of which can be studied in its own right, are “langue” and “parole” (De Saussure 1964). While “langue” refers to language as a formal structure, “parole” refers to language as use, as “performance” (Chomsky 1965). In the following, we will adopt the conversation analysts’ term *talk* to refer to that second dimension. The need for talk to be studied in its own right is nowhere as obvious as in the case of language use among bilingual speakers for talk among such speakers involves two systems each of which can be investigated as “langue” independently of the other. Researchers have recognised this need for the study of language choice among bilingual speakers, also known as that of *code-switching*, has now developed into a full-fledged discipline.

However, in this discipline, a problem persists. Although targeting to investigate aspects of talk, studies are for the most part conducted from the perspective of “langue”. Starting from Gumperz’ (1982) definition of code-switching as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to *two grammatical systems or subsystems*” (p. 56. Our emphasis), studies assume that one of the grammatical systems (hereafter referred to as language) involved in language alternation is the norm, the “scheme of interpretation” (Garfinkel, 1967), against which occurrences of the other are identified and interpreted as instances of motivated, i.e. functional, deviance. Thus, one of the most recurrent debates among researchers is that of how to determine the *base language* of a bilingual conversation. A related debate is whether every instance of
language alternation is functional. Briefly, current studies of language alternation are based on the view that speakers speak a language. This view faces problems on both counts. First, as Auer (1997) shows, in some cases, it is impossible to demonstrate which of the two languages involved is the base language. Secondly, as Sankoff (1972) points out, it is impossible to find a functional motivation for every instance of language alternation. In this respect, Myers-Scotton (1993) argues that, in some cases, language alternation is significant, not on the level of individual instances, but rather on the level of the general pattern of alternating between two languages within the same conversation.

While the general position remains that of seeing talk among bilingual speakers in terms of languages, some ideas upon which an alternative view can be developed can be found here and there in the literature. Already in Gumperz (1982), a distinction is suggested between the grammarian’s notion of language and the speakers’ own notion of code (p. 99). Similarly, Auer (1984) maintains that, if speakers are seen to be alternating frequently between turns and within turns, one may view this alternation itself as a code. In the same vein, Meeuwis and Blommaert (1998) demonstrate that, in some communities, language alternation can be seen as “a variety in its own right”. All these positions can be summarised by adopting the distinction proposed by Alvarez-Caccamo (1998) between language and communicative code. Briefly, in the literature, there is enough evidence that the concept of language is not a useful one in accounting for talk among bilingual speakers and it is in view of this evidence that we are suggestively asking the question of whether speakers speak a language. In other words, in this paper, our main question is how to account for language alternation among bilingual speakers since it cannot be adequately accounted for in terms of language.
This paper is organised as follows. Our main argument in the paper is that language choice among bilingual speakers is an instance of social action, and therefore that the issues it raises are those of order in social action. As a consequence, section one of this paper will introduce our central notion, namely that of order in social action. The specific view of order in social action that we will adopt is the one developed in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis. As we will be arguing, order in language choice among bilingual speakers cannot be accounted for in terms of language, but rather in terms of medium, understood as “the actually oriented-to linguistic code” (Gafaranga, 1998). At the same time as demonstrating that order in language choice is a speakers’ own concern, section two will discuss some of the methods speakers themselves use to establish the medium of their conversation. These methods will be observed in talk phenomena researchers refer to as “language negotiation sequences” (Auer 1984, 1988, 1995, Heller 1982, Torras, 1998a, b, 1999, Codó, 1998, Codó and Torras, 1999). Section three will illustrate some of the versions the medium can take in conversation, namely the monolingual medium and the bilingual medium. The section will further show that, under the bilingual medium, three possibilities can be observed. For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to these possibilities as the parallel mode, the mixed mode and the halfway-between mode. As, among bilingual speakers, different versions of the medium are possible, an issue arises as to how analysts can tell which one obtains in a specific instance of social action. This issue will be dealt with in section four of this paper.

The discussion in this paper will be based on two data sets. Space does not allow us to discuss in any detail the sociolinguistic contexts in which these data were collected nor
the methods we have used to collect them. Both issues are dealt with in Gafaranga (1998), Torras (1998) and Torras (1999). However, for the purposes of this paper, the following points need to be noted about those data sets. The first data set, collected among bilingual Rwandese currently living in Belgium, involves mainly two languages, namely Kinyarwanda and French. All speakers are proficient in both languages and the context of the conversations can be characterised as informal. As for the second set, it actually can be subdivided into two subsets. Both subsets were collected in the Barcelona area, Catalonia. Both consist of ‘service encounters’ (Merritt 1976, Ventola 1983, 1987, Halliday and Hasan 1989, Bailey 1997) and can be characterised as more or less formal. The languages involved in the first subset are Catalan and Castilian, while, in the second, in addition to these two, English is also observed. In the first subset, all speakers are proficient in both languages while, in the second, they are not necessarily equally proficient in all three languages. In some cases, the speaker’s proficiency is higher in English than in Catalan or Castilian and, in some other cases, it is higher in these languages than in English. Because of this diversity of languages, of sociolinguistic backgrounds, of the types of interaction and of speakers’ preferences, we hope to provide a broader view of what speakers do with their languages than it would be possible if only one set of data were used.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: ORDER IN SOCIAL ACTION

The problem of order in social action is a classic one and all theorists agree that social action is orderly. For ethnomethodologically-oriented theorists, specifically, the issue of order in social action is a very important one for, without order, social action is impossible. According to ethnomethodologists, the concept of order in social action is inseparable from
that of *social norm*. By social norm, ethnomethodologists mean a “scheme of interpretation” (Garfinkel, 1967: 120), “a ‘grid’ by reference to which whatever is done [becomes] visible and assessable” (Heritage, 1984: 11), in other words accountable. Working as landmarks with respect to which any social action is made intelligible, social norms account for the orderliness of social life. Any action which has been possible must be assumed to have been made possible by a specific and discoverable norm.

In turn, a social norm informs relevant acts in either one or the other of two ways. A relevant activity is either a direct application of the norm or it is a departure, a deviance, from it. That is, there is “no time out”. It is precisely because norms do not allow any “time out” that they account for order in social action. In the case where a norm applies, the action it informs passes “unnoticed”, as requiring “no second thought” (Heritage, 1984: 116). Participants adopt an “I-have-seen-all-this-before” attitude towards the activity (Sharrock and Anderson, 1986: 93). In the second case, actions “are (...) objects of ‘post-mortem’ thought and consideration” (Heritage, 1984: 116); the norm accounts for the activity only by approximation; it applies only for all practical purposes.

According to ethnomethodology, norms are rarely formulated. Rather they consist of ‘taken-for-granted background expectancies’ (Garfinkel 1967). In Garfinkel’s terms, a member of a setting is “responsive to everyday norms while at the same time, he is at a loss to tell us specifically of what the expectancies consist” (pp, 36-37). Here is where deviance becomes interesting. Deviant instances are very important for it is in such instances that the norm can be “witnessed”. Norms become manifest if they are looked at from the perspective of deviant instances (Streeck 1983: 101; Heritage 1988: 131). Any idea of
deviance presupposes an underlying order, a norm, which the relevant act is identified as a
deviation from. For research into order in social action, the interest of deviant instances is
that, while normative occurrences pass unnoticed, deviant circumstances are noticed, are
reacted to in ways which point to their deviant nature. It is in that sense that, according to
ethnomethodologists, deviant instances “reflexively” reveal the norm. Therefore, by
observing members’ own reaction to their activities while accomplishing them, one can
demonstrate the norm as it has been told by members themselves. The methodology which
uses deviant instances to establish the norm is known as deviant cases analysis (Heritage,
1988)

From the above brief definition of order in social action, a number of points can be
retained as regards language choice among bilingual speakers. Talk, as an instance of
social action, must be assumed to be orderly for, if it were not, it would not occur.
Language choice and language alternation must be assumed to be orderly for, if they
were not, they would not be observed. The question which needs to be investigated is
therefore: what order, what norm, governs the activity of ‘language-alternating’ among
bilingual speakers? While that order must be discovered in and for each instance, studies
of language alternation have for the most part assumed it. As we have said, the leading
assumption among students of language alternation is that, among bilinguals, talk is
normatively conducted in one language and that, from this norm, speakers deviate into
the other language for functional effects. A major problem with this assumption is that,
as we will see below, speakers themselves do not necessarily orient to the normative use
of one language.

2. NEGOTIATING THE MEDIUM: ORDER AS A SPEAKERS’ OWN CONCERN
Garfinkel, in his ‘breaching experiments’, has shown that, without norms, social action is impossible. Therefore, for social action to be possible, either participants come to the setting with some expectations from previous experience or they must negotiate on the spot the norm which will govern their activity. In language use among bilingual speakers, both situations can be found. On the one hand, there are those situations, the most common to be sure, where speakers, as competent community members, can anticipate a particular language to be usable. However, that a particular language is anticipated to be usable in a particular context does not mean it will necessarily be used. Rather, that anticipation will need to be confirmed or disapproved of by participants in and as social action. Let us consider extract (1):

Extract 1

Talk takes place at a town hall reception area between the receptionist and an enquirer.

1. *EN1: buenos días.
   %eng: good morning.

2. *REC: buenos días.
   %eng: good morning.

3. *EN1: pues mire usted esta carta xxx +/.
   %eng: you see this letter xxx +/.

4. *REC: que es de la Telefónica?
   %eng: is it from Telefónica (telephone company)?

The enquirer opens the encounter with a greeting in Castilian. He approaches the desk with some expectations. Without any expectations, he would not know what to do. These expectations might be based on his previous experience as a participant in service encounters and globally on his knowledge, as a member, of the sociolinguistic context in Catalonia. He assumes Castilian to be usable in this encounter. His expectations are confirmed by the receptionist, who greets him back in the same language and, thereafter,
Castilian is established as the norm for their interaction. Also consider extract (2) from our Kinyarwanda-French data set.

**Extract 2.**

Conversation takes place in a family setting with children around. AAA is the host and father of Child (CHI). BBB and CCC are friends who are visiting.

1. *AAA: mpe mperutse no kubona ntuza avuga ho avuga kuri télévision # simenya # ministre wa finance.*
   %eng: I recently saw that man talking on television # I don’t know # finance minister

2. *BBB: papa a dit papa a dit va t’ asseoir là-bas.*
   %eng: *papa said papa said go and sit there.*
   %add: CHI

3. *CHI: non.*
   %eng: *no.*

4. *BBB: si si c’est ce que papa a dit parce que tu as fait des bêtises.*
   %eng: *yes yes that’s what papa said because you’ve been naughty.*
   %add: CHI

5. *AAA: umh R ni nde ra R.*
   %eng: umh R who’s he R

6. *CCC: eh warayibonye*
   %eng: eh did you watch it.

   %eng: *over there over there.*
   %add: CHI

8. *AAA: jye narayibonye # sinzi ukuntu nafunguye hano mbona agezweho.*
   %eng: I watched it # I switched on just like this and there he was.

   %eng: *over there*

10. *BBB: tu as fait des bêtises.*
    %eng: *you’ve been naughty.*
    %add: CHI

11. *CCC: jye buri gihe saa mbiri n’ igice # ndeba kuri ART.*
    %eng: every 8: 30 # I want ART.

Among bilingual Rwandese in Belgium where the instance was collected, a major concern is that children are losing Kinyarwanda. That is, in talk as practical social action, Rwandese children speak and are spoken to in French. This is consistent with findings from studies, such as Li Wei (1994), which have investigated patterns of language choice.
in migrant communities. In the instance, speaker B has been interacting with other adults using both French and Kinyarwanda. When the need arises for him to talk to the child, he draws on his membership knowledge and adopts French for his interaction with this particular child. B’s expectations are confirmed for the child responds in French and, thereafter, their talk goes on in this language.

When participants’ expectations are confirmed, the norm applies for “yet another first time” (Heritage 1984) and the activity of language choice passes unnoticed. If they are not confirmed, an account must be found. Extract (3) illustrates an instance where one participant’s expectations are not confirmed.

**Extract 3**

Talk takes place at a town hall reception area between the receptionist and an enquirer.

1. *EN1: hola.
   %eng: hi.

2. *REC: Déu vos guard.
   %eng: hello
   %glo: God you guard.

3. *EN1: Déu vos guard [=! laughs] <queremos saber> [>] +/.%eng: hello we’d like to know +/.
   %glo: God you guard [=! laughs].

4. *REC: <Déu vos guard> [=].
   %eng: hello
   %glo: God you guard.

5. *EN1: bueno no sé si lo digo bien [=! laughs].
   %eng: well I don’t know whether I said it right [=! laughs].

6. *REC: diga-ho # tu diga`m-ho [=!smiles].
   %eng: say it # you say it to me [=!smiles].

7. *EN1: eh por zona eh qué instituto le pertenece a la [/] a nuestras hijas.
   %eng: erm regarding the district erm which high school do the [/] our daughters belong to?

EN1 greets REC in Castilian. This is the language she proposes for the interaction as is confirmed in turn (3) where she attempts formulating her service request. EN1’s choice is not taken up by REC, who greets her back in Catalan, using a rather archaic form.
Instead of initiating the business transaction after the greeting activity has been accomplished (Halliday and Hasan 1989; Ventola 1983, 1987), EN1 reacts to REC’s Catalan greeting in turn (3) by reproducing it. EN1’s repetition and her laughter indicate that REC’s greeting form has been perceived as unexpected. EN1’s formulation of the service request is interrupted by REC’s overlapping repetition of the greeting (turn 4). Through that repetition, REC acknowledges that the ‘otherness’ of his greeting has been noticed and indicates that it was meant to be noticed as such. The otherness of the greeting becomes a ‘talkable-about’ object in an insertion sequence that spans over the next two turns.

On the other hand, there are situations where the two parties have divergent expectations. In such cases, they need to negotiate locally which norm to attend to. In turn, that negotiation can be accomplished either implicitly or explicitly (Codó, 1998, Torras, 1999). Implicit negotiation occurs when speakers use their language choice acts during the early phases of the interaction or interactional episode to reveal to each other their language preferences without stating it in so many words. Consider extract (4) below.

**Extract 4**

The conversation takes place at the town hall between the receptionist (REC) and an enquirer (EN2).

1. *REC: bon dia senyora.*
   `%eng: good morning madam.*

2. *EN2: miré quèria hacer una pregunta # a ver # para inscribir al niño al instituto de aquí?*%
   `%eng: I would like to ask you a question # let’s see # how do I register my son for the secondary school here?*

3. *REC: directamente al instituto # está empadronado aquí el chico?*%
   `%eng: just at the secondary school # was the boy registered here?*

REC and EN2 propose different linguistic choices for their encounter. REC opens the interaction in Catalan and subsequently EN2 formulates her service request in Castilian.
In turn (3), after EN2 has shown her preference for Castilian in turn (2), REC switches to this language. That is, REC converges to EN2’s “language preference” and from that point onwards, talk is conducted in Castilian.

A more complex situation is observed in extract (5).

**Extract 5**

Talk takes place at the out-patients’ department reception at a hospital. The participants are a nurse and a patient.

1. *PA1: hora pel doctor R.
   %eng: an appointment with doctor R.
2. *NU1: a las ocho y media # o más tarde?
   %eng: at half past eight # or later?
3. *PA1: mmm bueno si pugués ser més tard be sinó +...
   %eng: erm well if it could be later otherwise +...
4. *NU1: a les nou?
   %eng: at nine?

PA1 initiates the encounter with the service request. The language in which the request is formulated is not clear from the analyst’s perspective given the similarity of the utterance in both Catalan and Castilian. However, NU1 seems to have taken PA1’s talk to be Castilian as her service compliance is carried out in this language (see Scheglof, 1984 for a discussion of ambiguity in conversation). In turn (3), PA1 disambiguates the situation and indicates that her choice in (1) was actually meant to be heard as Catalan. In turn (4), NU1 converges to this new relevance and, from that point onwards, the interaction is carried out in Catalan.

An even more complex negotiation sequence is observed in (6) below.

**Extract 6**

Talk takes place at a town hall reception area between the receptionist (REC) and an enquirer (EN1).

1. *EN1: hola buenas # yo estoy en urbanismo con el E S.
   %eng: hi morning # I’m from town development (working) with E S.
The enquirer opens the interaction in Castilian. This language is not taken up by the receptionist, who addresses the enquirer in Catalan. For a significant amount of talk, speakers seem to have adopted a “non-convergent” mode of talk, as EN1 seems to be speaking Castilian while REC speaks Catalan. However, a closer look reveals a certain pattern. In the talk, each speaker seems to be tying their contribution to previous speaker’s talk by recycling a bit of the previous speaker’s utterance (turns 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Language choice in that activity is interesting for speakers seem to have adopted two divergent strategies. EN1 consistently adopts the language used by previous speaker (Catalan) while REC uses her own language. In adopting the previous speaker’s language only for that part of talk which is recycled while the rest of his talk is in Castilian, EN1 seems to be pointing to the divergent nature of REC’s language choice. He seems to be telling him that his conduct is a notice worthy event. Eventually, because of these reminders, in turn (6), REC abandons his use of Catalan and converges to EN1’ use of Castilian.
The third method through which speakers solve the issue of language choice is by accomplishing explicit negotiation. In this case, one of the speakers produces a “formulation” (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970) to the effect that the language choice issue has to be settled before any significant talk can take place. Codó (1998) provides ample evidence of this strategy. For the purpose of this paper, consider extract (7) from our data.

Extract 7.

This service takes place at a pub between a Spanish waiter (BA3) and a foreign customer (CUS) who speaks English as a foreign language.

1 *BA3: hola.
   %eng: hi.

2 *CUS: hola # can I order in English # yeah?
   %eng: hi # can I order in English # yeah?

3 *BA3: sì.
   %eng: yeah.

4 *CUS: uh: I’d like to have a pint of blonde beer.

5 *BA3: mmm mmm.

6 *CUS: and well # a bit stupid perhaps er er a pint +/-.

BA3 opens the encounter in Catalan (represented in plain style). Right after, the customer raises the issue of what language they are going to use in conducting their business, whether he can use English. In turn (3), BA3 authorises that use and from turn (4) onwards English is used.

Briefly, in talk-in-interaction, bilingual speakers use a variety of methods to settle the language choice issue. That speakers go to all this length to negotiate the linguistic code for their interaction cannot be attributed to mere chance. Rather, it indicates that the
need for a norm, for order, is a speakers’ own concern. Negotiation sequences such as those we have illustrated above indicate that, without a jointly established code, talk would be impossible. They indicate that language choice is a significant aspect of talk organisation. From such situations where the norm needs to be negotiated on the spot, it becomes possible to understand what goes on even in those cases where no explicit negotiation is observed. In those situations, the norm will simply be said to apply “for yet another first time”. It is that linguistic norm speakers establish through negotiation sequences that we refer to as the *medium* of an interaction.

3. VERSIONS OF THE MEDIUM: THE ‘BASE LANGUAGE’ FALLACY

The work that speakers accomplish in negotiation sequences such as those we have illustrated above indicates that, among bilingual speakers, the medium of their conversation cannot be taken for granted. In turn, the actual medium of a bilingual conversation cannot be assumed for it can take many versions depending on occasions. In this section, we will illustrate some of the versions the medium of a bilingual conversation may adopt. As we have already seen, the medium is a type of social norm, a scheme of interpretation. Therefore, any instance of language choice is either a direct application of the norm or it is an instance of deviance from it. In social action, as we have seen, these two types of conduct are reacted to differently by members themselves. In the first case, the act accomplished passes unnoticed while, in the second, the act is oriented to as a noticeable event. On the level of language choice, it is those instances which are not signalled as deserving any notice, whether they consist of one language or whether they do not, that we will refer to as instances of the medium.

3.1. Monolingual medium
Among bilinguals, the language choice issue, whether it is handled through explicit or implicit negotiation or whether no obvious negotiation is gone through, may be solved by adopting a *monolingual medium*. All the examples we have looked at so far illustrate this possibility. As a further instance, consider extract (8) below.

**Extract 8**

This conversation shows the beginning of a service encounter at a pub. A Spanish musician (MUS) has been talking in Catalan to a customer (CUS) at the bar while waiting to be served. A British waiter (BA1) approaches them.

1. *MUS: copa de whisky i: endavant [=! laughs] !
   %eng: a glass of whisky and: let's carry on [=! laughs] !

2. *CUS: [=! laughs].

3. *BA1: què vols?
   %eng: what would you like?

4. *MUS: *erm uh one chupito of Jameson and some water please. *
   %eng: *erm uh a shot of Jameson and some water please.

5. *BA1: sure thanks.

In turn (3), drawing upon his observation of language choice between the customers prior to his talk, the waiter offers the service to be conducted in Catalan (represented in plain style). However in turn (4), MUS rejects that offer and instead proposes English (in italics). In turn (5), BA1 acknowledges MUS’s proposal and the service is conducted in English.

However, that, in a particular instance, a monolingual medium has been adopted does not necessarily mean that only one language is used. Instances of other languages may occur as well. Nevertheless, when they do, they are oriented to by speakers themselves as instances of deviance from the norm while instances of the language which has been adopted as the medium pass unnoticed. Consider extract (9) below
This encounter occurs at a market between a butcher (OWN) and a customer (CU6). CU6 is ordering some ready-made food. CU4 is another customer who is waiting to be served.

1. *CU6: allò que se’n diu / que se’n diu espera’t t’ho haig de dir en castellà perquè no sé com es diu en català +...
   %eng: that which is called / which is called hang on I’ve got to tell you in Castilian because I don’t know what it is called in Catalan

2. *OWN: viva la gracia!
   %eng: hurray!

3. *CU6: és greu eh?
   %eng: it’s awful isn’t it?

4. *OWN: <digues> [ï].
   %eng: say it.

5. *CU6: <codillos> [ï].
   %eng: shanks.

   %eng: yes # shanks.

7. *CU4: ah no sé com es diu en català <codillos> [ï]
   %eng: oh I don’t know what shanks are called in Catalan.

8. *CU6: <jo tampoc> [ï].
   %eng: me neither.

In this instance, two languages, Catalan and Castilian, are used. However, the use of Castilian is explicitly signalled as an instance of motivated deviance while Catalan is not. As CU6 herself says, Castilian is drawn upon only because the speaker lacks the proper word in Catalan. Therefore, although two languages are used, only Catalan is the medium.

### 3.2. Bilingual medium

A second solution to the language choice problem that bilinguals may adopt is the alternate use of two languages. In this case, bilinguals use both languages without any orientation to the difference between the two as significant. We will speak of a *bilingual medium* in such situations. In turn, within the general category of the bilingual medium, different possibilities may be observed.
3.2.1. Parallel Mode

The first possible form the bilingual medium can take is what we may refer to as the parallel mode. Other researchers (Gorter, 1987, Jonkam 1996, Torras 1998a, b, 1999 for example) have spoken of “non-convergent” talk in this case. This possibility consists of the fact that one speaker consistently uses language A while the other consistently uses language B without any orientation to the other party’s choice as divergent. Extract (10) below illustrates this possibility.

Extract 10

This exchange occurs at the town hall reception between the receptionist and an enquirer.

1. *REC: què volies?  
   %eng: can I help?

2. *EN1: yo? eh venía a entregar estos papeles.  
   %eng: me? erm I've come to hand in these papers

3. *REC: aquí entrant a la dreta.  
   %eng: over there on your right.

   %eng: OK thank you.

In the extract, the receptionist consistently uses Catalan while the enquirer consistently uses Castilian. As the service is smoothly and successfully carried out and as no where in the interaction participants themselves indicate that language choice is an issue, it must be concluded that this alternate use of two languages is itself the norm, the medium they are using.

3.2.2. Mixed Mode
A second form the bilingual medium may take is what we may refer to as the \textit{mixed mode}. Researchers such as Myers-Scotton (1993) speak of \enquote{unmarked codeswitching} in this case. This mode is observed when all participants alternate between their languages, between turns and within turns, without any orientation to the linguistic origin of the various elements they are using. Extract (11) below illustrates this possibility.

\textbf{Extract 11}

Participants are explicitly talking about language use and code-switching

   \textit{eng}: it's you and me who are talking.

2. *BBB: hee.  
   \textit{eng}: hee.

3. *CCC: \textit{en fait vous privilé\-giez} [\textit{\textit{\textless}}].  
   \textit{eng}: in fact you insist on.

4. *AAA: \textit{\textless la} [\textit{\textless} \textit{\textless}] \textit{la notion de langue} \textit{déjà}.  
   \textit{eng}: \textit{the [\textit{\textless}]} \textit{the concept of language}.

5. *CCC: \textit{ihtia igenda}.  
   \textit{eng}: \textit{disappears right away}.

6. *AAA: \textit{tu mets} \# \textit{la notion de langue}.  
   \textit{eng}: \textit{you put} \# \textit{the concept of language}.

7. *CCC: \textit{igenda}.  
   \textit{eng}: \textit{disappears}.

8. *AAA: \textit{dans mon travail je [\textit{\textless} \textit{\textless}] je la met en cause}.  
   \textit{eng}: \textit{in my work \textit{I [\textit{\textless} I question it}}.

In the extract, all participants, especially AAA and CCC, have used both French and Kinyarwanda. However, nowhere can we say that participants are orienting to the two languages as different. In fact, participants can be seen to have confirmed, through their conduct, that they are using one system (see Gafaranga 1997). In turn (1), AAA uses Kinyarwanda. In turn (2), BBB displays agreement by means of an agreement token. In (3), CCC shows stronger agreement by attempting to elaborate on AAA’s talk. However, on the level of language choice, he departs from the use of Kinyarwanda by adopting French. In
(4), AAA resumes the talk which had been interrupted by the agreement work. In this turn, he too uses French, apparently departing from his own choice of Kinyarwanda in turn (1). In (5), CCC expresses agreement by producing a completion (Gafaranga, 1998). This completion comes in Kinyarwanda, departing from his own and AAA’s previous choice of French. In (6), ignoring CCC’s agreement, AAA produces a self-repair. He reflexively justifies this act of not attending to an agreement which has been displayed and uses French. In (7), CCC re-displays the agreement by means of a completion. His talk comes in Kinyarwanda. Finally, in (8), AAA concludes his talk, using French.

On a superficial level, language choice in this instance could be seen as disorderly since speakers do not stick to previous choices either by themselves or by other speakers. However, a closer look reveals that speakers are actually attending to an order other than superficial. CCC’s turn (5) is actually a verb form whose subject is in AAA’s turn (4). Similarly the subject of the verb form in CCC’s turn (6) is in AAA’s turn (5). According to Sacks (Winter 1967, Lecture 2, Fall 1967, Lecture 4 and Lecture 5), these are “appendor clauses”. As, in both cases, CCC’s talk is in Kinyarwanda, these verb forms must agree in class with their subjects. In both cases, the subject is the French item notion de langue. As French is not a class language, if the linguistic origin of elements had been oriented to by speakers, no agreement would have been possible, talk would have been impossible (Sebba, 1998). In the instance, the French item actually seems to have been analysed as Kinyarwanda and attributed to a particular noun class as revealed in the agreement morpheme i- in i-hita i-genga. That is to say, CCC does not seem to have taken any notice of the ‘Frenchness’ of AAA’s talk. Implicationally, his own use of French in (3) does not seem to have been meant to be perceived as such. That is to say, the orderly nature, the
possibility of this talk, is accountable, not in terms of the separateness of the languages involved, but by the fact that speakers have not oriented to the two languages as different. In the instance, although speakers may be said to have used two languages, speakers themselves have not revealed any orientation to the two as different. In the instance, to view French and Kinyarwanda as two separate entities would only be a myth (Gardner-Chloros, 1995).

3.2.3. Halfway-between Mode

Finally, the bilingual medium may take the form of what we may refer to as the halfway-between mode. This is the fact that while one participant consistently uses one language, the other participant consistently alternates between the two languages in his / her repertoire. Extract (12), recorded in a Catalan home, illustrates this possibility.

Extract 12

Participants are talking about HOS’s aunt’s painting abilities over a cup of coffee.

1. *GUE: mira noia # ja és molt eh?
   %eng: you know # that’s quite something.

2. *HOS: lo que no la van bien son los [...] los los: [...] los arbres [...] los arbres no +...
   %eng: what she isn’t good at is the [...] the [...] the: [...] the trees [...] the trees no +...

3. *GUE: noi < cada [...] cada pintor té les seves debilitats # eh> »>.
   %eng: well every [...] every painter has their own weak points.

4. *HOS: < pero les flors [...] pero les flors > [...] si # verdad # la tieta # les flors?
   %eng: but the flowers [...] but the flowers yes # isn’t it # your auntie # the flowers?
   %add: RES

5. *RES: i tant.
   %eng: absolutely.

6. *HOS: les flors la meva tia tiene una mà # filla meva.
   %eng: my aunt’s so good at flowers # my dear.
   %glo: the flowers the my aunt has one hand # daughter my.

7 *GUE: doncs mira que ja és una cosa maca.
   %eng: well it’s a very nice thing.

   %eng: mmm mmm.

10 *HOS: fa les flors [...] fa unes aquarel·les amb flors [...] pasteles # ole eh!
In the extract, while other participants, especially the guest, are using Catalan, the host frequently alternates between Catalan and Castilian. Nevertheless, talk goes on smoothly. The participants’ own conduct reveals that nothing worthy of notice is happening. Conduct is normative. Even in turn (2) where a word search is observed, as no medium repair (see below) is operated, the situation can be understood as that of intra-turn other-language repair (see Gafaranga, forthcoming), as involving no deviance on the level of language choice.

Briefly, normative conduct among bilingual speakers may consist of either one or the other of two general patterns. Speakers may either adopt “monolingual talk” or they may adopt “bilingual talk” (Gafaranga, 1998). That is, speakers may choose to use one language as the medium of their interaction just as they may choose to use both languages. In the second possibility, at least three situations may be observed. Speakers may adopt the parallel mode, the mixed mode, or the halfway-between mode. It is because normative conduct may consist of any one of these four possibilities that the work that speakers accomplish in negotiating precisely which one is relevant in current interaction becomes accountable. It is also because of the same possibilities that we can affirm that, in talk, speakers do not speak a language, that the concept of language is not a useful one in accounting for speakers’ language choice acts.

4. DISCOVERING THE MEDIUM: A SPEAKERS’ OWN PERSPECTIVE
From the discussion above, one general conclusion can be drawn. The medium of a particular conversation where two languages are observed cannot be assumed, as many possibilities are available. A relevant question is therefore how the analyst can determine which possibility obtains in a particular instance. In the literature, because of the underlying assumption that normative talk among bilingual speakers is necessarily conducted in one language, that speakers necessarily speak a language, this problem is known as the ‘base language’ issue. Predictably, as the problem is raised from the wrong premises, the conclusion becomes that, in some cases, it is impossible to tell which of the two languages involved is the base language (Auer, 1997). This conclusion is understandable because, as the discussion above shows, in many cases, none of the two languages is by itself the scheme of interpretation. If the view we have been developing is adopted, it becomes necessary to respecify the problem. The issue ceases to be that of the base language and becomes that of the medium of a specific instance of bilingual conversation.

To be sure, the issue of the medium, although it may be raised for every conversation where two languages are observed, is actually felt in two of the four possible forms the medium of an interaction can take. In case the medium is monolingual, the issue does not arise as such, as all participants are using one language. Similarly, the issue does not arise in the case of the parallel mode as each speaker consistently uses one language. The issue arises in the case of frequent language alternation within the same speaker’s talk, whether it takes the form of the mixed mode or whether it takes the form of what we have referred to as the halfway-between mode. In both cases, one does not know whether a specific instance of language alternation is an instance of functional deviance.
(code-switching, see Gafaranga, 1998, Gafaranga and Torras, 1999) or of normative language choice.

As we have argued in the section above, the medium of an interaction can be thought of as a social norm which accounts for order in talk activities on the level of language choice. Therefore, as a norm, it can be identified by means of the same methods which are used to discover any other norm in social action. In social action, participants themselves indicate which norm they are attending to here and now either by adopting an “I-have-seen-all-this-before” attitude towards what they are doing or by adopting an attitude which points to the activity as deviant. Therefore, two approaches may be adopted in investigating norms in social action. One may conduct a deviant cases analysis or one demonstrates the normative nature of what is being done (Heritage, 1984). Both approaches can be relied upon in discovering the norm on the level of language choice.

4.1. Medium Repair

The methodology of deviant cases analysis can be applied to language choice on the assumption that language choice itself is an activity that speakers accomplish while talking, that, in talk, speakers are aware of what they are doing on the level of language choice and that they reveal that awareness in and as social action. One particular type of conduct through which speakers reveal their awareness of what they are doing on the level of language choice is what Gafaranga (1998, also see forthcoming for a more detailed
(discussion) refers to as *medium repair*. This repair consists of the fact that, once a medium of an interaction has been adopted, any departure from it is repaired unless it is meant to be functional. And this is so precisely because the medium functions as a social norm. Through that type of repair, speakers themselves indicate which elements they do not consider to belong to the medium they are using and, reflexively, which medium they are using and whether it is bilingual or monolingual. In extract (9) above for example, speakers are clearly aware of their language choice acts, of the medium they are using. This awareness is revealed in the orientation they have adopted towards the different elements. More specifically, it is revealed through the stance they have adopted towards the use of Castilian. According to speakers themselves, Castilian is used because of the lack of an adequate expression in Catalan. Through that same stance, speakers have revealed that Catalan is the medium they are currently using. It is precisely because Catalan is the medium that the use of Castilian is perceived by speakers themselves as an instance of repairable deviance. Also consider extract (13) below:

**Extract 13**

Talk takes place at the Erasmus office between a Spanish secretary (SEC) and a German Erasmus student (STU).

01 *SEC: matriculated # and after this eh it has to wait # four five six *jours* eh [/] six +...
  %eng: registered # and after this er it has to wait # four five six days er [/] six +...
02 *STU: days?
03 *SEC: days # after being +...

In this encounter, talk is conducted in English (represented in plain style). However, in turn (1), the secretary inadvertently uses the French element ‘jours’ (represented in italics), immediately realises that this element is not part of the medium they are using, namely English, and tries to repair it as the search marker ‘eh’ and the retracing ‘six’ indicate. In turn (2), the student provides the repair and in turn (3), the secretary acknowledges it and
talk goes on. Through this repair, speakers have confirmed that French is not part of the system they are using and, reflexively, that English is the medium.

In both extracts (9) and (13), a monolingual medium has been adopted although language alternation has occurred. Through the stances they have adopted while accomplishing that alternation, speakers themselves have confirmed that they have adopted a monolingual medium. Therefore, analysts themselves can use those stances to demonstrate that the medium is monolingual. However, as we have seen, talk among bilinguals need not be monolingual. The same methodology of deviant cases analysis can be used to demonstrate that current medium is bilingual. Consider extract (14) below.

**Extract 14**

Participants are talking about the possibilities for a refugee to study in the UK.

1. *AAA: non lero nka bariya b’impunzi ukuntu bigenda # babagira ba # a a amashuri hano ni privé quoi # ni privé mbega # kuburyo rero kugirango aze muri iyi université agombà kwishyura.*
   %eng: refugees like him are # schools here are private # so that he must pay to study at this university.

2. *BBB: umh.*
   %eng: umh.

3. *AAA: *mais comme* nta mafaranga afite ay yatse *bourse le* # babyita local government.*
   %eng: *but as* he doesn’t have money he has had to apply for a *grant* form the they call it local government.*

4. *BBB: umh.*
   %eng: umh.

5. *AAA: local authority donc ni nkaaa+...* %eng: local authority well it’s likeee+... 

   %eng: it’s like a municipalité.

7. *AAA: nka municipalité c’est ça # municipalité yahano niyo yamuhaye bourse.* %eng: that’s right like a municipalité he got a grant from the local municipality.

While talking, speaker AAA faces a problem of “language preference”. To solve it, he uses an English expression After this use of English, he goes on to attempt a repair (turn 5). Speaker BBB, noticing the problem, proposes that repair (turn 6). In the extract,
while speaker AAA can be said to have attempted the repair using Kinyarwanda, BBB’s repair uses French. In turn (7), AAA acknowledges the repair. The need for the use of English to be repaired suggests that the use of this language is deviant conduct. On the other hand, as no need is felt to repair neither the use of French nor that of Kinyarwanda, the use of these two languages must be concluded to be normative. The repair work that speakers have accomplished indicates that current medium is Kinyarwanda-French language alternation. Also consider extract (15) below:

**Extract 15**

Participants are talking about social assistance in the different countries where they live. A is narrating what happened to them when their last child was born. A, who lives in Germany, is proficient in all three languages. Information on B, who lives in Belgium, is not available, although it is not very likely that he is proficient in German.

1. *AAA: kwenregistra umwan n’ibiki # byose kugirango donc # abone amafaranga donc kugirango xxx # bon [=laughs] niya muri ntuza # muri za ministères # muri # Sozialamt # donc ni kimwe +…
   %eng: registering the child etc. # all that so that # she receives the money well so that # so I went to something # to the ministry departments # to the # social welfare office # well it’s like +…

   %eng: Ministry of social affairs.

   %eng: no # in fact it’s an office it’s not a ministry.

In the extract, speaker AAA is faced with a problem of telling exactly the institution where he went to claim child benefit. Evidence for this is the repetition of the element (‘muri’), the use of the hesitation marker ‘ntuza’, and the many pauses. As a first attempt, he uses the French element ‘ministère’, but he finds it inadequate and goes to repair it. He still misses the ‘mot juste’ (pauses) and proposes a German expression (‘Sozialamt’). Immediately after, he attempts a translation of this element (‘donc ni kimwe’). Noticing the problem, speaker BBB proposes a translation using French (‘ministère des affaires sociales’). In turn (3), AAA rejects that translation on the level of its content without any notice of its linguistic origin. The work that speakers have accomplished indicates that German is not an acceptable choice in current interaction.
even if it conveys the most adequate information. Conversely, as neither the use of French nor that of Kinyarwanda is reacted as an unusual occurrence, it must be concluded to be normative. The repair indicates that Kinyarwanda-French language alternation itself is the medium.

4.2. Normative Conduct

The second method which can be used in determining whether the medium of a bilingual conversation is monolingual or whether it is bilingual is to demonstrate that participants have reacted to what they have done as normative conduct, i.e. that they have taken no notice of what they have done. For example, in both extracts (6) and (10), each speaker has adopted a different language. However, in (10), unlike in (6), nothing indicates that speakers are aware that they are using two different languages. This lack of orientation to their talk as divergent confirms that the alternate use of two languages is normative conduct, that they have selected the parallel mode as the medium for the interaction.

Language alternation as normative conduct can even be demonstrated locally. In the following we will illustrate two methods through which participants can be seen to have revealed that language alternation is normative. The first of these methods is what Gafaranga (1998) refers to as other-language repair (also see forthcoming for a more detailed discussion) This repair hinges on the concept that ethnomethodologists, borrowing from phenomenologists, refer to as the “reciprocity of perspectives” (Sharrock and Anderson, 1991). It consists of the fact that, one participant missing the ‘mot juste’, other participants provide it in a language other than first participant was
using and the “other-languageness” of the proposed element passes unnoticed by first speaker. Here is an example.

**Extract 16**

Participants have been talking about the linguistic situation of Rwanda, especially about the language policy which was in place before they left. Within this policy, a national commission (Urutonde) had been set up to develop the language. Its aims are the object of the extract.

1. *AAA: n’ibintu byo mu Rutonde # bavuga ngo bakore ikinyarwanda # kitagize.
   %eng: like in the commission of Rutonde # where it was question of creating a kind of Kinyarwanda # which was not.

2. *BBB: <pure> [>].
   %eng: pure.

3. *CCC: <pure> [<].
   %eng: pure.

4. *AAA: umh ibyo narabirwanyaga dès le début.
   %eng: umh was totally against that since the very beginning.

Speaker AAA has a problem about how to qualify the type of Kinyarwanda which was being promoted. Evidence for this can be found in the pauses and in the hesitation marker ‘kitagize’. BBB and CCC help him out and, in overlapping turns, provide the needed ‘mot juste’. In (4), AAA ratifies the repair. In the extract, while AAA has been trying to qualify the type of Kinyarwanda which was being promoted using Kinyarwanda, speakers BBB and CCC repair the problem AAA is facing using French. Through this repair, speakers have revealed their reciprocity of perspectives about language choice in the sequence. More specifically, by providing the same element in the same language in overlapping turns, BBB and CCC have indicated that what they are doing is normative conduct. Furthermore, in ratifying the repair, AAA does not seem to have taken any notice of the use of French as deviant from his own choice of Kinyarwanda in turn (1). In fact, AAA himself, after he has ratified the repair, goes on to use both French and Kinyarwanda. By so doing, he confirms that, even in turn (1) where no instance of French is observed, the possibility of using this
language was there. Thus, what BBB and CCC have done is to realise a possibility which had been there all along.

A second strategy that participants may be seen to use to re-affirm to one another that language alternation itself is the medium can be observed in what we may refer to as cross-linguistic semantic relations. We will illustrate this by one particular semantic relation, namely synonymy. Linguists have amply shown that, in language use among monolinguals, cases of true synonymy are rather rare. Rather elements stand more often in a relationship of hyponymy. Among bilinguals, the same relationship obtains, not only between elements which could be said to belong to the same language, but also between elements which, from an external observer’s point of view, would be said to belong to two different languages. As a consequence, where the monolingual would choose between two elements, the bilingual might have to choose between three and, in some cases, between elements belonging to two different languages without orienting to that difference as significant. It is this second possibility we are interested in here. Consider extract (17) below:

**Extract 17**

Participants BBB and CCC had come to visit participant AAA, the researcher, from Belgium. Before this extract, they have invited him to reciprocate the visit. AAA has shown hesitation about this invitation and the extract starts with his account for that attitude.

1. *AAA: ndibw entfin donc hari ibyo ngomba gucombina # sinzi niba ngomba kujya kubikorera iBuruseri cyangwa se niba ngomba kujya iNairobi # ariko di iBuruseri niho heza niho hari n*’ibitabo.
   %eng: I think well there are things I must **combine** # I don’t know if I must do it in Brussels or if I must go to Nairobi # wait a minute it’s better I go to Brussels for there are also **books**.

2. *BBB: niho hari **documentation**.
   %eng: there are **references**.

4. @comment: silence.

4. *CCC: niho hari **documentation** naho iNairobi se wakoraa # sur quelle base?
   %eng: there are **references** as for Nairobi # how can you work?

5. *BBB: **wakwidoocumenta** # ute *ibitabo byava he?
   %eng: how **can you use references** # where would you find **books**?
In (1), AAA holds that the advantage of going to Brussels is that he can have access to books (on Rwanda). He uses the Kinyarwanda word for books. In (2), BBB agrees with him by producing a reformulation by means of language alternation (see Gafaranga, 1998 for a discussion of this type of agreement sequence). He uses the French word ‘documentation’, a word which is more specific than the Kinyarwanda one as used by AAA. ‘Documentation’ refers specifically to the research activities while ‘ibitabo’ refers to any books. In (4), CCC shows his own agreement and uses the French word. At this point, one may think of what Jefferson (1987) calls “embedded correction”. An argument in favour of this interpretation would be that, as the element ‘documentation’ is more appropriate in this academic context, speakers have adopted the ‘mot juste’. But, in (5), BBB cancels that interpretation. He uses, in a reiterative structure, both elements as if to say that, by using the French element, he did not mean that the element ‘ibitabo’ was not appropriate. In the same turn (5), the linguistic difference between the two elements ‘ibitabo’ and ‘documentation’, i.e. the fact that one is Kinyarwanda while the other is French, is also cancelled. Instead of keeping the French linguistic structure as it has been adopted so far, BBB adopts an integrated form of the French element (wakwidumenta). And, in (6), AAA agrees with the argument as it has been developed without any signal that what speakers have accomplished is deviant in any way. Even the fact that the form ‘wakwidumenta’ is neither French nor Kinyarwanda, but rather both, is noticed. Through this conduct, participants can be seen to have confirmed to one another, and therefore to the analyst, that what is significant about the two elements is, not the language they belong to, but rather the content they convey at this particular point of the interaction and the work that semantic
difference allows them to accomplish here and now. In the instance, although language alternation has occurred, on the level of language choice, talk is actually normative.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, on the basis of what we have observed in our data consisting of bilingual conversations, we have raised the question of whether speakers speak a language, of whether the concept of language is a useful one in describing speakers’ language choice acts. At the end of the discussion, the answer to that question is clear. From an analytic point of view, speakers cannot be said to speak a language. Rather, in talk, they select a medium, a norm, for their conversational activity. In the paper, we have shown that the need for a medium of their interaction is a speakers’ own concern. Through medium negotiation sequences, speakers themselves reveal that, without a common medium, their interaction would be disorderly, i.e. impossible. Therefore, in order to be able to account for order in language alternation among bilingual speakers, analysts must determine, not the base language, but rather the medium, the scheme of interpretation speakers themselves orient to while talking.

In this paper, we have shown that the medium of a bilingual conversation, that scheme of interpretation, need not be monolingual. It may also be bilingual. In turn, the bilingual medium may take at least three different versions, namely the parallel mode, the mixed mode and the halfway-between mode. It is because, in principle, many possibilities are available that speakers themselves negotiate which one is going to be relevant in a particular instance. It is also because many possibilities are available that analysts
themselves must determine which one has been adopted by speakers themselves. In the paper, we have argued that, in order to accomplish this practical task, analysts must observe speakers’ own reaction to their language choice acts. In turn, observation of participants’ own reaction so as to discover the medium which informs their talk activities can either be directed towards instances speakers themselves perceive as deviant or towards instances speakers themselves orient to as normative conduct.

The view of language choice adopted here potentially leads to important implications, not only for studies of language choice amongst bilingual speakers, but also for studies of language variation in use in general. By re-directing attention away from the concept of language, the view calls for a redefinition of the notion of code-switching. As we have seen, code-switching has traditionally been defined as the use of two languages within the same conversation. The discussion in this paper shows that not all instances of the use of two languages in the same conversation have the same status. Some instances are oriented to by speakers themselves as instances of normative conduct while some others are oriented as instances of repairable deviance. This is consistent with the findings by researchers such as Auer (1984, 1995) who have formulated the call for a distinction among different language contact phenomena. The concept of code-switching would have to be limited to any use of two languages which does not fall in either of these two categories. In other words, code-switching would be, not the use of two grammatical systems in the same conversation, but rather an instance of functional deviance from the medium, from this actually oriented-to linguistic code. As regards general studies of language variation in use, the implication is to do away with the concept of ‘language’ as a grammatical system and to adopt a view of language as a code. If such a view is
adopted, bilingualism demonstrably becomes only an extreme case of language variation. That is, in this view, it would be possible to account for phenomena of register switching, dialect switching and language switching in a unitary fashion. After all, in talk, bilinguals and monolinguals do essentially the same things. Each of their acts is either normative or it is deviant with respect to a discoverable medium.

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**TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS**

The transcription format used follows the conventions laid out in the *LIDES* Coding Manual (LIPPS group 1998). Accordingly, speakers’ utterances are reproduced on main tiers and translations and glosses on dependent tiers. However in this paper, unlike in LIDES where language contrast through the use of a particular code after each lexical item, different type faces are used to facilitate reading.

**A. Talk Features**

+/− interruption

+... trailing off

# pause

xxx unintelligible material

\text{[!=]} text \text{[!=]} paralinguistic material (e.g. coughing, laughing)

<text> [<] overlap precedes

<text> [>] overlap follows

[<] retracing

... omitted fragment

%add Addressee

**B. Language Contrast.**
**Kinyarwanda-French Data.**

Kinyarwanda: plain characters.  
*French: italics.*  
Other languages: underlining.

**Catalan-Castilian Data.**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catalan</td>
<td>Plain style stands for stretches of talk in Catalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Castilian</strong></td>
<td>Bold style stands for stretches of talk in Castilian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Underlined</strong></td>
<td>Underlined utterances correspond to those stretches of talk where the language cannot be determined by the researcher (e.g. when a given utterance is the same in the two languages).</td>
</tr>
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**C. Bold style** indicates elements targeted by analysis.