

## Code-Switching As a Channel for Expanding the Russian Vocabulary of a Bilingual Child Aged 4–6 in an Uzbek–Russian Family: The “Lexical Bridge” Model

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**Abstract:** *The article examines an understudied mechanism by which the Russian vocabulary of a bilingual child expands: code-switching (CS) in the family discourse of an Uzbek–Russian family. A working “lexical bridge” model is proposed, according to which a Russian word becomes consolidated in the child’s active vocabulary if it is first presented within an Uzbek syntactic frame and accompanied by situational or visual support. The sources of Russian vocabulary formation are described and classified, and the methodology and data-coding scheme for empirical testing of the model are presented.*

**Key words:** *Child bilingualism, Russian vocabulary, code-switching, lexical bridge, Uzbek–Russian bilingualism, preschool age.*

### Introduction

Child bilingualism in Uzbekistan is a widespread phenomenon: a considerable proportion of children grow up in conditions of contact between Uzbek and Russian, and Russian is often acquired not in full but as a set of communicatively significant lexical blocks. The relevance of the problem is determined by the fact that vocabulary is the component of a bilingual’s language competence that is most sensitive to environmental conditions [1]. At the same time, the scholarly literature is dominated by studies that record vocabulary size and the share of exposure, whereas the specific micro-mechanisms through which an individual Russian word enters a child’s active vocabulary remain insufficiently described, especially for the Uzbek–Russian language pair.

The object of the study is the Russian vocabulary of a bilingual child aged 4–6. The subject is code-switching by adults and by the child as a channel for introducing and consolidating Russian lexemes. The aim is to substantiate the “lexical bridge” model and to develop a methodology for its empirical testing. The objectives are: (1) to systematize the sources of Russian vocabulary formation; (2) to identify the types of CS that are potentially significant for lexical development; (3) to formulate testable hypotheses; (4) to describe the research design.[2]

### Methodology

The starting point is L.S. Vygotsky’s idea that word meaning develops in verbal communication and is mediated by the social situation. In relation to bilingualism, this means that a Russian lexeme acquires meaning for the child not in isolation but through inclusion in specific communicative episodes. A.A. Leontiev’s psycholinguistic approach makes it possible to treat the word as an element of activity and not merely as a unit of the language system. F. Grosjean emphasizes that a bilingual is not “two monolinguals in one person” but a bearer of a distinct linguistic configuration; therefore, assessing a bilingual’s vocabulary solely against monolingual norms is incorrect. Classic studies [3] define language contact as a source of transfer, while the works of Poplack and Myers-Scotton describe the structural constraints on CS.

Empirical data show that the vocabulary size of a bilingual in each language depends on relative exposure and the quality of linguistic input [4]. However, an open question remains: which specific speech events turn a Russian word from “heard” into “used” when Uzbek is the base language of everyday communication in the family.

## Result and discussion

Based on an analysis of the literature and the logic of the Uzbek–Russian language environment, the following groups of sources are proposed (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Classification of sources of Russian vocabulary[5]

| No. | Source                                   | Characteristics                               | Typical lexical groups                                       |
|-----|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Family discourse (parents, grandparents) | Direct adult speech, including speech with CS | Everyday and kinship vocabulary, names of household objects  |
| 2   | Preschool institution / classes          | Structured input, instructional speech        | Educational vocabulary, numbers, colours, names of actions   |
| 3   | Screen content                           | Cartoons, videos, games in Russian            | Emotive-evaluative vocabulary, character names, action verbs |
| 4   | Peers and play                           | Spontaneous speech, imitation                 | Play vocabulary, colloquial forms                            |
| 5   | Social environment                       | Shops, transport, media, signage              | Names of goods, services and urban realia                    |
| 6   | Language contact and borrowings          | Russianisms in the family's Uzbek speech      | Words established in Uzbek as borrowings                     |

The first four groups are described in detail in the literature on child bilingualism (Protasova, Rodina). The sixth is the least studied: a considerable layer of Russian words is heard by the child within Uzbek speech (as borrowings and insertions), and it is these units that, according to our hypothesis, form a “preliminary” passive Russian vocabulary which is then easily activated.

### 3. The “lexical bridge” model

A “lexical bridge” is understood as a speech sequence in which a Russian lexeme is introduced within an Uzbek utterance (intrasentential CS) and, within a short interval (1–3 turns), is repeated in a Russian context or accompanied by a translation equivalent. An example (hypothetical): an adult says in Uzbek “Mana bu — stakan, stakanga suv quyamiz” (“Here, this is a glass; we will pour water into the glass”), and then: “Дай стакан, пожалуйста” (“Give me the glass, please”). The first phrase ensures comprehension through a familiar syntactic frame; the second demonstrates the word in a “pure” Russian context.[6]

Three types of CS are distinguished, differing in their presumed lexical effect:

- *referential* — insertion of a Russian word into an Uzbek phrase when there is no Uzbek equivalent (or it is weakly used); increases the likelihood of passive acquisition;
- *duplicating* — consecutive naming of an object in both languages; increases the likelihood of active acquisition by establishing a “word–word–referent” link;
- *discursive* — switching to change the addressee, emotion or function of the utterance; the lexical influence is minimal.

The central assumption of the model is that the greatest contribution to the active Russian vocabulary is made not by the amount of Russian speech as such, but by the share of duplicating and referential switches accompanied by visual support.[7]

### 4. Hypotheses and research methodology

**Hypothesis 1.** Russian lexemes introduced through a “lexical bridge” are acquired into the child’s active vocabulary more often than lexemes presented only in monolingual Russian speech.

**Hypothesis 2.** Duplicating CS is more effective than referential CS for active use of a word.

**Hypothesis 3.** The bridge effect is stronger in the presence of visual support (an object, a picture, an action). **Hypothesis 4.** The share of Russian borrowings in the family's Uzbek speech is positively related to the size of the child's passive Russian vocabulary.[8]

#### **4.1. Sample and material**

The participation of 20–30 children aged 4–6 from Uzbek–Russian families (with a varying share of Russian in home speech) and their parents is envisaged. Material: (a) audio recordings of family interaction (3–4 sessions of 30 minutes each during play and book reading); (b) a parental questionnaire on the child's language biography and exposure; (c) picture-naming and word-comprehension tasks in Russian before and after a series of sessions.[9]

#### **4.2. Experimental part**

A set of 20 Russian nouns and verbs that are rarely used by the child, matched for frequency and syllable structure, is selected. The words are distributed across three conditions: (1) bridge with duplication; (2) referential CS; (3) monolingual Russian presentation (control). A series of 6 sessions is held over two weeks; a delayed test is administered after 7 days.[10]

#### **4.3. Coding scheme and measures**

Transcripts are coded for the following parameters: type of CS; direction (Uzbek → Russian / Russian → Uzbek); initiator (adult / child); presence of visual support;[11] number of repetitions of the word. Dependent variables: word comprehension, word production, and durability of acquisition (delayed test). Non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon, Mann–Whitney) and mixed-effects models accounting for individual differences and the word as random factors are envisaged for data analysis.[12]

If the hypotheses are confirmed, the data will make it possible to refine practical recommendations for families and educators: instead of the rigid “one parent – one language” principle, in some situations it is more appropriate to deliberately use structured CS as a tool of lexical teaching.[13] This is consistent with the current tendency to regard CS in child bilingualism not as a speech defect but as a norm of bilingual communication.[14] At the same time, possible limitations (a small sample, differences in the social status of families, the influence of screen content) call for caution in generalizing the results.[15]

### **Conclusion**

The article proposes a classification of the sources of Russian vocabulary formation in a bilingual child, substantiates the “lexical bridge” model and describes a methodology for testing it on Uzbek–Russian bilingual material. The scientific novelty lies in singling out CS as a separate channel of lexical development and in operationalizing this channel through a typology of switches and an experimental design. A prospect for future work is a longitudinal study and a comparison of data on children from families with different language policies.

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