

**You switch I switch, Jack:
On the role of interaction in Cabo Verdean language mixing**

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Abstract. This paper investigates the role turn-taking has in structuring language mixing practices in bilingual conversation. Previous research has observed that bilinguals prefer maintaining each other's language usage e.g. Auer (1984: 28-29) 'preference for same language talk.' The present paper tests this hypothesis by exploring the language mixing patterns in the bilingual Cabo Verdean Creole (Kriolu)-English community in Boston. Two research questions drive the investigation: 1) How are bilinguals influencing each other's language practices in an interactional context? 2) Are there observable contextual factors conditioning these interactional language practices? Four bilingual Kriolu-English conversations totaling 1.5 hours were analyzed focusing on the languages used at points of alternation between speaker turns. A quantitative analysis calculated the rate at which speakers maintained each other's languages. Subsequently, a qualitative analysis explored possible contextual factors conditioning language change or maintenance. Results of the quantitative analysis show speakers have a broad preference for maintaining each other's languages and the qualitative analysis supports that changing languages can be interactionally motivated.

Keywords. Cabo Verdean Creole; bilingualism; codeswitching; codemixing; language mixing; conversation analysis

1. Introduction. Studies on bilingual language have been burgeoning since the late 20th century and span a wide range of fields. Much of this work focuses on the phenomena of 'code-switching' broadly defined as "the systematic alternation between languages" (Balam 2021: 2). In place of 'code-switching' or 'codeswitched', the present paper uses the term 'language mixing' or 'mixed.' This avoids the implication that bilinguals are consciously 'switching' linguistic systems instead of producing one fluent, linguistic system drawing from a mixed repertoire.

One question at the forefront of bilingual research is how it is structured, and previous approaches have focused largely on how it is structured *syntactically*. For example, Myers-Scotton & Jake's (2015) 'Matrix Language Frame' MLF model dictates that each bilingual clause specifies a Matrix Language (ML), which creates the syntactic frame and an Embedded Language (EL) that is inserted into the ML frame. (The MLF model will be referenced further in Section 4 - Methodology.) One limitation of grammatical models of bilingual language is that they focus on isolated utterances and do not consider factors external to a single utterance e.g. the interaction as a whole.

The present study contributes to research that looks beyond sentence-internal phenomena, to explore the role the interaction plays in structuring bilingual language. Much of the research on interactional phenomena, e.g. Auer's 'preference for same language talk,' present *qualitative* evidence, but *quantitative* evidence is scant. To address this gap, the present paper explores

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bilingual tendencies to align on language usage both quantitatively and qualitatively. First, the rate participants maintained each other's language usage was calculated, modeled in part after Fricke & Kootstra's (2016) quantitative framework. Second, following the qualitative Bilingual Conversation Analysis model (see: Auer 1998; Wei 2002, 2005), the data was analyzed for previously attested contextual cues for changing languages such as signaling disagreement, topic change or to call for attention (see: Auer 1984; Gafaranga & Torres 2002; Dahmen 2022; Wei 2002, 2005). Through the novel integration of qualitative and quantitative methods for interactional analysis, the present investigation shows that the interaction plays an important role in how bilinguals structure language mixing.

2. Theoretical frameworks.

2.1. FRICKE & KOOTSTRA (2016). Psycholinguistic work has contributed important evidence that the interaction plays a significant role in the structure of language mixing (Loebell and Bock 2003; Kootstra, van Hell, and Dijkstra 2020). These approaches focus largely on what unconscious cognitive mechanisms are at play, e.g. priming. Priming is the process by which a linguistic element produced by one speaker encourages the replication of that same element in a subsequent utterance (Fricke & Kootstra 2016). While the present paper does not explore priming, it draws from a priming analysis framework (Fricke & Kootstra 2016) as both priming and interactional research align on the hypothesis that language users influence each other's linguistic productions.

Fricke & Kootstra (2016) explores priming in Spanish-English bilingual speech using natural conversational data from the Bangor Miami Corpus (Deuchar, Davies, Herring, Parafita Couto, & Carter 2014). They test the priming effects of language. Their first analysis looked at the priming effects of the language of the main clause. For example, if one speaker mixes languages (codeswitches) within a clause, will the next speaker respond by also mixing languages? Clauses were labeled as 'codeswitched' if they "contained at least one unambiguously English word or one unambiguously Spanish word" (Fricke & Kootstra 2016: 186). 'Ambiguous' items included proper nouns, interjections, and borrowings with unclear language membership.

Their second analysis looked at priming effects on a structural (syntactic) level. Here they analyzed whether the Matrix Language (ML) of a given clause primed the ML of a subsequent clause (either Spanish or English). The ML of an utterance was evaluated as the language of the finite verb (see: Parafita Couto, Deuchar, & Fusser, 2015).

Results found a main effect for priming on both the clause and ML levels. Still, Fricke & Kootstra caution readers against interpreting that language mixing practices are a purely unconscious cognitively primed phenomenon: "we must not lose sight of the fact that the social, pragmatic, and discourse-informational impacts of switching languages are likely to be the primary drivers of codeswitching behavior" (Fricke & Kootstra 2016: 195). For this reason, the present paper also explores such social and contextual factors through a qualitative Bilingual Conversation Analysis.

2.2. BILINGUAL CONVERSATION ANALYSIS. Bilingual Conversation Analysis, first presented by John Gumperz (see Gumperz 1982), involves a methodical, turn-by-turn analysis of interactions. Within the framework, one prioritizes a bottom-up approach where each observation is evaluated first and foremost as it relates to the conversation at hand. In other words, outside knowledge, which may bias the analysis, is only considered once conversation-internal evidence is fully examined (Auer 1998, Wei 2002). By conducting a sequential analysis, Auer (1998) finds that

speakers in conversation are naturally accommodating and largely maintain each other's choice for the 'language-of-interaction' (LOI). He calls this the 'preference for same language talk' (Auer 1984). Then, still drawing from evidence locally present in the conversation, one can deduce interactional meaning when bilinguals follow or flout this social preference. For example, changing the LOI can signal (i) a repair previous language choice (ii) disagreement (iii) a topic change or (iv) emphasis or a call for attention.

Dahmen (2022) draws from Bilingual Conversation Analysis to an interactional study on the bilingual Jaru-Kriol community in western Australia. Through a sequential analysis of 2.5 hours of natural conversational data, he analyzed points of alternation between speaker turns for instances of language mixing. These tokens were then sorted into two categories: 'interactionally meaningful' where the language mixing conveys interactional significance, and 'action neutral' where no interactional meaning is apparent. He used this evidence as an indication of where this community fell on the continuum from 'codeswitching' (where the languages are still regarded as separate) to 'fused lect' (where the languages have been fully integrated into a stabilized mixed code). The more interactionally meaningful tokens there were, the more the speakers are recognizing the languages as distinct, thus the farther the bilingual code was from 'fused lect.' Results showed that language mixing could be used as an interactional resource, but it could also be an unmarked ('action neutral') phenomenon that contains no underlying interactional or social meaning. Thus Jaru-Kriol was not yet a fused lect.

3. Cabo Verdean American diaspora. Kriolu is the native language to Cabo Verde, a ten-island nation situated off the coast of West Africa. Despite the long history of Cabo Verdeans creating homes outside of the islands due to Cabo Verde's economic, environmental, and political hardships, very little linguistic research has been conducted on the diaspora. The present field site in New England is the largest diasporic Cabo Verdean community (Halter 2005). New England has been home to Cabo Verdeans since the mid 19th century, resulting in over 200 years of contact with American culture and language (Gibau 2005). The present paper aims to contribute to the body of research on Kriolu by recognizing the language practices by a subset of Kriolu-English bilinguals in Boston, Massachusetts. To avoid over-generalizing their linguistic practices, the present paper describes the community from the bottom-up starting with naturalistic conversational data from five proficient bilinguals.

4. Methodology.

4.1. PARTICIPANTS & PROCEDURE. All participants were highly proficient Kriolu-English bilinguals from the Boston area. Demographic information is presented in Table 1. Subject 5 (S5) acted as both the research assistant (RA) and a participant, and she helped to recruit the other participants. Participants were matched for age and background which facilitated natural codeswitching. Note that S4 was slightly different from the other participants in that she came to the US at an older age and ranks her proficiency in English lower than the rest of the language users. The question of how this might have affected the data is covered in the discussion.

| Code | Gender Identity | Age | Age of Arrival in US | Ranked English Proficiency ¹ | Ranked Kriolu Proficiency |
|------|-----------------|-----|----------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| S1 | F | 27 | 10 | 6 | 6 |
| S2 | M | 26 | 10 | 5 | 6 |
| S3 | M | 26 | 11 | 5 | 6 |
| S4 | F | 32 | 18 | 3 | 5 |
| S5 | F | 26 | 9 | 6 | 5 |

Table 1. Participant demographic information

Data consists of four individual conversations recorded between the RA (S5) and four friends; conversation 1 (C1) with S1 was 28 minutes, conversation 2 (C2) with S2 was 11 minutes, conversation 3 (C3) with S3 was 22 minutes, and conversation 4 (C4) with S4 was 29 minutes. Table 3 shows the conversation lengths and density of alternations in speaker per minute.

| Conversation | Length | # Alt. per min |
|--------------|---------|----------------|
| C1 | 28m 18s | 7.10 alt/min |
| C2 | 11m 42s | 7.45 alt/min |
| C3 | 22m 29s | 4.7 alt/min |
| C4 | 29m 43s | 3.3 alt/min |

Table 3. Conversation length and number of speaker alternations per minute.

For the procedure, the participants read and signed the consent form as approved by the IRB. Subsequently, as the introduction and the consent form were in English, participants then watched a short video of Kriolu-English bilinguals codeswitching to facilitate them shifting to ‘bilingual mode’ (Grosjean 2010). Then, the RA recorded a 20–30-minute conversation. Lastly, each participant filled out a Bilingual Language Profile survey (Birdsong et al. 2012) and an additional language background survey, then were compensated for their participation. The primary investigator (PI) was not present during the recording session to eliminate observer bias as they were not a member of the Cabo Verdean American community.

4.2. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS. Because it is not known on what level bilinguals assess each other’s language, the rate of maintaining the LOI between speaker turns (‘points of alternation’) was evaluated on three levels. The first two (Clause Language & Matrix Language) were drawn from Fricke & Kootstra (2016) and the third (Last word-to-First word) was a novel addition. Utterances were segmented by main clause, evaluated as an utterance containing one finite/tense-bearing verb (e.g. *was* in *How was CV?*) or one word or phrase in isolation (e.g. *Pamódi?* ‘Why?’). To simplify coding and analysis, the analysis focused only on whether the LOI was maintained or changed, not the direction of the change. For example, both English-to-Kriolu and Kriolu-to-English were coded as English~Kriolu. A total of 573 tokens were analyzed (Table 2).

¹ Subjects self-rated proficiency on a scale from 0-6

| Level | Tokens |
|----------|--------|
| CL | 483 |
| ML | 414 |
| L-F word | 479 |
| Total | 573 |

Table 2. Tokens

The first level, Clause Language (CL) measured the rate that the overall language of clauses was maintained between speaker turns. Clauses were coded as unilingual ‘English,’ ‘Kriolu,’ or bilingual ‘mixed.’ Clauses were mixed if they contained at least one unambiguously other-language item. Ambiguous items included discourse markers (e.g. “like,” “so,” “yo”), proper nouns (e.g. “Brockton,” “Biden”), known & suspected borrowings (e.g. “goddaughta,” “rap”). Otherwise, unilingual utterances were still classified as ‘English’ or ‘Kriolu’ if they contained ambiguous items (e.g. “So, *ten kel college, kel Jean Piaget...*” ‘So, there’s this college, the **Jean Piaget**’ (Fricke & Kootstra 2016). Clauses that contained only one lexical item that was also ambiguous were discounted (e.g. “Yeah, ok”).

The second level, Matrix Language (ML) measured the rate that the ML was maintained between speaker turns. Unlike Fricke & Kootstra (2016), both mixed and unilingual utterances were included in this analysis. Some utterances contained an implied rather than overt VP (VP ellipsis) as in “So a lot of your raps are like mostly in Creole, why [**are they in**] Kriolu and not English?” These examples were considered separately but ultimately still included as they still had a clear language frame. ML tokens were discounted if there was a mixed VP, i.e. the VP drew from both languages (e.g. *Na txom N ta build* ‘On the land I **will build**’.

The third level, Last word-to-First word (L-F word) measured the rate that the language of the last word of an utterance matched the language of first word of the subsequent utterance. This level was added after observing cases such as (1) where the language of the full clause (CL) and/or the ML were not maintained, but the language toward the end of a clause (measured at the last word) and the beginning of the following clause (measured at the first word) was maintained. Tokens were discounted if either word in the L-F word pair were of ambiguous language origin.

- (1) English-KRIOLU (Eakins 2021 corpus)²
 1 S5 [Y’all find out] [you could put your pets in your um life insurance?]
 2 S1 [For what? So ORA KI MORI] [PA BU collect?]
 ‘For what? So when they die you collect?’

(1) was coded as English~Mixed for the CL and English~Kriolu for the ML analysis and thus counted as changing the LOI. However, looking at the example, we can see that S1 matches S5’s language choice at first. The L-F word level shows that while S1 can change the CL and ML, she may still be influenced by the language of the preceding utterance.

4.3. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS. The qualitative analysis drew from Conversation Analysis and interactional frameworks (Auer 1998; Wei 2002, 2005; Dahmen 2022) to contextualize the ‘preference for same language talk’ and interrogate interactional motivations for changing the LOI. The four conversations were transcribed by a proficient English-Kriolu speaker and

² Conversation analysis transcription conventions reported in Section 9.

annotations were made in ELAN (2022). Like the quantitative analysis, focus was given to points of alternation between speaker turns, however, the qualitative approach also took into consideration the context of the entire conversation. While the clues from the conversation are prioritized, knowledge of the speakers and the community can be informative and crucial, thus these details were considered post-Conversation Analysis (Auer 1998). Following Dahmen (2022), whether each LOI change is ‘interactionally meaningful’ or ‘action neutral’ is also noted. ‘Interactionally meaningful’ examples matched previous observed meanings (e.g. topic change, to signal disagreement, to call for attention). All other examples are considered ‘action neutral.’

5. Results.

5.1. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS. The quantitative analysis showed a general preference for language maintenance for all three levels of the analysis. Figure 1 shows the rate of language maintenance for each of the four conversations. Despite variation between the conversations, both the ML maintenance and L-F word maintenance were very similar. Because the CL analysis also calculated rate of mixed clauses (e.g. Kriolu~Mixed; English~Mixed), the overall rate of maintenance and change was lower compared to the ML and L-F word levels. With a larger corpus, statistical modeling would allow for more accurate evaluations, however there are too few tokens for statistical analysis in the current data set.

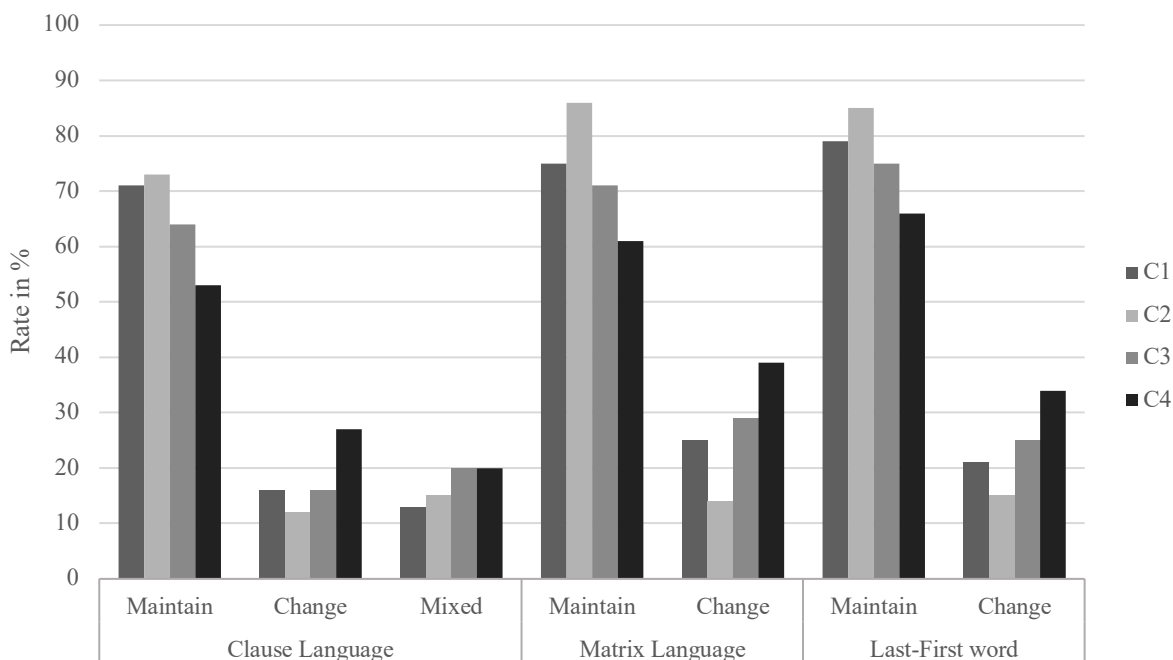


Figure 1. Rate of language maintenance or change

First, we note that each conversation differed in length and total number of alternations (Table 3). As the density of alternations per minute increased, so did the rate of maintaining languages. This suggests that the more speakers alternated turns, the more likely they were to follow each other’s language usage. Second, comparing LOI alternation across the conversations, C2 had the highest rates with 73% for CL, 86% for ML, and 85%, for L-F word. C4 had the lowest rates with 53% for CL, 66% for ML, and 66% for L-F. The proportion of mixed utterances is relatively consistent, suggesting there is some stability to language mixing practices across the

participants. While there seems to be broad preference for LOI maintenance, participants still vary rate of LOI change. Thus, qualitative analysis can illuminate how interactional context might be affecting LOI maintenance practices.

5.2. QUALITATIVE RESULTS. The qualitative analysis supports the idea that speakers in interaction prefer following social norms for linguistic cooperation and accommodation ('preference for same language talk' Auer 1984). Participants displayed both their preference for language alignment and their simultaneous ability to mix languages throughout the conversation as in (2-3).

(2) English-KRIOLU (Eakins 2021 corpus)

1 S5 N TENI TRUNK SUJU[UUUUU]

'My trunk is dirty(yyyyyy)'

2 S2 ABO STA drive to Waltham right now?

'You're driving to Waltham right now?'

3 S5 No I'm gonna go to Boston (.) PAMO ROPA DI TRABADJA KA TEN NA NHA
(.) like I haven't moved in yet (.)

'No I'm gonna go to Boston. Because my work clothes I don't have them in my
(.) like I haven't moved in yet (.)'

(3) English-KRIOLU (Eakins 2021 corpus)

1 S5 UN FIN DI SEMANA I slept like three days straight (.)

'In one weekend I slept like three days straight.'

2 S4 Yeah it does (.)

3 S5 I was like PA KA TXOMA-M

'I was like don't bother me'

4 S4 KANTU N BEN [xxxx]

'When I came back [voice unclear]'

In (2) and (3) participants show how they can expertly mix languages within their own utterances, but still maintain the same language between each other.

The qualitative analysis also illuminated the interactional context surrounding LOI change. Changes to the LOI were both 'interactionally meaningful' (i.e. communicated one of the previously observed interactional meanings) and 'action neutral,' (i.e. showed no previously observed meaning). This suggests Kriolu and English maintain some degree of categorical distinction for this subset of the Cabo Verdean American community (Dahmen 2022).

Interactionally meaningful change of the LOI:

(4) English-KRIOLU (Eakins 2021 corpus)

1 S5 DJA ODJ! KENHA KI TEN FAMILIA NA MERKA E SABI (.) SI BU KA TEN FAMILIA BU BA DIZARASKA !

‘You see? When you have relatives in America, it’s great. If you don’t have relatives, you are left on your own.’

2 S1 DJA SI BU KA TEN FAMILIA, no but like IMAGINA PAGA//

‘If you don’t have family, no but like imagine paying’

3 S5

// because (.) but how?

4 S1 BU PARTI EL DINERU

‘You share the money’

5 S5 But [S1], SI BU KA TEN FAMILIA you gotta do it!

‘But [S1], if you don’t have family you gotta do it!’

6 S1 BU KA MESTE BAI TRABADJ?

‘You don’t need to go to work?’

7 S5 Yeah but if you don’t have the support (.) you gotta do it (.) you don’t have a choice (.)

8 S1 NEN SI BU BA BU TRABADJU (...)

‘Even if you go to work...’

(4) shows a typical interactionally meaningful use for changing the LOI, to signal disagreement. Here S5 and S1 are discussing how if you have support from your relatives, you can manage childcare more easily. Otherwise, you must pay for daycare and that is often too expensive for many households. S5 expresses that if you cannot afford daycare or a nanny, parents do not have a choice and one parent must stay home with the child. S1 disagrees and says that both parents need to go to work to afford raising a child in the first place. In turn 2, S1 expresses her disagreement and then S5 interrupts to change the LOI to English and disagree. In turn 3 S1 changes the LOI back to Kriolu to continue the debate. Turns 4-6 show how the participants use complementary language choices to emphasize their dissenting opinions.

(5) English-KRIOLU (Eakins 2021 corpus)

1 S5 How was CV?

2 S4 [laughing at baby] N DZE, “Tia, don’t touch me” (.) Use your words (.) Say “hi, tia”

‘I said, “Aunty, don’t touch me.” Use your words. Say “hi, aunty.”’

3 S5 Ay MO KI KABU VERDI STABA?

‘Hey, how was Cabo Verde?’

(5) shows another instance of a previously observed interactionally meaningful change in LOI, to attract a speaker’s attention. In turn 1, S5 makes a first attempt to ask S4 a question. When S4 ignores her, S5 changes the LOI from both her previous statement and S4’s statement. This is an interactionally meaningful change because the change is used to strategically capture S4’s attention.

Action neutral change of the LOI:

- (6) English-KRIOLU (Eakins 2021 corpus)
1 S5 BO MAI? Is she going to CV too?
‘Your mom? Is she going to CV too?’
2 S4 Mhmm (.) EL RANJA UM MOSS GO LA FRANSA.
‘Mhmm. She's dating a guy in France.’
- (7) English-KRIOLU (Eakins 2021 corpus)
1 S5 December N TA BAI (.) N TA BAI DJOBE-L
‘December, I’m going to go. I’ll go see her.’
2 S4 I wanna go for December too

(6) and (7) are ‘action neutral’ as none of the previously observed interactional meanings are present. These cases support the idea that a bilingual’s languages are both available at any point and what seems like ‘mixing’ or ‘codeswitching’ can be bilinguals simply using their full linguistic repertoire (Dahmen 2022) without watchful adherence to which language is used and when.

6. Discussion.

6.1. INTEGRATING QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE RESULTS. The qualitative analysis fills contextual gaps regarding the quantitative results, and the bottom-up methodology prevents generalizations and biases rooted in knowledge not directly present in the conversation. For example, the data shows that S4’s conversation has the lowest rate of maintaining the LOI. A top-down perspective would look at the demographic information (Table 1) and infer a connection between S4’s low reported proficiency in English and the high rate of LOI change. We might assume for instance that S4 is changing the LOI to Kriolu when S5 speaks English. However, looking to the conversational data itself, we can see that is not the case. Interestingly, S4 often switches the language to English (not Kriolu). S5 also contributed to the rate of changing the LOI by switching to Kriolu in many cases. As they are aware of each other’s language competencies, this might be an effective way in which they are signaling cooperation with each other.

6.2. LIMITATIONS. Because conversational work involves line-by-line analysis of natural data, there are often fewer speakers and smaller corpora. The present study only involves five participants and four conversations, a considerably smaller corpus than the one analyzed in Fricke & Kootstra (2016) which contained 56 thirty-minute conversations. On one hand, this limited the ability to generalize about a wider bilingual community, but on the other hand it also allowed me to consider detailed profiles of the participants and complement the quantitative data with qualitative conversation analyses. An additional limitation is that the present study looked only at the presence or absence of LOI change, but not the *direction* of the change. Fricke & Kootstra (2016) found that alternations that began in Spanish were changed less frequently than alternations that began in English. It would be interesting to compare results from the present corpus. Finally, more focus could be directed toward the individual speakers. The small pool of participants and the detailed backgrounds that were collected will allow us to explore how often each participant is maintaining or changing the LOI. This data could reveal whether some speakers are more accommodating or adaptable than others.

7. Conclusion. The present paper drew from quantitative and qualitative methodologies to answer two overarching research questions: 1) How are bilinguals influencing each other's language practices in an interactional context? 2) Are there observable contextual factors conditioning these interactional language practices? The first analysis provides quantitative evidence to support Auer and other's hypothesis that bilinguals have a 'preference for same language talk'. Further, the qualitative analysis justified a closer look into the context of the alternational pairs. It revealed further evidence of interactional influence on language mixing when participants changed languages to communicate interactional meaning. As participants self-reported regularly mixing languages, they also could change languages entirely neutrally. Overall, an interactional analysis into language mixing practices reveals a broad preference for maintaining languages between conversational partners, and the ability to change languages to both communicate meaning, or simply communicate.

8. List of abbreviations.

| | |
|----------|-------------------------|
| MLF | Matrix Language Frame |
| ML | Matrix Language |
| CL | Clause Language |
| L-F word | Last word-to-First word |
| LOI | Language of interaction |
| RA | Research assistant |
| CV | Cabo Verde |

9. Transcription Conventions.

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------|
| KRIOLU | Caps |
| English | Sentence case |
| Underline | Ambiguous language |
| Bold | Target element |
| 'translation' | Translation |
| [misc] | Sound effects e.g. [laughs] (.) – pause |
| (...) | Omitted fragment |
| // | Overlapping talk |
| xxx | Unintelligible talk |

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