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**Department of Linguistics**  
**California State University, Fresno**

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## Contents

SLA Metaphor Development . . . . .	1
<i>Maisarah M. Almirabi</i>	
The Semantic Feature of [Shape] in the Bamunka Noun . . . . .	8
<i>Ciara Anderson</i>	
Double-Obviatives and Direction-Marking in Kutenai . . . . .	18
<i>Irene Appelbaum</i>	
Pathways of Change in Romance Motion Events: A Corpus-Based Comparison . . . . .	25
<i>Catherine Arnett</i>	
Linguistic and Cognitive Temporal Representations in Traditional Negev Arabic . . . . .	35
<i>Letizia Cerqueglini</i>	
Alliteration and Rhyming in Mandarin Onomatopoeia . . . . .	41
<i>Yi Jen Chen</i>	
A Factorial Typology of Codas in the Prosodic Hierarchy . . . . .	48
<i>Trevor Driscoll</i>	
A Method for Depicting Vowel Sounds in Three Dimensions . . . . .	57
<i>Grandon Goertz and Terese Anderson</i>	
Cross-linguistic Patterns in the Argument Structure of Posture Verbs in English and Spanish . . . . .	70
<i>Diana Gómez Vázquez</i>	
Taming Free Merge Further – Sub-Extraction and its Kin . . . . .	82
<i>Nobu Goto and Andreas Blümel</i>	
The Syntax of Sentential Negation in Standard Arabic and Jazani Arabic . . . . .	94
<i>Eman Hadadi</i>	
Serial Tonal Derivations in Southern Taiwanese Diminutive Structure . . . . .	105
<i>Yuchau E. Hsiao</i>	
Psych Adjectives and Their Cross-categorical Behaviors . . . . .	113
<i>Yang Liu</i>	
Some Linguistic Features in Green Hmong, White Hmong, and Hmong Leng . . . . .	118
<i>Chô Ly</i>	
Optional Raising and Labeling in ECM . . . . .	129
<i>Manabu Mizuguchi</i>	
An Analysis of Deadjectival Nominalization: A DM-theoretic View . . . . .	141
<i>Junya Morita</i>	
Labeling Algorithm, Agreement, and Pro-form <i>no</i> in Japanese . . . . .	151
<i>Masao Ochi</i>	
Constructing Naturalistic Artificial Languages for Language Acquisition Research . . . . .	162
<i>Mariel L. Schroeder</i>	
The Use of Word Order and Determiners to Mark Information Structure in Adult and Child Saudi Arabic . . . . .	173
<i>Mashaël Semsem and Jidong Chen</i>	
Bilingual Kazakh Children’s Code Switching . . . . .	179
<i>Asel Shayakhmet</i>	
Pronouns and Logophoricity in South Saami . . . . .	184
<i>Mikael Vinka</i>	
Domain of Suppletion: From Japanese Numeral . . . . .	196
<i>Yusuke Yoda</i>	

# Bilingual Kazakh Children's Code Switching

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## 1 Introduction

Kazakhstan is a post-Soviet country comprising more than 100 cultural and language groups, where Kazakh-Russian bilingualism is widespread across its whole territory. The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan designated the Russian language as an 'international' language; it functions in the society simultaneously with the official Kazakh language and serves as a lingua franca. Due to decades of russification and keeping the Kazakh language far away from science and other crucial fields of functioning during the Soviet time, Kazakhstan has had a problem of development and the actual use of Kazakh language, although now it is not as acute as before.

It is very common that Kazakh children have knowledge and competence in two languages, in spite of the fact that Kazakh and Russian are neither typologically, nor genealogically related languages. Kazakh has agglutinative structure, whereas Russian has inflected structure; Kazakh is one of more than forty Turkic languages in Altai family of languages, whereas Russian belongs to the eastern Slavonic branch of the Indo-European family of languages. However, social factors require Kazakh children to grow up bilingually, switching between the two most important languages for the population.

## 2 Overview

We recorded the oral speech of bilingual Kazakh children who were from nine to ten years old at the time of data collection. The informants were selected on the basis of bilingual criteria. Children were asked to describe a picture book, i.e. a story without words, about a little boy (the famous children's picture book "Frog, Where Are You?" by Mercer Mayer).

The bilingual children were attending the fourth grade of a school-lyceum in Almaty, Kazakhstan, which has both Kazakh and Russian classes. Based on the language of their education, we instructed children either in Kazakh (if a student was from the class taught in Kazakh) or Russian (if a student was enrolled in a Russian-speaking class) to describe the pictures and narrate a coherent story using the language which was more convenient for them.

During the child's description of the pictures, the researcher tried not to interfere in his/her story, giving him/her a free choice of the linguistic means of both languages possessed by the young bilingual narrator. The sample of bilingual informants contains both boys and girls. The data were collected in several separate sessions, taped down, and then transcribed using the CHAT transcription system (MacWhinney, 2000).

## 3 Framework

In bilingual acquisition processing the use of languages is considered to be a capability to handle two different language codes, and many studies have shown that code switching often either opposes or accompanies code mixing. According to linguistic literature, these two terms may interact and complement each other rather than oppose (O'Grady, Archibald, Rees-Miller, 2005), or sometimes code mixing is considered to be a certain type of code switching (Spolsky, 2008).

It is believed that code mixing happens during many stages of child's bilingual acquisition when phonological, lexical, morphological, etc. elements of two languages might happen to be parts of the same linguistic unit, e.g. a phrase, a sentence, or even a word (Comeau, Genesee, & Lapaquette, 2003). Code switching routinely refers to strategically motivated bilingual activity and involves communicator's pragmatic intentions (Reyes, 2004). Inferring from the definitions, we use terms of code mixing as if it is referred to a relatively unmotivated bilingual transition from one language to another during the process of

\*CHI: oda ademi tosek bolghan [=kz]  
 \*CHI: # potom [=ru] bala uqtady [=kz]  
 \*CHI: potom ubejal [\*]  
 \*CHI: potom sobachka predupredil [\*] mal'chika  
 \*CHI: a ma- # a mal'chik byl rasstroen  
 {A boy had a dog, a frog (ru). He had a nice bed (kz) ... Then (ru) the boy got asleep (kz). Then the frog came out from the jar, then got away. Then the dog warned the boy, but bo- ... but boy was upset}

## 5 Conclusion

The issues on Kazakh-Russian speaking bilingual children discussed above require further study and analysis, especially, we need to focus on quantitative data which is going to be the point to show the bigger picture. In this writing, we tried to draw attention to some results, such as second language interference in implementation of narratives by bilingual children, which involves the factor of language dominance. Predictably, the important role plays input; in our case, parents, teachers, any other interlocutors, i.e. Kazakh adults, who do code switching and code mixing, have some impact on the bilingual children's speech. In the process of narrating, some children were trying to simplify their approach, choosing the so-called 'language economy principle'. As a result of that, they could use declension or conjugation of one language for the words from another language. Indubitably, lacunae in non-dominant language vocabulary play their role in code switching, but at the same time, it is hard to overestimate young narrator's strategy implementation of both languages within bilingual child's competence. Depending on the real discourse, Kazakh-Russian bilingual children used metacommunicative and demonstrating types of pragmatic code switching, and relief code switching functioned as an indicator of the different type of children's code switching. Three conventional groups of children, i.e. with dominant Kazakh, with dominant Russian, and with relatively balanced Kazakh and Russian, respectively were distinguished. Kazakh bilingual children's code switching demonstrates that they use linguistic resources of both languages available to them to make their narrations explicit for interlocutors.

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