This article is a précis of a Minimalist Approach to Intrasentential Code Switching (MacSwan, 1999). Like any précis, it promises nothing new beyond the presentation of a concise summary of the work. I may, however, occasionally falter in this task and reference work and controversies which have emerged since the publication of MacSwan (1999).

Making the simplest assumption, we might suppose that the principles which govern bilingual code switching are all and only the principles which govern monolingual language, with no special mechanisms specific to code switching itself. I will pursue this proposal below, as in MacSwan (1999), exploring some important consequences of Chomsky’s (1995a) Minimalist Program for the data of language mixture.

First, however, I will sketch some previous approaches to code switching, including Poplack (1980, 1981); Joshi (1985); Di Sciullo, Muysken and Singh (1986); Mahootian (1993); Belazi, Rubin and Toribio (1994); and the language processing approaches of Azuma (1991, 1993), de Bot (1992) and Myers-Scotton (Myers-Scotton 1993; Myers-Scotton & Jake 2001; Myers-Scotton 2001, 2002; Jake, Myers-Scotton & Gross 2002). I will review these approaches below, arguing that each has undesirable empirical and conceptual characteristics.