The syntax and prosody of codeswitching in New Mexican Spanish-English discourse

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This paper examines from both a variationist perspective and a discourse analytic one the discursive and prosodic patterns of codeswitching. Shenk (2006) suggests that prosodic considerations are paramount in code-switching, showing that there is a strong correlation between codeswitching and Intonation Units (IUs) (Chafe 1994). Based on four bilingual individuals, Shenk (2006) argues that bilingual speakers overwhelmingly switch at IUs boundaries, as in example (1). My current research finds that speakers in a defined New Mexican bilingual community, where speakers use both Spanish and English in everyday life, a full 25% of switches are produced internal to the IU, that is, the constituents of both grammars alternate in the same clause (examples 2 & 3).

(1) K: tres años pa'l novecientos, 'three years for the nineties'
   so that would be --
   (H) noventa y seis años. 'ninety-six years'

(2) T: yo sé que buitre is a buzzard, 'I know that buzzard'
   you see?

(3) A: Yo decía, 'I said'
   no me van a pegar a mí that hard porque,' 'they are not going to hit me that hard because'
   .. soy mujer, 'I'm a woman'

In this study I use interviews from the New Mexico-Colorado Spanish Survey (Bills y Vigil 1999) and digitally recorded natural conversations with bilinguals of Northern New Mexico. The analysis examines 200 analyzable codeswitches in two directions: Spanish-English and English-Spanish. We compare syntactic patterns at switch sites when the switch occurs within the IU and when it occurs at IUs boundaries (Ford & Thompson 1996). The substantial proportion of codeswitches inside of the IU and syntactic patterns are evidence that codeswitching occurring internal to the IU or clause is more complex and requires a high ability of bilingual competence (Poplack 1980/2000).