

An Analysis on Code-Switching in *Fortress Besieged* from the Perspective of Register Theory

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Abstract

Code-switching is a common yet complicated phenomenon. With the rapid development of cross cultural communication, the contact between language and language varieties become all the more frequent. With the appearance of more and more bilingual and multilingual communities, code-switching becomes a linguistic phenomenon of significant academic concern in the field of linguistics. This paper sets out to analyze code-switching in Ch'ien Chung-shu's famous work—*Fortress Besieged*. In this novel, some characters frequently engaged in code-switching in their conversation. However, among differing views on the merits of this language phenomenon, few studied it from the register perspective. In this light, the present study adopts the register theory to analyze code-switching in *Fortress Besieged*. The core of this study is to make a detailed analysis of the impact of field, tenor and mode upon the occurrence of code-switching in this novel. Through an investigation of code-switching employed in this work, it shows that code-switching in this novel is subject to the influence of the three factors of register, field, tenor and mode. These three variables of register have a restrictive impact on the occurrence of the switched codes based on different situations in *Fortress Besieged*. Throughout an analysis of code-switching in *Fortress Besieged*, the study intends to arouse language users' awareness of this linguistic phenomenon so that they can apply it properly in their communication.

Keywords: code-switching, *Fortress Besieged*, register

1. Introduction

Fortress Besieged is a great critical and realistic novel written by Ch'ien Chung-shu, an outstanding Chinese novelist. In *Fortress Besieged*, several main characters who have studied abroad or have bilingual competence often switch their code when having conversations. Previous researches on *Fortress Besieged* are mainly from literary angle. Few researches have attempted to analyze code-switching from the system perspective, especially the register. This study tries to answer a very important question: How does the register analysis render the linguistic phenomenon of code-switching in *Fortress Besieged*?

As far as analysis is concerned, the author employs register theory of systemic-functional grammar to explain some typical code-switching instances in *Fortress Besieged*. A combination of quantitative and qualitative approach is used in the present paper, with the intention to make a through analysis of the code-switching in *Fortress Besieged*. Data in this paper include code-switching occurring in characters' conversation as well as the writer's narrative description. These instances are classified according to three dimensions of register: field, tenor and mode.

This study is composed of four parts. The first part is the introduction. It briefly introduces the current situation of the study of code-switching and the work written by Ch'ien Chung-shu. The second part reviews the previous studies on code-switching as well as specific studies on code-switching in both the spoken and written discourse. The third part is the body of this study, and an analysis of the code-switching instances in *Fortress Besieged* under the framework of register theory is to be presented. It discusses under the three dimensions of register theory including field, tenor and mode. The last part is the conclusion, comprising the result of the research and some possible contributions. Besides, it lists some limitations as well as some suggestions for further study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Code-Switching

In linguistic study, “code” first came into use in the field of sociolinguistics. Terms like dialect, variety, style, standard language, pidgin and Creole can refer to a language system that people employ for communication, yet the problem is that they all have the inclination to arouse emotions, which result in linguists’ endeavor to introduce another term. Thus the term “code” was put into use for its relative neutrality. It can indicate such language variety as a register, a dialect, or a style, even an idiolect used by a speaker. Vershueren has defined code as follows: “any distinguishable variant of language, involving systematic sets of choices, whether linked to a specific geographical area, a social class, an assignment of functions, or a specific context of use” (Vershueren, 1999, p. 118).

Before we come to the definitions of code-switching, it is better for us to know who put forward the term first. In fact, it is not E. Haugen who first used the term, as is often believed. It is Hans Vogt who did the job in an article published in 1954. Since then, researchers have come up with various definitions based on their own research focus and data they employed. Among all the definitions, the one given by Myers-Scotton (1993) was agreed upon by more researchers, that is, code-switching is the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction, and the linguistic varieties participating in code-switching may be different languages or dialects or styles of the same language.

Code-switching in this paper will be defined according to *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* edited by Richard (2002, p. 115) as “a change by a speaker or writer from one language or language variety to another one. Code-switching can take place in a conversation when one speaker uses one language and the other speaker answers in a different language. A person may start speaking one language and then change to another one in the middle of his speech, or sometimes even in the middle of a sentence”.

2.2 An Overview of Code-Switching Studies Worldwide

The linguistic study of the code-switching phenomenon began abroad in the early decades of the twentieth century and widespread in 1950s and the modern view of code-switching came up in 1970s. Since 1970s, code-switching has obtained many achievements in researches abroad and developed different angles and standpoints. Four approaches are formed on code-switching, including grammatical approach, sociolinguistic approach, psycholinguistic approach, and Conversational Analysis (CA) approach. These four different perspectives have revealed different aspects of code-switching. All research approaches have made contribution to our understanding and perception of code-switching. Because of the complexity and multi-faceted nature of this linguistic phenomenon, no single approach can provide a comprehensive explanation.

There is not as much research on code-switching in China as abroad. China is not a typical bilingual or multilingual country. In China, there is little research on code-switching during 1970s to 1980s. Domestic researches of code-switching began in the 1980s. And Chinese researchers showed their interest in code-switching in the 1990s. The last decade witnessed a boom period of code-switching study in China. According to the language varieties involved in the studies on code-switching, previous studies in China could fall into three main categories, namely Mandarin and dialect code-switching, Chinese and English code-switching, and Mandarin and ethnic group language code-switching (Li & Chen, 2004). Many approaches to the study of code-switching is applied in some specific type of discourse, such as news, advertisements, novels and EFL classroom (Shen & Li, 2001; Wang & Huang, 2004; Ye & Qin, 2004).

According to the statistics from CNKI, there are 662 papers with the title of “code-switching” from 1987 to 2011 in China. From 1987 to 2000, there are 26 papers code-switching. From 2001 to 2005, there are 93 papers on code-switching. From 2006 to 2011 there are 543 papers on code-switching. The following table shows the tendency of code-switching researches in China.

Table 1. Studies of code-switching in China from 1987 to 2011

1987-1990	1991-1995	1996-2000	2001-2005	2006-2011	Total
3	7	16	93	543	662

Domestic linguists and scholars have studied code-switching from various approaches and the researches done by domestic scholars already have achieved a lot. However, code-switching studies in China are still new

compared with western countries. Among the code-switching studies of written discourse, the systematic functional approach is rare thus needs further study.

2.3 Register Theory

The concept of register was first put forward by Reid in 1956 (Ure & Ellis, 1997, p. 198). Register is concerned with situation context. The first person relating the study of context with study of language is the anthropologist Malinowski (Berns, 1990, p. 9). In a seminal essay “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages”, he laid the foundation for the development of contextual studies in the sphere of linguistics. He pointed out “Exactly as in the reality of spoken or written language, a word without linguistic context is a mere figment and stands for nothing by itself, so in the reality of a spoken living tongue, the utterance has no meaning except in the context of situation” (Malinowski, 1923, p. 307). By proposing the above words, Malinowski intended to contextualize text by relating it to its environment. He thought that the context of situation should be taken into account during the process of interpreting message.

Profoundly influenced by Malinowski, Firth further explored meaning by building up his entire theory of semantics upon the notion of context, claiming that meaning is not only interlocked with an immediate environment, but “deeply embedded in the living process of persons maintaining themselves in society” (Gregory & Carrol, 1978, p. 69). Descending directly from Firth’s perspective of context theory, Halliday took a functional approach to view language as an instrument of social interaction. He points out “all language is language in use, in a context of situation, and all of it related to the situation” (Halliday, 1978, p. 32), which highlight the significance of context in any interpretation and analysis of a text. Halliday first mentioned the term “register” in his book *Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* in 1964 and after that, he further developed and perfected this concept. He defined three variables, namely, field, tenor and mode, and thought these three variables influenced language use in every context situation.

Field of discourse is always deemed as subject matter. In fact, it is much more than subject matter in this category. In essence, field of discourse is what is going on. According to John Pearce, “field refers to the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs, and embraces not only the subject matter in hand but the whole activity of the speaker or participant in a setting” (Doughty et al., 1972, p. 185). As Halliday indicated, field referred to “what socially recognized action the participants are engaged in, in which the exchange of verbal meaning has a part. This includes everything from, at one end, types of action defined without reference to language” (Halliday, 1978, p. 144).

According to Doughty et al., tenor is concerned with “the relationship between participants... not merely variation in formality... but... such questions as the permanence or otherwise of the relationship and the degree of emotional charge in it...” (1972, p. 185). Thus, tenor refers to the participants in communication, and the relationships among them. If a participant’s role in social situation altered, then the language that the participant employ would change accordingly. Therefore, people should consider how to communicate with others, in a casual way or in a polite way. For instance, when talking with a person of higher social status, the language that the participants use must be overcautious. While, talking with intimate friends, the language may be pretty casual. Thus, tenor of discourse often varies greatly with the differences of the participant’s social status.

Mode of discourse refers to the medium or mode of the language activity which determines (or rather correlates with) the role played by the language activity in the situation (Halliday, 1973, p. 9). The essential distinctions among mode variations do not simply lie in that between writing and speaking, but much more in sub-categorization. When real situation is taken into consideration, this clear-cut distinction between writing and speaking is far away from the truth. The real fact is that there is a lot of overlaps between the two modes, and the distinction is much changeable than might have been presupposed.

3. Register Analysis of Code-Switching in *Fortress Besieged*

In this part, we adopt the register theory to explore the code-switching in *Fortress Besieged*. To be specific, it focuses on the restrictive functions of the three register variables on code-switching, namely, field, tenor and mode.

3.1 Field Analysis

The variable of field can be regarded as the most obvious dimension of situation. It refers to the contextual factors such as the subject matter, setting, participants and the whole language activity. Topic means the domain of human experience and it is treated as a dimension of the situation. It is the manifest content or referent of speech, but the field not necessarily refers to the topic. For example, literary works is a particular field of discourse and technicality is another dimension of the field as well.

It is found that the field variable influences the appearances of code-switching in the novel *Fortress Besieged*. Subject matter and topic restrict the occurrence of code-switching. From the perspective of field, subject matter including love, academy, debates and quarrels contains more code-switching in *Fortress Besieged*. It is reasonable for these topics to appear frequently because the main characters of the novel are some intellectuals who are highly educated and show more interests in these subject matters. The field variables and the correlated distributions of code-switching among the 91 sample data are illustrated in the following table, followed with a brief explanation.

Table 2. Different types of discourse

Types of discourse	Chinese-English code-switching	Chinese-French code-switching	Chinese-Germany code-switching	Total
Number	79	11	1	91

Table 3. Different fields of discourse

Setting	Number	Percentage
Home setting	48	52.8%
University setting	8	8.8%
Restaurant setting	7	7.7%
Office setting	1	1%
Author's narrative description	27	29.7%

According to the data collection, among all the 91 different fields of discourse, 48 fields occurs in the home setting accounting for nearly 53 percentage; 27 fields occurs in the author's narrative description accounting for nearly 30 percentage; 8 fields occurs in the university setting accounting for nearly 9 percentage; 7 fields occurs in the restaurant setting accounting for nearly 8 percentage and 1 field occurs in the office setting accounting for 1 percentage. Totally there are 79 Chinese-English code-switching; 11 Chinese-French code-switching occurs in the home, restaurant and narration settings. Only one Chinese-Germany code-switching occurs in the narration setting.

Here are some code-switching instances in *Fortress Besieged* with a detailed analysis from the perspective of field variables:

在这个自造的昏天黑地里，他觉得苏小姐凉快的手指摸着他的前额，又听她用法文低声自语：“Pauvre petit!”

……苏小姐道：“时间还早呢，忙什么?还坐一会儿。”指着自己身旁，鸿渐刚才坐的地方。“我要坐远一点——你太美了!这月亮会作弄我干傻事。”

苏小姐胜利地微笑，低声说：“Embrasse-moi!”说着一阵害羞，奇怪自己竟有做傻子的勇气，可是她只敢躲在外国话里命令鸿渐吻自己。鸿渐没法推避，回脸吻她。(Ch'ien, 1991, pp. 84-85)

This conversation happens between Fang Hongjian and Miss Su in a pavilion of Miss Su's house after the dinner with some friends. In this code-switching instance, Miss Su uses some Chinese-French code-switching in her language. We can categorize the field elements of this conversation in the following table:

Table 4. Field elements of the conversation

Setting	A pavilion of Miss Su's house
Topic	Moon
Circumstance	They are alone without anybody else around; Miss Su adores Fang and is eager to express her love

The above table shows that the field elements of this conversation are informal and non-technical. From the perspective of field, the topic concerns with love affairs between Fang Hongjian and Miss Su. And the setting is in a pavilion of Miss Su's house. The circumstance of their conversation is that Miss Su wants to express her love to Fang Hongjian. However, she chooses to use some Chinese-French code-switching instead of using Chinese words directly.

The field elements in this conversation are informal and non-technical. On one hand, the participants are in love and longing for the affection from each other. On the other hand, the "moon" and "fool" suggest that the setting environment of the conversation is romantic and informal. Moreover, this conversation happens in a pavilion without anyone else. That is to say, the ideational register in the conversation is non-technical.

In the French language, "Pauvre petite" means "poor guy" and "Embrasse-moi" means "hug me". These two French phrases show a dubious and close relationship between them. Miss Su chooses such a non-technical expression for two reasons. Firstly, she adores Fang Hongjian but she feels shy to express it in Chinese directly. Secondly, Chinese people are comparatively conservative towards such private topics as love, especially in the 1930s China. Miss Su's choice of code-switching is a successful communicative strategy because it matches the field of discourse.

From the analysis and discussion above, we can infer that field of discourse can greatly affect the language choice and the function code-switching performs is ideational. When a communicator chooses to switch his or her codes, he or she must choose language items that can suit the field elements such as the subject matter, the participants, the setting and the circumstance of the context. Otherwise, the misuse of technical or non-technical language items will result in awkwardness or deviation in a discourse.

3.2 Tenor Analysis

As has been stated, tenor includes the personal tenor and the functional tenor. The personal tenor refers to the social relationship between participants. According to Halliday, the personal tenor restricts the formality of language choice. The more intimate the relationship is, the lower the formality is. Therefore, the participants of the communication should find an appropriate way to express themselves from the perspective of tenor.

Language can manifest the social status and relationship of the communicators. Code-switching can also demonstrate the social status of the communicators. This may serve as one of the reasons that people switch their codes. As for the novel *Fortress Besieged*, several tenor elements restrict the appearances of code-switching. The main tenor elements include social status, role relationship and degree of formality.

In this part, the author chooses some conversations between characters involving code-switching. And the results prove that the social status, relationship and degree of formality restrict on the occurrence of code-switching. The code-switching instances are presented in the following with detailed discussion.

Example:

到了张家，张先生热闹地欢迎道：“**Hello! Doctor** 方，好久不见！”

当时张先生跟鸿渐拉手，问他是不是天天“**go downtown**”。鸿渐寒暄已毕，瞧玻璃里都是碗、瓶、碟子，便说：“张先生喜欢收藏瓷器？”

“**Sure! Have a look see!**”张先生打开橱门，请鸿渐赏鉴。

鸿渐拿了几件，看都是“成化”、“宣德”、“康熙”，也不识真假，只好说：“这东西很值钱罢？”

“**Sure**，值不少钱呢，**plenty of dough**。并且这东西不比书画。买书画买了假的，一文不值，只等于 **waste paper**。瓷器假的，至少还可以盛菜盛饭。我有时请外国 **friends** 吃饭，就用那个康熙窑‘油底蓝五彩’大盘做 **salad dish**，他们都觉得古色古香，菜的味道也有点 **old-time**。”

方鸿渐道：“张先生眼光一定好，不会买假东西。”

张先生大笑道：“我不懂什么年代花纹，事情忙，也没工夫翻书研究。可是我有 **hunch**，看见一件东西，忽然 **what d’you call** 灵机一动，买来准 **OK**。他们古董掮客都佩服我，我常对他们说：“不用拿假货来 **fool** 我。**O yeah**，我姓张的不是 **sucker**，休想骗我！”关上厨门，又说：“噢，**headache**——”便按电铃叫用人。(Ch’ien, 1991, p. 37)

Zhang Jimin is going to have a marriage interview with Fang Hongjian for his daughter. One day he invites Fang Hongjian to his house. As soon as they meet, Zhang Jimin frequently uses some Chinese-English code-switching in his language. As for his occupation, Zhang Jinmin works in the City Bank as a rich banker. Compared with Fang Hongjian, he belongs to the high social class. Moreover, he is the host and addresser who dominate the conversation. The use of code-switching in this conversation is restricted by the tenor elements. On the one hand,

Zhang Jimin has a decent job belonging to the high social status compared and his language choice matches his role as a junior and guest. On the other hand, Fang Hongjian has studied in Germany and got the doctoral degree. Moreover, Zhang Jimin is going to have a marriage interview for his daughter. That's another reason for him to choose a more serious and sophisticated language. For him, using the English language is a communicative strategy that symbolizes the social status.

For the code-switching part, Zhang Jimin uses some English words such as "plenty of dough", "waste paper", "headache", "States" to replace some very easy and common Chinese words on purpose. The inappropriate code-switching makes him more like a bounder than a banker. He keeps introducing his antiques with frequent code-switching now and then, making Fang Hongjian awkward and the dinner party turned out to be unhappy.

3.3 Mode Analysis

This part analyzes code-switching in the spoken and written discourse in this novel.

The mode of discourse can be labeled as the medium or channel in inter-lingual transmission. Channel refers to the way a language is conveyed among participants in a certain situation. It includes both phonic way and graphic way. While medium refers to the structure model of composition. It contains both spoken form and written form. Language can be written, spoken, formal and informal. Until now, we find that the more formal the context is, the less possible code switching occurs.

Example:

张先生呵呵大笑，一面吩咐进来的女佣说：“快去跟太太小姐说，客人来了，请他们出来。Make it snappy!”说时右手大拇指从中指弹在食指上“啪”的一响。(Ch'ien, 1991, p. 37)

In this case, the Chinese-English code-switching "Make it snappy!" is used by Zhang Jimin addressing to his servant. This conversation is informal. With respect to the tenor of discourse, Zhang Jimin's social status is superior to his servant and their social relationship is unequal. Although his servant may not understand any English, Zhang Jimin uses English expression instead of Chinese to show off in front of his guest Fang Hongjian. Fang Hongjian's social position is lower than him. Thus in this context, Zhang Jimin's switch into English in his choice of words reflects the informality of the text. And it also shows the oral features of the conversation.

In written discourse, some code-switching can explain or comment on something. These code-switching reveals the distinctive writing features of the novel. The following is an example that shows how mode of discourse influences the use of code-switching in written form.

Example:

鸿渐见了她面，不大自然，手不停弄着书桌上他自德国带回的 Supernorma 牌四色铅笔。(Ch'ien, 1991, p. 215)

陆子潇的外国文虽然跟重伤风人的鼻子一样不通，封面上 Communism 这个字是认识的，触目惊心。(Ch'ien, 1991, p. 230)

In the above two code-switching instances, the code-switching parts are not embedded inside the sentence. On the contrary, both of them are independent expressions in English and Germany. The written discourses all keep their original form. The code-switching "Supernorma" and "Communism" are kept by the writer in the foreign language. This kind of code-switching is a style of written language referring to certain things in another language. In the first case, this kind of code-switching belongs to the "lower form" of code-switching since it is just the original quotation of something in another language. In the second case, the writer directly uses the English name instead of translating it into the Chinese for the sake of convenience. Lu Zixiao knows little English other than the word "Communism" and this shows his intentions to see Fang Hongjian lost the job.

This part provides an analysis of how the register variables influence the use of code-switching. The analysis shows that the three variables of field can greatly affect the language choice and the function code-switching performs. When a communicator chooses to switch his or her codes, he or she must choose language items that can suit the field elements such as the subject matter, the participants, the setting and the circumstance of the context.

4. Conclusion

This paper is a tentative study of code-switching in the novel *Fortress Besieged*, hoping to develop a register framework for the code-switching study. The present study mainly analyzes the influence of the three register variables upon the code-switching in *Fortress Besieged*. The result shows that the code-switching in this novel is not random.

As a kind of language variety, code-switching is a topic which can be discussed in the framework of register theory. As a common field between systemic-functional linguistics and sociolinguistics, register theory points out a new direction for code-switching study. In this light, the core of this study is to make a detailed analysis of the impact of field, tenor and mode upon the occurrence of code-switching in this novel. From the perspective of field variable, code-switching in this novel is influenced by the setting of the communication. And with respect to the tenor of discourse, the social position of the participants and their role relationships restrict the occurrence of it. As for the mode of discourse, the occurrence of it in the characters' conversations differs from that of the descriptive sentences

The findings of the present research may not only shed a light on code-switching research in the novel *Fortress Besieged* but also on other literature works as well. The investigation into the code-switching from the perspective of the systemic functional linguistic approach may help scholars to employ this communicative strategy consciously and effectively. As a tentative study, it is hoped that this paper could open up some new resources and suggestions for the future relevant studies.

However, the present study has its limitations. On the one hand, the data collected is far from exhaustive. On the other hand, the discussions and results of this study are only preliminary explorations. For further research in code-switching and literature discourse studies, there is still much room for improvement.

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