

## “Zwei languages *zusammenputten*”<sup>1</sup>: Bilingual ways of expressing bicultural identities

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### Introduction

The availability of linguistic resources plays a crucial role when sociocultural identities are constructed in interpersonal interaction. When looking at ways of how language is used to fulfil this purpose, the behaviour of bilinguals is particularly revealing because the structure of the bilingual linguistic repertoire is often more transparent than that of a “monolingual” repertoire.

In our research project on contact phenomena between German and English, we investigate bilingual speech patterns of first generation German immigrants to the USA<sup>2</sup>. In our presentation we focus on the analysis of a tape-recorded free interaction which took place among five bilingual speakers aged 59-82, and we are concentrating on two of the speakers, both of them women. These speakers, we will call them *Laura* and *Toni*<sup>3</sup>, immigrated to the USA as young adults with hardly any prior knowledge of English.

Both speakers have lived in the USA for most of their lives. They worked in English-speaking environments, they started families, and they have monolingual (English) as well as bilingual (English/German) friends. Both of them are still in touch with family members in Germany. They are proficient speakers of both languages.

We have found that the sociocultural identities our bilingual informants construct can be markedly different, even when the linguistic preconditions are quite similar. Based on our findings we challenge the assumption that differences in bilingual behaviour are necessarily due to differences in the degree of bilingual competence (as suggested by, e.g., Poplack 1980). Our informants exhibit a fluent command of English as well as German, which is demonstrated in a number of (nearly)

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<sup>1</sup> ‘putting two languages together’/‘to put to languages together’

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<sup>3</sup> The names have been changed in order to protect the informants’ privacy.

monolingual passages in both languages. Nevertheless, their bilingual production differs in several ways from each other with respect to patterns of language mixing.

	<i>Laura</i>	<i>Toni</i>
place of origin/birth in Germany (year of birth)	Stuttgart (1934)	Munich (1918)
year of immigration to the USA	1954	1936
context of immigration	following her American husband	with parents & younger sister
age at time of immigration	20	18
places lived in (USA)	New York State, Florida	New York State, Florida
exposure to English in Germany	private language school (British English, less than half a year); personal letters from the USA, dictionary	at school (approx. 1 year)
acquisition of English in the USA	living environment, (first) husband & his family, TV	at work, living environment, later TV
total exposure to English in years <sup>4</sup>	46 years	64 years
actively used varieties	Stuttgart Swabian, Standard German, Bavarian influence; English (standard/colloquial)	Munich Bavarian, Standard German, Northern German influence; English (standard/colloquial)
language(s) of/with the partner(s)	English (with first husband); German (with second husband) married twice; first husband (Italo-) American, second husband German (from Munich); widowed	German/mixed married twice; both husbands from Northern Germany (Bremerhaven area); widowed
language(s) with their children	English only with children (one daughter knows some German from visits to Germany)	little German/mostly English with daughter; English only with son-in-law, granddaughters etc.

Figure 1: Biographical and sociolinguistic background (Laura/Toni)

Despite their similarities, particularly with regard to their age and manner of learning English and the considerable length of exposure (shaded areas in the table), the two informants show noticeably different profiles in their linguistic behaviour – not so much in the total amount of English or German they use but in the way they arrange their linguistic resources. Laura puts her emphasis on the *separation* of her linguistic resources, demonstrating that being German and being American are two different aspects of her life. Toni, on the other hand, with a strong tendency to mix English and German, constructs an *integrated* German-American identity (cf. Lattey/Tracy, in press).

## 2. The overall profiles: Language preferences in changing contexts

We receive a first impression of the individual speakers' profiles when we look at the proportion of English and German used by them during the recorded interaction. A word count showed that Laura produces close to 70 % German items, and only 30 % of her linguistic production is in English. She uses only very few ambiguous lexical items. For Toni, a little more than half of her linguistic production is in German (about 55 %) and about 42 % in English (ca. 3 % blends or ambiguous items, such as 'ja'/'yeah').

### *Language choice as an adjustment to linguistic context*

We found that Laura and Toni differ in their language choices in relation to the linguistic input, i.e. in relation to the language of the previous utterance (turn). There is a noticeable difference in their matching of the (preceding) linguistic context. This is illustrated in Figures 2 (Laura) and 3 (Toni).

<sup>4</sup> at the time of the recording

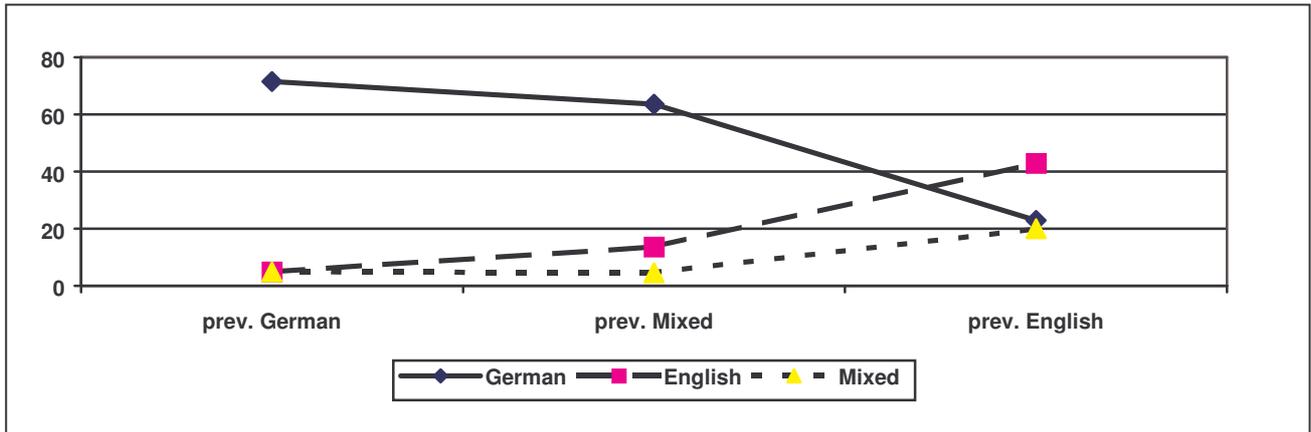


Figure 2: Linguistic adjustment to previous turns/Laura

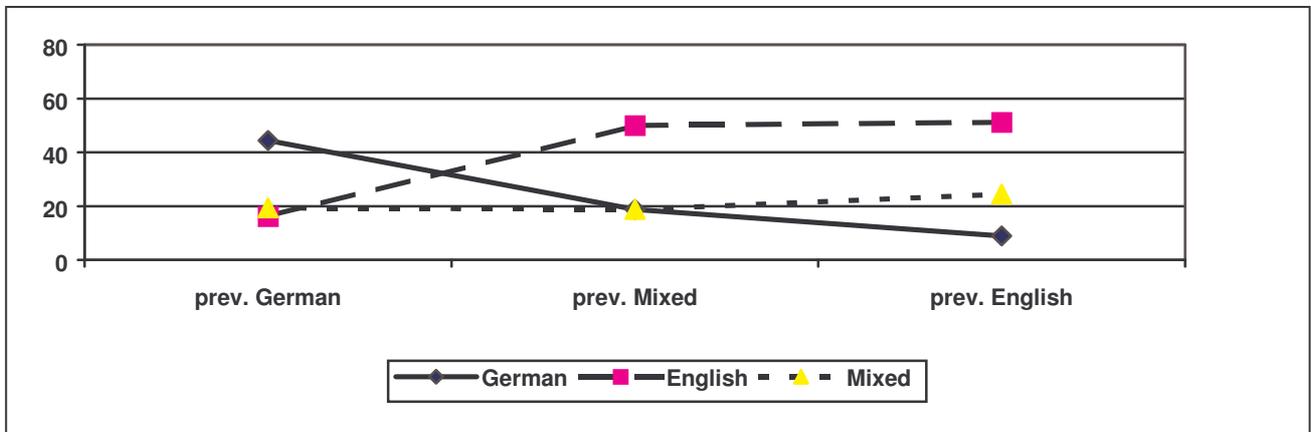


Figure 3: Linguistic adjustment to previous turns/Toni

While both speakers prefer German after German turns and English after English turns, there are two major differences between Laura and Toni:

- Laura prefers German after mixed turns, while Toni prefers English after mixed turns. Thus, Laura appears to consider mixed utterances as part of German discourse, while Toni prefers to consider mixed utterances as part of English discourse. Mixed turns offer a choice to the speakers regarding the language they prefer. Therefore, mixed contexts reveal the divergent individual preferences of the speakers most clearly.
- With respect to German, Laura adjusts her language choice more often to the language of previous utterances than Toni does. After a German turn, Laura mainly uses German and very rarely English. Toni does not differentiate as strictly between the different linguistic contexts.

## 2. Individual speakers' profiles: Details

### *Patterns of language mixing: amount and types of mixing*

#### *Amount of mixing*

Individual mixing patterns become discernible in the language choice of the clauses our informants produced. (We considered all complete clauses Laura and Toni produced during the recording.) As Figure 4 illustrates, both speakers produce more German clauses than mixed or English clauses, but

the distribution of the three clause types is different for each speaker. (Note that this representation refers to *intrasentential* mixing only.)

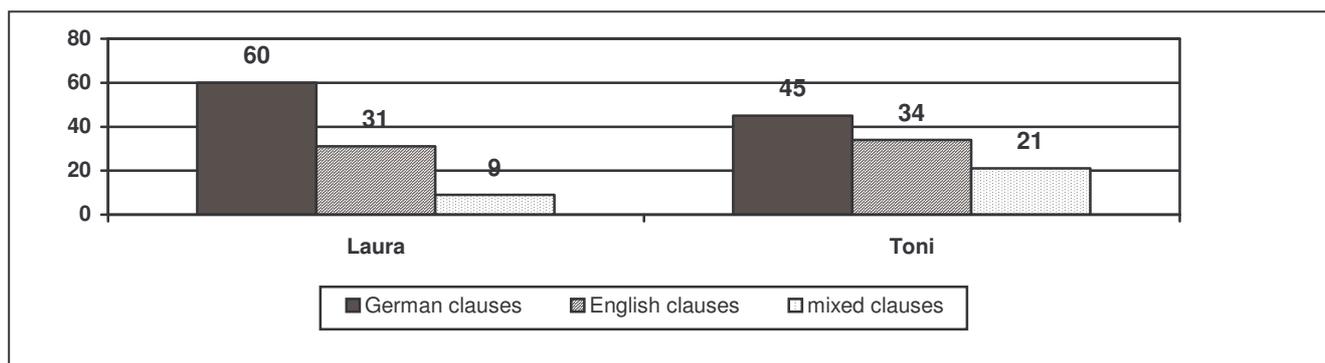


Figure 4: Speakers' clauses by language (in relative percentages)  
(Laura: n = 390/Toni: n = 877)

Laura produces more purely German clauses than Toni does, and all *unmixed* clauses together constitute over 90% of her overall production. Her profile is marked by a strong preference to separate German and English in bilingual interaction.

Toni's profile is marked by a relatively more balanced use of all three clause types (German/English/mixed). The proportion of mixed clauses is noticeably higher than in Laura's production. Toni's readiness to mix German and English is a recurrent feature of her bilingual profile also in other recordings.

#### Types of mixing

##### Blends<sup>5</sup> and Crossover<sup>6</sup>

Laura's speech in general is characterized by a pronounced separation of her languages. This is reflected in the types of mixing we find in her data. Blends (mixing on the word level) and crossover phenomena, i.e. intense forms of mixing, are extremely rare. There is only one instance where Laura creates blended forms. She is fully aware of it, it is done on purpose and in reaction to a blend coined by another interlocutor – in order to point out politely that this is not what she considers to be “proper language”:

- (1) LK: *Teacherin?* *Gibt's sowas, e teacherin?* [LAUGHS]  
-FEMALE? Does that exist, a -FEMALE?  
*Zwei languages* *zusammenputten!*  
two together- -INFIN  
(TELMA-1, 341-344)

Laura's reaction and her own blend show that she “knows how to do blends”, i.e. the absence of this type of mixing phenomena from her data is a matter of choice and not of lack of ability.

Toni's utterances stand out in that she intensely mixes elements from English and German (Standard German and Bavarian German) on all linguistic levels. We find blends on the word level as well as crossover phenomena such as German words with English structure, for example:

- (2) TG: *Ich wollt* *eigent-lich* *noch gar nicht* *einen*, [instead of Gm. *keinen* none]  
I wanted actually not yet one

<sup>5</sup> *Blend*: one lexical item combining morphological and/or phonological material from more than one language (mixing on word level)

<sup>6</sup> *Crossover* in the context of language mixing is defined as the combination of lexical material from one language with a syntactic structure from the other language (Tracy / Lattey in pr.).

*I wanned to wait until they were/ be a little more refined but-ähm,[...]*

(TELMA-1, 707-709)

In the analyzed recording, Toni's mixed utterances follow German, English and mixed previous turns by other informants equally (see Figure 3 above), which shows that she feels very comfortable with mixing. Besides these mixed utterances we also find stretches that are monolingual German or English.

### *Insertional and Alternational Mixing*

Based on Muysken (2000), we count as instances of insertional mixing clauses in which words or single constituents from language A are inserted into a language-B environment. Insertional mixing always refers to intrasentential mixing.

Alternational mixing (Muysken 2000) is understood to refer to cases in which the mixed material consists of more than one element but does not form a constituent; cases in which the mixed material occurs at a clause boundary (these are ambiguous if the mixed material is one word or one constituent); and all cases of intersentential mixing.

For Laura, the large majority of her mixed clauses are unambiguous cases of insertional mixing, mainly with one-word insertions, for example:

(3) LK: Im-e *basement* möchte I net wohnen.  
in a I would not like to live

(TELMA-1, 1431)

(4) LK: [...]wenn i Birnen ess den ganzen Tag un-und *escarole* Salat [...]  
if I pears eat the whole day an-and salad

(TELMA-1, 1424)

Only two clauses (out of her 390 clauses) clearly contain alternational mixes, three clauses are ambiguous (insertional/alternational). That is, alternational mixing within clause boundaries is practically non-existent in her data. In Laura's data, alternational mixing is generally restricted to clause and turn boundaries.

In Toni's utterances we find many cases of insertional as well as alternational mixing. Most of the inserted items are noun phrases, discourse markers and tags, which occur very frequently (especially English DMs and tags in English, German or mixed contexts), and sometimes adverbials. She also exhibits functional code-switching to mark asides, for self-corrections and contrasts, and for structuring her discourse, e.g. when presenting quotations. In her alternational mixing she mostly but not always respects clause boundaries.

• insertional and alternational mixing:

(5) TG: [...] da war Lichauer's und *all those restaurants*, und *that's where my aunt's bank* war,  
[...]

there was Lichauer's and [insertion] and [alternation] was

(TELMA-1, 716-717)

• alternational mixing:

(6) TG: *She works days now (then) cause she mog des lieber, na kriegts' net ganz so vui.*  
likes that better, then she gets not quite as much [money]

(TELMA-1, 1499)

### Stability of profile

Laura's speech is characterized by long stretches in German (with few insertions of English items) and long stretches in English (with few insertions of German items). Thus, when Laura switches (alternational mixing), she “resets” her language choice almost completely.

We found that Laura keeps her individual mixing profile throughout the group interaction just as she does in one-on-one interactions. The group interaction appears to affect her linguistic choices only in that she uses more English (during some one-on-one interactions, Laura speaks German almost exclusively). Her mixing patterns remain unchanged and reflect a stable individual mixing profile.

Toni, on the other hand, does not separate her languages strictly but uses whatever language fits best what she wants to say in each situation. She does not monitor her language mixing overtly in any restrictive way, and it can be seen from all her recordings (group as well as one-on-one situations) that she feels very comfortable with mixing in bilingual contexts. For this particular recording it can even be said that she has a leading role in that her mixing behaviour leads the conversation into a more “mixed mode” in general.

Toni's mixing behaviour remains stable in all situations, i.e. she keeps to her individual mixing profile, just as Laura keeps to hers.

### Discourse markers and language choice

We looked at discourse markers (DMs) in more detail because they sometimes seem to follow their own rules with respect to mixing. We found, for example, long stretches of monolingual German speech, interspersed only with a number of English tags (*you know, right*) in several recordings (including the one analyzed here). The question we set out to answer is: Does the distribution of DMs fit in with bilingual speakers' profiles that were identified on the basis of mixing patterns and distributional frequencies in the use of German and English, or do they follow a different pattern?

We compared the distribution of 12 English and 16 German (roughly corresponding) items in English and German contexts. Our choice was guided by frequency of occurrence in our data as well as the earlier identification and discussion of most of these DMs by Schiffrin (1987, for English), Fuller (2001, for the bilingual German/English context), and Norrby/Wirdeñäs (2003, regarding the expression of discourse identities in Swedish). Included are discourse markers *per se* (e.g., *well, you know*), connectors (*but, because, so*) and modal adverbs and particles (e.g., *actually, really*).

(E: you know, right; because, but, so; maybe, just, actually, really; well, I think, I mean.

G: weisst(e), gell, net; weil, aber; also, vielleicht, wahrscheinlich, halt, ja, mal, doch, eigentlich; ich glaube, ich denke, ich meine.)

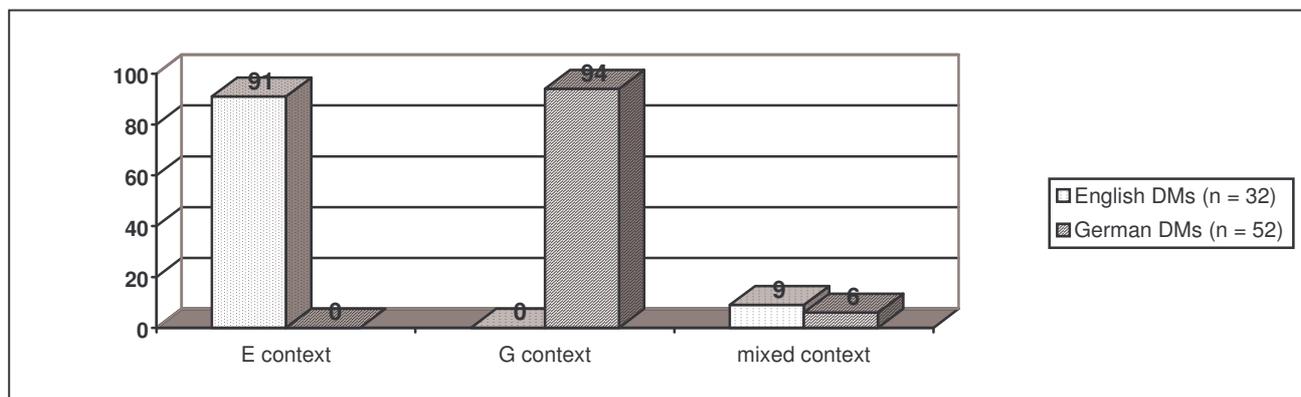


Figure 5: *Laura* / DMs in varying linguistic contexts (in %)

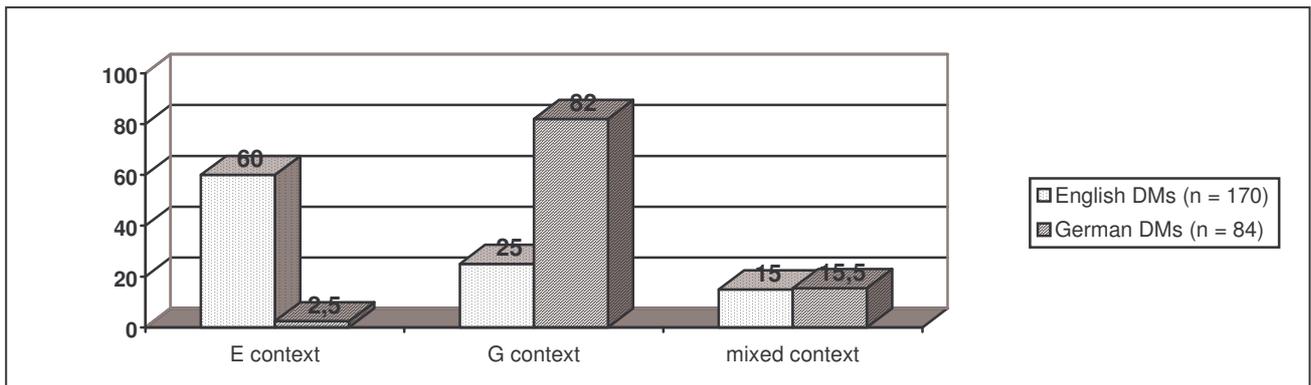


Figure 6: *Toni / DMs in varying linguistic contexts (in %)*

### Observations

- Toni uses discourse markers more frequently than Laura does.
- In Laura's utterances, German DMs are more frequent than English ones; for Toni, the opposite is true (i.e., she uses more English DMs).
- Both informants clearly prefer to use discourse markers in linguistically matching environments (i.e., German – German or English – English); however, Toni is more prone to using discourse devices in “non-matching” environments than Laura is; Laura uses no discourse markers in unambiguously non-matching environments.
- Toni more often inserts English DMs in a German context than German DMs in English. In mixed contexts, she uses DMs from both languages equally.

In sum, Laura's use of discourse markers is characterized by a clear separation of the languages: DMs only occur in matching environments. Only mixed contexts allow for some variation.

Toni, in full agreement with other features of her profile, is more open to mixing and certainly does not separate the two languages strictly. Nevertheless, a clear context sensitivity is reflected in her preferred use of DMs that match their language environment.

### 3. Discussion of the findings

We found that Laura and Toni diverge in the ways in which they make use of their language repertoire and, especially, in the patterns of their language mixing and separation. The table in Figure 7 sums up the main characteristics of their profiles.

	<b>Laura</b>	<b>Toni</b>
adjustment to context	yes, strongly	yes, to a certain degree
preference in ambiguous (mixed) context (turns)	German	English
blends (word-level mixes)	only three instances (produced on purpose to express disagreement with this type of mixing)	frequent
insertional mixing	insertions rare (intrasentential mixes in general are rare)	insertions frequent
alternational mixing	preferred over insertional mixing, but (almost) exclusively at clause and turn	intra- and intersententially

	boundaries	
discourse markers	language matching in unambiguous contexts is 100%; in mixed contexts variable	tendency to adhere to language of context, but not exclusively

Figure 7: Profile features in comparison (Laura/Toni)

As we pointed out at the beginning, crucial features of Laura’s and Toni’s acquisition of English (age at onset, learning environment, geographical location, length of exposure) were similar. Further, both have a thorough command of English as well as German, as demonstrated by long monolingual turns by both speakers. Nevertheless, each woman shows her own individual pattern of mixing and language interaction. This observation is a challenge to the assumption made by Poplack (1980) that certain patterns of language mixing (or switching) are due to different degrees of language competence and to differences in the age of second language acquisition.

Poplack concluded from the linguistic behavior of her informants, Spanish-English bilinguals in the USA, that switching behavior correlated closely with the age of L2 (i.e., English) acquisition and self-rated bilingual ability. She found that fluent bilinguals who acquired English early (age 2 – 13) favored *intrasentential* switches and switched at various syntactic boundaries. Spanish-dominant late learners of English (after age 13) preferred *intersentential* switching and tag-like switches (i.e., switching of tag-like elements such as interjections, fillers, tags, and idiomatic expressions).

From this, she concluded that for tag-like switches “only minimal knowledge” of the L2 grammar is needed, that the switching of full sentences or larger segments (i.e., intersentential switching, alternational mixing) “require[s] much more knowledge of L2 to produce”, and, finally, that intrasentential switches (insertional and alternational mixing) are of the most demanding kind because “the speaker must (...) know enough about the grammar of each language, and the way they interact, to avoid ungrammatical utterances.” (Poplack 1980:650)

Compared to Poplack’s informants, our two informants belong in her group of late L2 learners (starting after age 13). Based on Poplack’s results we should hypothesize that mixing behavior should be fairly homogeneous between the two speakers, and that switching of tag-like elements would be most frequent in the speech of our informants, followed by intersentential mixing and a rather low proportion of intrasentential mixing. As we demonstrated, this does not coincide with our results. Toni shows intrasentential mixing much more than Laura does, but she also produces more tag-like mixes than Laura (mixing of DMs). Both of them mix along clause and turn boundaries (intersentential mixing).

Our findings disagree with Poplack’s results in two ways: Firstly, the switching hierarchy Poplack suggests does not match the mixing patterns of our informants. Secondly, the age factor can apparently be “softened” by other factors such as length of exposure to English. Patterns of language mixing are obviously not determined exclusively by the age and the circumstances of second language acquisition. They are also the result of individual preference, of personality traits, and certainly of the way in which a bilingual person sees and positions herself in her bilingual and bicultural environment.

#### 4. Bilingual patterns, bicultural lives

Our analysis shows that two individuals with comparable linguistic preconditions (acquisition context, competence, etc.) show diverging bilingual language use, i.e. competence does not necessarily determine linguistic/bilingual behaviour in any case, as has been claimed previously (e.g. Poplack 1980). Here, the diverging attitudes towards a bilingual/bicultural life are reflected by

the language use of these individuals. One individual (Laura) strictly separates her two languages, even in bilingual contexts and even if the other interlocutors in the group mix their languages very freely. Separation of English and German and correct language use are important for her, which is additionally highlighted by her metalinguistic remarks. She clearly separates her American and German identities which she shows through this language behaviour.

In contrast, the other individual (Toni) tends to mix her two languages freely and intensely, especially in bilingual contexts. However, even in monolingual passages her utterances contain elements of the other language. Toni has a more integrated bilingual identity and puts no strong emphasis on “correct“ or “pure” language, which results in intense language mixing. This type of language behaviour shows that she has created an integrated German-American identity.

Thus, the individual use of their repertoire of languages enables these speakers to express their attitude towards a bilingual/bicultural life iconically by arranging their languages in a specific and individual pattern.

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