

## Code-Switching in Blackfoot Stories

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**Introduction** The goal of this paper is to document and analyse instances of code-switching in oral stories told in Blackfoot, an Algonquian language spoken in Alberta. In this context, *code-switching* refers to the alternating use of Blackfoot and English within the same monologue. Implications for syntactic theory and language revitalization are considered.

**Background and Methodology** Data are drawn from the Blackfoot Oral Stories Database ([stories.blackfoot.atlas-ling.ca](http://stories.blackfoot.atlas-ling.ca)), which was established in 2016 in response to community interests. The database currently houses 95 stories (totalling 347 minutes of audio recordings) told by 21 storytellers of varying ages and linguistic backgrounds. Some storytellers are fluent L1 speakers who speak mostly Blackfoot at home and in the community, whereas others are self-reported learners and/or semi-speakers who hear and understand Blackfoot but rarely speak it. Stories are largely curated in group storytelling sessions, in which storytellers take turns sharing and recording stories in a conversational setting. Once recorded, audio files of the stories are segmented into English and Blackfoot using Praat; each code-switch is catalogued and transcribed along with surrounding content.

**Results** Although code-switching is not found in every story in the database, every storyteller code-switches, some with greater frequency than others. A representative sample of the data for three storytellers, each with different code-switching patterns, is presented in the table below (recording times are cumulative for all stories told by each storyteller.)

Storyteller	Recording time (min)	% Blackfoot	% English	Average # of code-switches per min
S (L1 Blackfoot; born 1930s)	17:42	97%	3%	1.13
A (L1 Blackfoot; born 1950s)	31:02	91%	9%	2.93
N (L1 English; born 1970s)	9:58	41%	59%	4.03

As for the content, nearly 40% of the switches from Blackfoot to English involve the expression of temporal adjuncts (*the next morning, Saturday, every time*), and approximately 25% consist of discourse markers (*y'know, and so, I think*). These patterns are relatively consistent across storytellers.

**Implications for Syntactic Theory** Blackfoot is argued to lack the syntactic category of Tense (Ritter & Wiltschko 2014); the expression of temporality is complex and interwoven through the grammar. Nominals such as personal pronouns (Bliss & Gruber 2015) and demonstratives (Bliss & Wiltschko 2018) encode temporal relations, and verbal categories such as modality are sensitive to temporal distinctions (Louie 2015). The prevalence of English temporal adjuncts in stories can provide further clues to the grammar of temporality.

**Implications for Language Revitalization** Intergenerational transmission of Blackfoot is decreasing (Genee & Junker 2016); many younger community members (under age 50) are self-reported semi-speakers whose language abilities are sometimes regarded negatively by elders (Chatsis et al. 2013). These people may face barriers in speaking due to fear of ridicule or fear of not preserving their language in an authentic way (e.g., Juuso 2015). This study reveals that code-switching is a “normal” strategy, used by even very experienced L1 storytellers. Destigmatizing code-switching may help to ease the fears of semi-speakers, thereby encouraging their language use and transmission, and it may help them to recognize their potential as active contributors to their language community (Boltokova 2017).

## References

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