

اثر المقدرة اللغوية على وظائف التناوب اللغوي بين العربية والانجليزية لدى طلاب عراقيين

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**The Effect of Language Competence on the Functions
of English-Arabic Code-Switching among Iraqi
Students**

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المستخلص

تتناول الدراسة التي بين يديك ظاهرة التناوب اللغوي التي هي من سمات متعددي اللغات. حيث يتم تحليل محادثات بين طلاب عراقيين في جامعة ممفس. وبعد ان تم تسجيل محادثات لثلاث مشتركين بمستوى لغة متباين في اللغتين الانجليزية والعربية، تم اخذ الملاحظات وتحليل المعطيات لالقاء الضوء على بعض الاسباب التي تسوق المتحدث الى التناوب من العربية الى الانجليزية وبالعكس. حيث اعتمدت الدراسة نموذج اوير (1998، 2013) لتفحص اثر مستوى اللغة المتحدث بها على تواتر او تنوع الوظيفة للتناوب اللغوي. وقد وجد ان هذه الظاهرة تحدث بتواتر مختلف تبعا لمستوى اللغة (سواء الانجليزية او العربية) لاغراض منها تغيير الموضوع او اقضاء احد السامعين او اظهار التضامن في حال التناوب للغة الاكثر اتقاناً او لاطلاق الدعابة وغيرها في حال التناوب للغة الاقل اتقاناً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العربية، ثنائية اللغة، المقدرة، التناوب اللغوي، الوظائف، الانجليزية

Abstract

The current study investigates the bilingual phenomenon of codeswitching by Iraqi Arabic students at the University of Memphis. Casual topics of conversations by three participants, selected purposively with varying competence of English and Arabic, were recorded. Notes were taken to analyze why and when speakers codeswitch from English to Arabic and vice versa. In light of the models proposed by Auer (2002) and Appel and Muysken (2006), the study attempts to examine the effect of competence of any of the languages spoken on the variety of functions and direction of code-switching. In addition to the functions established by the aforementioned models, it is found that bilinguals generally often code-switch to the language of better competence to change subject, exclude other speakers, or show solidarity. Meanwhile, bilinguals may switch to the language of less competence to communicate humoristic gestures, among other purposes .

Keywords: Arabic, bilingualism, competence, code-switching, English, functions

Introduction

Generally, university students, specifically “prestigious universities”, often consider code-switching to be a useful way of communicating in their discussions, conversations, and debates (Rammal, 2012). This bilingual phenomenon is defined as a shift made by a speaker from one language to another or one variety to another. It could also occur in two speakers, for instance, a speaker may ask a question using English then another speaker answers in Spanish (Ritchards et al. 2013).

The current study investigates the effect of competence of English and Arabic on the choice of language orientation or preference of code-switching among Arabic speakers at the University of Memphis in casual random themes of conversations. It also attempts to find additional functions of code-switching that other researchers failed to observe and document.

The preference of language in casual conversation or online chatting is mostly a cognitive decision (Bosma & Blom, 2019). Such decisions usually impact on the interlocutors’ performance in all kinds of conversations including face-to-face and online interaction. Moreover, both public and private university students are most likely to be affected by code-switching, namely, they show different impressions and attitudes toward code-switching speakers.

Whether face-to-face or online, code-switching occurs both intentionally and unintentionally conditional to such factors as: (1) fluency and extent of knowledge in the two languages, (2) the speakers’ social orientation, (3) the ability to find the appropriate word in the second language, and (4) a speaker’s education, among many other factors (Albanon, 2018).

Sometimes conversations occur in informal settings; therefore, Arab students are obliged to use their own local dialect, which sometimes sounds unfamiliar to students from other states or even Arab countries. Therefore, students resort to code-switching to overcome such incidence in daily interaction.

Hence, it seems that interlocutors activate their knowledge of the two languages instantaneously, and use this knowledge skillfully to accomplish communicative purposes during the conversations. The following examples from recorded conversations demonstrate how two Iraqi students code-switch unconsciously:

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Student 1: “Arid asi’lak, kammalit submission lil assignment a-thani?”

“I wanna ask you: did you complete the submission of the second assignment?”

Student 2: “Beli, kammalit submission ala e-telegram, lakin buqa al- moodle online e-layla.”

“Ya, I completed the submission on telegram, but not on moodle online, tonight [I will do it tonight]”.

The excerpts above show that code-switching is not a random process; rather it is governed by rules to maintain a communicative purpose. It is noticed that the use of the colloquial Arabic sounds ‘lil-‘ in “lil-assignment”, ‘e-‘ in “e-telegram”, and ‘al-‘ in “al-moodle” serve to substitute for the article ‘the’. In code-switching, this sort of shift functions as a means to clarify the “illocutionary” meaning (Crystal, 1983, p 179). Furthermore, it smoothens the tone and the structure of the utterance. It is seen that the words code-switched are often technical (Moodle, Telegram) because Arabic lacks their functional equivalents. Thus, speakers often need to borrow such words.

Syntactically speaking, code-switching is systematic; that is, it cannot occur anywhere in the utterance. According to Sridhar & Sridhar (1980) and Poplack (1979), bilinguals tend to switch at boundaries of basic syntactic categories, such as noun phrase, verb phrase, and prepositional phrases. However, if the two languages involved differ with respect to the order of elements or parts of speech, code-switching is then uncommon between these items. In Standard Arabic, for example, an adjective follows the noun it modifies, whereas in English, the adjective precedes the noun. However, these rules are sometimes broken by code-switching fans, especially in local dialects where the adjective, as in English, precedes the noun, example:

Hatha tafsirun jayyid. Tasluhu an takoon ustathan. (Standard Arabic)

Hatha khosh tafsir. Inta tislh tkoon ustath. (Iraqi Arabic)

[This is a good explanation. You make a good teacher.]

Aims of Study

The study tries to find out whether the amount of competence in the foreign language (English) can affect the frequency and function of the bilingual phenomenon of code-switching.

Research Questions

The present study addresses the following questions:

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- 1- Can competence in the first or second language affect the speaker's direction of code-switching?
- 2- Besides Auer (2002), and Appel and Muysken's (2006) list, what are the functions of code-switching in English-Arabic conversations by speakers of different competence levels of English and Arabic?

Hypotheses

The study investigates the applicability of the following hypotheses:

- 1- Competence in the first or second language affect the speaker's direction of code-switching.
- 2- In addition to Auer (2002), and Appel and Muysken's (2006) typology, there are additional functions of code-switching by speakers of different competence levels of English and Arabic.

Definitions of Code-switching:

Researchers and linguists propose a plethora of definitions for code-switching. Myers-Scotton (2006, p. 239) defines code switching simply as "the use of two language varieties in the same conversation." Gompers's (1982, p. 59), considers it a "juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems of subsystems." Another usually confused with concept to code switching is code mixing. However, researchers often draw a fine line between the two phenomena. A main difference between them is the way they are used. Myers-Scotton (1993) differentiates between the two terms insisting that code-switching takes place when bilinguals switch between two languages during one interaction with another bilingual person whereas code mixing is the use of words, affixes, phrases and clauses from more than one language within the same sentences. On the other hand, Muysken (2000) highlights that code switching is seen in cases where the two languages retain their monolingual features, whereas code- mixing is used for cases when there is some overlapping between the two languages. In this study, the researcher focuses on code-switching rather than code mixing.

Theoretical framework

An eclectic framework of Auer (2002) and Appel and Muysken (2006) was adopted because these models complement each other in making a comprehensive typology of functions of code-switching.

For the first model by Auer (2002), the following functions are listed:

- 1- Speech reporting.
- 2- To exclude or include participants in the conversation.

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- 3- Signaling marginal remarks.
- 4- Repetition (reiteration) or clarification, drawing attention and organizing turn taking.
- 5- Manipulating language as in pun.
- 6- Shifting the activity (or mode).
- 7- Changing the topic.
- 8- Organizing conversational activities in context.

Appel & Muysken (2006) highlight six factors:

- 1- Referential (or deficiency); lacking knowledge of the language switching from.
- 2- Directive (to a specific person speaking the same language).
- 3- Expressive (to stress a mixed identity).
- 4- Phatic (to change the tone of conversation).
- 5- Metalinguistic (to “show off” and exhibit multilingual skills).
- 6- Poetic (serving as jokes, puns and so on).

Methodology, data and participants

In this case-study research, the researcher analyzes transcribed excerpts of conversations recorded on tape for three Iraqi Arabic students. Because the number of participants is not large, the researcher relies heavily on the insights of qualitative analysis. Two of these participants are Iraqi-born students enrolled at the University of Memphis and a third is an American-born Iraqi student at the same university. The Iraqi-American speaker ‘2’, 27 years, spent all his life in the US, student ‘3’, 29, spent most of his life in the US while student ‘1’, 39 years old, had arrived to America recently. All participants are males majoring in MA, English Linguistics.

The researcher played the role of a disinterested observer and the conversations were spontaneous since the participants were unaware of the purpose of study.

The conversation analysis method was used to analyze the transcripts where code-switching (herewith, a blanket term for code-mixing as well) is used. Also, the Myers-Scotton’s model was adopted in this study.

In addition to the analysis based on previous scholarly work, a pre-analysis and post-analysis unstructured interviews were made with the participants to confirm some inferences.

Data Analysis:

Three conversations were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively as shown in the tables and charts below. Most code-switching occurrences

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were from English to Arabic. Hence, (64.80%) of codeswitching cases were from English to Arabic and (35.20%) were backwards. However, more lies in the details that will be discussed in the results supported by the participants' interviews.

Table (1): Frequencies and directions of code-switching.

Interlocutors	E-A #	A-E #	E-A+A-E
I.1	49	9	58
I.2	19	17	36
I.3	15	19	34
Total CS	83	45	128
Percentage	64.80%	35.20%	

I.1: Interlocutor 1; the Iraqi student studying at the University of Memphis

I.2: Interlocutor 2: The Iraqi student living most his life in the US

I.3: Interlocutor 3: The American-born Iraqi student

E-A #: number of Arabic words which represent switching from English to Arabic

A-E #: number of English words which represent switching from Arabic to English

Chart 1: Codeswitching by each participant.



Table (2): Detailed numbers of functions and factors of code-switching.

CS	I.1			I.2			I.3		
	E-A	Deficiency (31)	Religiosity (7)		Humor (5)	Religiosity (6)	Solidarity (1)	Jokes (6)	Impressivity (5)
Topic change (4)		Jokes (7)	Total (49)	Topic change (3)	Jokes (4)	Total (19)			Total 15
A	Topic change (4)	Solidarity (4)	Impressivity (1)	Topic change (5)	Privacy (4)	Solidarity (2)	Topic change (6)	Privacy (5)	Solidarity (3)
				Humor (2)	Jokes (4)	Total (17)	Emotion (3)	Humor (2)	Total (19)

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It is important to keep in mind that in this study, English is considered a second language for speaker 2 and speaker 3 since they were born in the United States, and a foreign language for speaker 1. Moreover, speaker 3, the American-born Iraqi is absorbed in the American culture more than the Iraqi culture. Hence, speaker 2 and speaker 3 speak English effortlessly, whereas speaker 1 speaks it with quite an effort and according to the interview, he struggles understanding fast and slurred over English.

Discussion of findings

The chart above gives the numbers of occurrences of code-switching of the three participants from English to Arabic and backwards. However, since the number of participants and conversations is not large, the quantitative analysis is given a secondary significance. Thus, the following sections represent excerpts from the conversations analyzed descriptively based on previous studies and supported by interviews with the participants when needed.

Studies on code-switching in general indicate that the bilingual phenomenon of code-switching occurs either because of a phase of deficiency or a means of social stable shift (Hall, 1995).

Quantitative account

In general, speaker 1 codeswitched more often than the other two speakers. The justification for that is because of lacking full competence of English. His codeswitching was frequently from English to Arabic. His codeswitching factors were mostly for deficiency; failing to find the equivalent in English.

Deficiency

Deficiency (or in Appel and Muysken's terms referential) occurs when bilinguals or language learners fail to find the equivalent word or expression in the foreign language, thus they resort to switching to their native language.

Speaker 1, i.e., the Iraqi speaker switched from English to Arabic mostly when he struggled to find the English words he intended to say. Hence, he resorted to Arabic since the other participants could understand it. Neither speaker 2 nor speaker 3 was noticed to switch for the factor of deficiency, apparently for being competent in both Arabic and English.

1. S2: What did you do about your i-69 form?

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2. S1: Megan volunteered to take me. I mean she will take me to the immigrat [SIC] office, and finish my iqama. How you say that in English?
3. S3: Do you mean the green card?
4. S1: Is it the same?! I thought green card is something else.
5. S2: You mean the immigration office? You don't have to go there, you are a student.

Solidarity

According to Fairclough (2001), the use of “we” or “them” is a means of showing belonging to or distancing from a group. This phenomenon, which sociologists and sociolinguists refer to as solidarity, can also be attained by bilingual choices of language and is often determined by the language that speakers switch to.

In the conversation of the current study, speaker 2 switches to English when he speaks to speaker 3 to stress belonging to the American community, and switches to Arabic with speaker 1 to show solidarity to the Iraqi community. According to the interview, S2 switched to Arabic to include S1 in the conversation.

6. S3: We don't have time to sing the whole song. Let's find a short version.
7. S1: What song?
8. S2 to S1: indah ughnyah lazim yeghanniah b eid al-istiqlal [he has a song he has to sing at the Independence Day celebration].
9. S2 to S3: I think you should sing the national anthem instead.

Topic change

Sometimes, changing the topic is not the reason behind codeswitching, rather is the change of topic that dictates code-switching. This notion is often overlooked in the literature of code-switching. Researchers tend to stress the notion of topic change as a factor behind code-switching. This could be true, but the analysis of the current conversations indicates to the first notion as well. According to the researcher's knowledge, this point is highlighted here for the first time. Notice the following excerpt:

10. S3: If we go in the morning we will arrive at night. That's good cuz then we will crash bed and wake up early and help in the mawkib¹.
11. S2: Dude they start working at night. They mash humus at night, el qima² mu sahla tihtaj deg lilsubuh. [Qima is not easy; it needs mashing all night]

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12. S1: Kheli niqra al Imam al-Hussein [Let's chant a requiem over Imam Hussein]

The excerpt illustrates that speaker 1 changed the topic by codeswitching into Arabic as a consequence of speaker 2's codeswitching. This phenomenon is rarely noticed by researchers.

Privacy

In some cases, codeswitching is used to exclude participants from conversation when the subject matter is sensitive or confidential (Gal, 1988). This is sometimes seen in parents' conversation who want to give themselves some privacy. It is also noticed when interlocutors talk about a sensitive matter such as political, religious, or cultural embarrassing matters.

Based on the interviews, speaker 2 and speaker 3 used codeswitching for the specific function of privacy or exclusion of interlocutor 1. They codeswitched from Arabic to English in these situations since they knew that speaker 1 is not highly competent in English.

13. S2: Kheli nakhuth taxi yam'awwad afdhal li'an maku wakit. [let's take a taxi man, it's better. We don't have time]

14. S3: Yeah but we have to go Dutch. Do you want me to pay S3's fare as well?!

15. S2: Oh it's totally fine. He won't mind at all.

Paying fares or for meals is a sensitive matter in the Arabic culture. In Iraq for instance, it is a norm that one pays fare for all companions on a bus or taxi (Fast, 2010). Although, the American-bred speaker 3 preferred that everyone should pay his fare, he accounted for the fact that speaker 1 would find it awkward. Hence, speaker 3 codeswitched to English to exclude speaker 1. Another reason for code-switching at this sensitive moment is maybe to avoid embarrassment. According to Leung & Chan (2016), bilinguals tend to switch to another language (the second or foreign) when the topic is embarrassing because that language tend to be less emotional.

Humor³

Since they were raised in the American culture, speaker 2 and speaker 3 found some Arabic sounds to be funny even when they spoke Arabic fluently. Sometimes, they made fun of speaker 1 regarding some Arabic sounds that typically sounded funny to the English speakers in general (see Albanon, 2018). Wells (2011) conducted a study on George Lopez's comedy. He established that his comedy "could be interpreted by English

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monolinguals as funny, because it is a mix of sounds they know along with some they are unaccustomed to.” (p 69)

Here is an excerpt of a conversation in the current study to illustrate this state:

16. S2: We are going alone, so an Uber would be enough.

17. S1: I will grab a bag of fustuq (pistachio). I hope you don't mind the sound of cracking.

18. S3: I love fustuq

19. S2: Who doesn't like fustuqqq [laughing]!

Jokes

Most jokes by speaker 1 were told in Arabic. Likewise, Speaker 2 used English, which is his nurture language, for joke telling. Translating jokes is a specifically hard task to most bilinguals since jokes carry rich cultural connotations and inside subtleties. Verdinelli and Biever (2009) presented two experimental studies on eighty-eight bilingual students. They demonstrated that bilinguals tend regularly to communicate their jokes in their mother language since jokes are emotional phenomena of bilinguals and because jokes usually carry notions that could be missing in the target language.

20. S2: Iraqi jokes are hilarious! Tell us one please. Fidwa fidwa⁴.

21. S3: wahid tzawwaj ma ye'rif shi yiqool lmerteh fe gal ilha, ahlich yidroun beech hna? [A man got married. At the wedding night, he didn't have anything to talk about so he asked his bride, does your family know you are here?]

22. S2: lol that's f**ked up man!

23. S3: I don't think I got it.

Religious jargon

The Islamic view regards to speaking the religious register in languages other than Arabic is well-known. In Islam, praying/reading the Quran counts when solely said/read in Arabic. New embracers of Islam have to learn Arabic in order to be able to perform the pillars of Islam (Abdulqadir, 2005). This verdict encourages Muslims to speak the Islamic expressions in Arabic even in everyday conversations. Even non-Muslim Arabs use such expressions as cultural rather than religious formulas.

Many religious words and expressions were said in Arabic in the current study even when English was the medium of conversation. The reason behind that is the lack of the exact equivalent in English (lacuna

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see next section). Even when such words are Anglicized and do exist in English dictionaries, speaker 1 it with Arabic pronunciation. Some of these words have phonemes that do not exist in English.

Wong (2000) conducted a study on bilingual speakers of different backgrounds to look into the cultural functions of code-switching. She highlighted that for religious purposes, participants switched to their native language because they received their religion in that language, hence they feel more comfortable saying their prayers or religious expressions in that language. For instance, a Catholic participant in her study felt that confessing her sins to a priest or saying her prayers in general were more convenient in her native language because she learned her religion in that language.

In the current study, Islamic expressions were said in Arabic. Expressions like insha'Allah, God Willing, Allah Kareem, God is Generous, Alhamdulillah, Thanks God, etc were observed.

Lacuna (lexical and accidental/phonological gaps)

For lexical gap examples, the following excerpt was observed:

24. S1: Are there signs of 'Ashuraa⁵ in Memphis?

25. S2: Yes of course. We are still Muslims, man.

26. S3: I love 'Ashuraa!

The word 'Ashura is a religious (and cultural) word in the Arabic society. It refers to a holiday respected by Muslims. Speaker 1 felt more comfortable saying it in Arabic because he could not find an equivalent in the English language since it is a word peculiar to Arabic in terms of meaning and sounds. For more examples, see lines (10-11).

Emotional Codeswitching

Bilingualism experts assert that the mother language is the language of emotions. Wierzbicka (2003) established in her study that emotional vocabulary of a particular language definitely differs from one language to another. She then continues to say that "the set of concepts by means of which the speakers of any given language make sense of their own and other people's feelings is specific to a particular language," (cited in Dewaele & Pavlenko 2004, p. 94-95).

Therefore, speaker 3 in the current study often cussed in English which is the language he grew up with culturally. In terms of grief, speaker 1 grieved in Arabic in the lamentation council of Imam Hussein.

A new situation of codeswitching was noticed in Speaker 1 who codeswitched to Arabic in cases of daydreaming where he spoke while

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thinking. It is a neutral mental state that is worthy of studying in further and more in depth research.

Impressing

According to Eldin (2014), bilingual speakers could practice code-switching for the purpose of impressing the audience or other interlocutors. This function was also observed in the conversations of the current study. Speaker 1 for instance who was the least competent speaker of English tended to switch from Arabic to “fancy” English words or idioms which he was not expected to know as confirmed by the interview.

27. S2: (On the phone) Min togol jai biltariq ma'naha ba'ad 3 sa'at yallah tousal

[When you say I'm on my way that means 3 hours from now]

28. S3: Jai jai. Hel-Sheitan ma qibal yintini al-sayarah ila inteteh 20 dolaar

[I'm coming. That little devil wouldn't give me the car unless I gave him 20 dollars]

29. S2: Inteteh 20 chekkah?!

[You gave him 20 bucks?!]

30. S1: It's all about the Benjamins.

31. S2: [laughing] what the f**k!

It is noticed how speaker 1 said an idiom that is particularly used by Americans. Idioms mostly entail cultural awareness of the language spoken. In that way, Speaker 1 was trying to impress speaker 2 which is a social function of code-switching.

Conclusion

In light of the Auer's typology, and Appel and Muysken's model, the results show that speaker 3 switched more often to English; the language of his cultural nurture and preference. Speaker 1's preference was the opposite tending to switch to Arabic mostly for deficiency (or in Appel and Muysken's terms referential) or unawareness of the English word or phrase. This indicates that bilingual speakers' tend to switch to the language they speak better, i.e., the direction of code-switching often occurs towards the language of more competence.

In emotional codeswitching such as cussing and grieving, speakers used the language that they spoke more fluently, which is Arabic for speaker 1 and English for speaker 3. Speaker 2; however, represents a

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medial situation. He cussed in English while grieved in Arabic. This indicates that in taboo language, the cultural influence on language choice is stronger than that of fluency in bilinguals. Humor based on sounds was expressed by the language that is less fluent for the speaker. According to the interviews, those sounds were perceived as funny and unfamiliar which incites them to mock and joke about. These functions of code-switching are not listed in the models adopted in the study.

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1 Mawkib is a place where pilgrims are served.

2 Qima is a paste of mashed peas and meat.

3 It is important here to distinguish between humor and joke in the current study. Humor is used for sounds and non-verbal wit. Joke, on the other hand, is used for verbal wit where the funny part is reflected by content rather than sounds.

4 Fidwa means please. It is a functional word which is not included in the current study.

5 The initial voiced pharyngeal sound of the word 'Ashuraa is an accidental gap (which does not exist in English. It sounds weird to many English speakers. Thus, such sounds are mimicked by English speakers as a means of humor.