

*Code switching among bilingual learners of Spanish: social and cognitive functions*

Code switching is a common practice among bilingual speakers. Research on Spanish/English bilinguals in the US has provided plenty of evidence documenting the use of code switching in daily conversation to serve a variety of interactional and social functions. This paper investigates code switching in a different setting: the heritage language classroom. It analyzes Spanish heritage language learners' use of English in both teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions. The findings of the study suggest that, in this academic setting, bilingual learners resort to code switching not only as a strategy to establish intergroup solidarity and membership—as documented in previous research, but also as a cognitive tool to mediate their language learning. Evidence was obtained of heritage learners' use of English with a metalinguistic function, to provide scaffolded help to each other, and to collaborate in the co-construction of their knowledge of the Spanish language. The pedagogical implications of these findings are discussed.