

Investigating Code Switching between Arabic/English Bilingual Speakers

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Abstract

This study investigates code switching in Arabic/English bilingual speech. The data analysed in this paper is an interview between two female Arabic participants in the context of hair and skin care. It took place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where Arabic is the official language and English is used as a second language. The paper studies the occurrences of code switching from Arabic to English in the conversation from a sociolinguistic perspective. A conversational analysis is carried out in an attempt to understand functions of code switching based on the participants' turns. The findings show that switching from Arabic to English is overwhelmingly utilized in the interview. It is argued that code switching occurs mostly in elaboration. Additional functions of code switching by speakers include grabbing the audience attention, emphasizing points, and showing knowledge of topic-related terminologies.

Keywords: Code switching, Bilingual, Participant, Conversational analysis

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In bilingual and multilingual communities, it is very common to find instances of code switching in spoken language or even written. Code switching has been defined quite similarly by many researchers. Auer states that it is the 'alternating use of more than one language' (Auer, 1984:1). A similar definition is offered by Alvarez-Cácamo (1990) who suggests that code switching is the change of languages which occurs in bilingual speech.

In order to understand what is meant by code switching, it is important to know what does the term 'code' refers to. (Gardner-Chloros, 2009:11) defines it as 'a neutral umbrella term for languages, dialects, styles/registers, etc.'. In this paper, 'code' refers to language, and therefore, 'code switching' here indicates changes from and to languages, Arabic and English in this case.

Many studies have shown that code switching is a common phenomenon among bilingual and multilingual speakers from a variety of first language backgrounds like Chinese (Wei and Milroy, 1995) and (Lin, 1996) and Spanish, (Poplack, 1980) and (Martinez, 2010). Arabic speakers are no exception. Studies by (Bahus, Nabhani, and Bacha, 2014) and (Taha, 2008) revealed that code switching from Arabic to English and vice versa is commonly found among students and faculties in academic contexts. Language alternation is not restricted to spoken language, it also occurs in written language and even in social media websites. As shown in Elsayed's study (2016), Kuwaiti students switch between Arabic and English when using WhatsApp messages for communicative purposes and to maintain their cultural identity.

In this article, an interview between two female Arabic participants is analysed. The conversation took place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where Arabic is the official language and English is used as a second language. The reason for choosing this particular conversation to analyse is because it seems to be interesting how two Arabic speakers are talking in an Arabic-speaking country, and addressing Arabic audience, but they use English vocabulary and phrases extensively in their conversation. It is important to mention that many people in Arabic countries tend to believe that a person who speaks English is educated and belongs to a high social class. It is also a common belief that women tend to use English terms in their speech more than men, (Elsayed, 2016). This paper will study the occurrences of code switching in the interview from a sociolinguistic perspective, and analyse them based on the conversational analysis model, (Auer, 1984). The aim is to identify social functions of code switching and not grammatical or cognitive aspects.

1.2 Literature Review

During the last few decades, the concept of code switching has been an interesting subject for research. Many studies have focused on the syntactic aspects of language alternation (e.g. Poplack, 1980; Poplack, 1981; Joshi, 1985; and Belazi et al. 1994). Others studied the cognitive linguistic ability in code switching (e.g. Romaine, 1989; Cenoz and Genesee, 2001) and from a psycholinguistic perspective (Grosjean, 1982). The study of Blom and Gumperz (1972) can mark the immersion of code switching research from a sociolinguistics perspective.

In their study, (Blom and Gumperz, 1972) developed two models: 'we code' and 'they code', which are usually used to refer to group identity. It was commonly accepted that 'we code' refers to one's ethnic language or a minority group in a society, and 'they code' refers to the language of that society. However, this model has some limitations as the 'we/they' distinction does not always have clear cut boundaries. In many cases, people from a minority group speak both languages (the language of the wider society and the one of their ethnic group) as a native language. Therefore it can be hard to identify which language is the 'we code' and which is the 'they code'.

Between 1983 and 1993, Myers-Scotton has developed the 'markedness model' of code switching, which became very influential at that time, and is still widely used a tool to explain the social motivation of code switching. Her theory suggests that a normally expected occurrence of code switching is referred to as an unmarked choice, whereas unexpected instances are marked choices. Nevertheless, this model has been criticized based on the fact that it mostly relies on assumptions and external interpretations which can, sometimes, be irrelevant to the participants themselves.

A very influential approach to analyse code switching is the conversational analysis model (CA), which was proposed by Auer (1984). This model suggests that conversational speech cannot be analysed in isolation, but rather must be analysed based on preceding and following turns by participants. Auer argues that code switching should be analysed based on speakers' choice of language in each turn. This approach provides the minimum external interpretations as it relies on the actual function of each turn by each participant. Wei (2002:171) suggested three important issues in CA approach: '(i) relevance, (ii) procedural consequentiality, and (iii) the balance between social structure and conversational structure'. He argues that those who adopt the CA approach must ensure that their analysis is relevant to the participants, explain how extra-linguistic features might affect the conversational interaction, and clarify how factors such as participants' identities and relationships are reflected in the process of interaction.

1.3 Research Questions

This paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the functions of code switching in the interview?
2. Where does code switching occurs more frequently?

2. Method

The participants are two ladies: an interviewer and a participant (who is a Lebanese British TV presenter and programmes producer), and they were celebrating the launch of a new hair product (Head & Shoulders Cream Bath). The venue is The Palace Hotel in Dubai, UAE. Five minutes of the original interview has been extracted and transcribed (see appendix I). The data was collected from Hia magazine website (the link to the interview is provided in appendix II).

This study will use the conversational analysis model as a framework for analysis. The conversation takes the form of questions and answers. Thus, most of the functions are either a question or an answer. It also involves many names (e.g. Head and Shoulders Shampoo and Head and Shoulders Cream Bath) which are rarely translated into Arabic, and in the analysis they were not regarded as significant instances of code switching. The interview is mainly in Arabic, but involves many English words and phrases. Instances of code switching to English are in **bold** font. The function of each instance of code switching is written at the end of each sentence in a box in italic (see appendix I).

3. Analysis

Many code switching instances in the interview have the function of addressing audience and grabbing their attention. The interviewer chose to switch to English when addressing the audience, who are mainly women, using the English terms 'ladies' and 'readers' (see appendix I). As mentioned earlier, Arabic women tend to favour the use of English in their speech to indicate a high social class, and using English when addressing them helps attracting them. However, in another occasion where the speakers address the same audience, they did not use any English words.

- 1) **I:** Ok. What is your beauty advice which you would like to say for Arabic ladies today? What do you highly advise?

P: Always smile.

In example 1, neither the interviewer nor the participant used English. The question clearly addresses 'Arabic ladies', and therefore, it is expected to use Arabic language in the question as well as the response. Despite the fact that Arabic women tend to favour the use of English in their communication, it would be inappropriate to use it here when the question is directly addressed to 'Arabic' ladies.

Emphasis appears to play an important role in the use of code switching; i.e. many instances of code switching have the purpose of emphasizing the meaning. The participant, switched code to assure a previously said Arabic phrase. This can be seen in the following examples:

- 2) **I:** aha, **he's very charismatic.**

P: Yeah, **very charismatic** and relaxed

- 3) **I:** **Ok.** If I am not wrong, you got married **last Summer** [is that right]?

P: [**Last Summer**]

- 4) **P:** I've always loved the **style** of Valentino, I feel it's my **style.**

I: **Very romantic.**

P: **Very romantic** and **it's always been my style** and **I've always loved Valentino**

In examples 2, 3, and 4, the participant used English to emphasize a point that was mentioned in the previous turns. Another important function of code switching which the participants undertake is to reflect knowledge and education of some terms. The topic of the interview deals with beauty and fashion, and being aware of related terms indicates a prestigious and a high social class. In the interview, the participant used Arabic in her answer except when referring to words such as 'moisturising cream' and 'make-up' (see appendix I). The following example illustrates the same point:

- 5) **I:** Ok. In terms of appearance and **fashion**, who do you like?

P: I love natural beauty so much because, **it's, it's my thing** (laugh). I like Halle Barry and Kate Winslet, and I love the **style** of Cameron Diaz very much. **She is very stylish**, she can be **effortless** in **style**. Whatever she wears looks pretty on her. Umm, Nicole Kidman and many others.

The only English word in the question is 'fashion'. The same appears in the answer as the participant used English when referring to 'style' and 'stylish'. We can also notice that the participants did not use English in articles and prepositions as in 'the **style** of' and '**effortless** in **style**'.

As mentioned earlier, the conversation consists of questions and answers; some answers involve elaboration as well. The conversation as a whole includes plenty of code switching instances, but the most common uses of it occurs in elaboration. Example 6 indicates that the speakers switched code when elaborating on something:

- 6) **I:** aha, **he's very charismatic.**

P: Yeah, **very charismatic** and relaxed. He never tries **to impress you** or something. **He is who he is**, George Cloony, very kind.

In addition, some interesting patterns were noticed in the conversation. Speakers do not only switch to English in new or emphasized information, but sometimes in repeated words; i.e. to say a word in Arabic then repeat it in English as in examples 7 and 8 below.

- 7) **P:** And it should always be clean and ready for blow dry, for **blow dry**, which I try not to do more than twice a week.

- 8) **P:** The character of George Cloony is ... you feel that he has the confidence, the **confidence** of the fifties and sixties stars.

It was also noticed that the speakers sometimes used English when the previous turn was said in English, or at least involved the use of English as shown in the following examples:

- 9) **I:** Is there any secret that you would like to share with 'Hia' **readers**?

P: **Good make-up remover.**

10) **I: Ok.**

P: Moisturising the skin and the **scalp.**

I: Ok. Tell us about your hair

Using the same language in the following turn indicates interest in the topic and the conversation.

It has been noticed that the participants did not switch to English after any non-verbal conduct (e.g. gesture or nodding). For instance, when the participant nodded, the interviewer used Arabic at the beginning of her following sentence, even though she usually starts her speech with an English word (e.g. 'ok', 'smile', etc.). This also includes non-linguistic features such as aah and umm or laughing. Example 11 illustrates this point:

11) **I: Ok.** In terms of appearance and **fashion**, who do you like?

P: I love natural beauty so much because, **it's, it's my thing** (laugh). I like Halle Barry and Kate Winslet, and I love the **style** of Cameron Diaz very much. **She is very stylish**, she can be **effortless** in **style**. Whatever she wears looks pretty on her. Umm, Nicole Kidman and many others.

In this example, the participant switched to English many times in her speech. However, after the non-linguistics conducts 'laugh' and 'umm', she did not.

4. Conclusion

The conversation discusses hair and skin care, fashion, and celebrities. These can all be regarded as feminine issues or at least interest females more than males. Therefore, the extensive use of code switching seems reasonable because, as mentioned earlier, women are part of a social group that favours the use of English in their communication.

By using the conversational analysis approach, this interview has been analysed based on the participants' turns. As can be seen, most code switching instances occur in elaboration. From the previous analysis, we can summarize the findings and the main functions of code switching as follows: (1) to elaborate, (2) to grab attention, (3) to emphasize, and (4) to show knowledge of topic-related terminologies. The speakers frequently switched code in explanations and elaborations. When the speakers intended to attract a specific social group (ladies in this case), they also switched to English when addressing the audience. Furthermore, they used English words and phrases in assertion. Speakers also switched to English in certain occasions especially when they mention things which are associated with the topic like style, fashion, moisturising and so on. Moreover, the analysis showed that code switching occurs more frequently after a previously said English word or phrase or in some repeated words. It has also showed how some patterns of non-linguistic and non-verbal patterns have affected the way the participants interact.

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Appendix I

Transcription of the Interview

Key:

Normal font: Arabic

Bold font: English

I: interviewer

P: participant

[]: overlap

I: Hello 'Hia' ladies, today we are at **The Palace Hotel** in Dubai to celebrate the launch of **Head and Shoulders Cream Bath**, and with us there is the **ambassador** of **Head and Shoulders**: Raya Abi Rashed, who else could it be! Welcome Raya!

Introducing the interviewee

P: **Hi**, how are you? Hope you are fine.

Greeting

I: Thank God! Ça va. We are so happy to have you with us today.

P: So am I.

I: First of all, we would like to ask you Raya about your look. You are known for the **natural look**, [you are always very simple]

New information

P: [true]

I: either with your hair or skin or make-up

P: [That's right].

I: [Tell us first], how do you take care of your skin, especially that you travel a lot?

P: In mornings and evenings, I always put **moisturising cream**, and I believe the most important thing when I work and I need to wear **make-up** is that my skin has to be very clean before sleeping, so that I wake up with a fresh face.

Answer

I: Is there any secret that you would like to share with 'Hia' readers?

Question

P: **Good make-up remover**. For example, if I have lots of **make-up** on my face and I didn't remove it using a **good make-up remover**, I wake up with my eyes ... (gesture: pointing at her eyes as if they are swollen). And the secret is having a clean skin and of course moistening it.

Answer & elaboration

I: Ok.

P: **Moisturising the skin** and the **scalp**.

Emphasis

I: Ok. Tell us about your hair, again **you are very simple** in your hair [its always the same colour], right?

Question

P: [yes]

Yes, the same colour, I just use **colouring shampoo**, but I don't dye my hair. I take care of it with **good scalp care** from **Head and Shoulders**. And it should always be clean and ready for blow dry, for **blow dry**, which I try not to do more than twice a week.

Answer & elaboration

I: Ok. Of course you tried the new product from **Head and Shoulders**?

Question

P: Sure, of course, **cream scalp**.

I: Ok. Do you recommend us to use it?

Answer

P: Definitely, I highly recommend you all to use it because first of all, you can use it for **relaxation**. After you use **Head and Shoulders shampoo**, you put some of the **cream bath** for ten minutes and wait. This time is called **me time**, where you can make some **relaxation** and take care of yourself. If you use **Head and Shoulders shampoo** and the **Head and Shoulders Cream Bath** for your hair, you won't suffer from dandruff and the **scalp** becomes healthy. If you have a good **scalp**, you will have good hair.

Answer & elaboration

I: Ok. What is your beauty advice which you would like to say for Arabic ladies today? What do you highly advise?

P: Always smile.

I: **Smile**, of course, and that's what you are known for, right?

Repetition

P: (nodding)

I: Ok. You've met a lot of famous people. Can you tell us who is the person who attracted you the most in terms of character?

P: aah

I: Whether a woman or a man.

P: umm, the character of George Cloony is ... you feel that he has the confidence, the **confidence** of the fifties and sixties stars. I always compare him with Cary Grant. You feel that he is an **old Hollywood**.

Emphasis

I: **He's very charismatic**.

Elaboration

P: Yeah, **very charismatic** and relaxed. He never tries **to impress you** or something. **He is who he is**, George Cloony, very kind.

Repetition & elaboration

I: What about actresses? Anybody?

P: There's a lot who I like, but I like Kate Winslet so much, first, because of her natural beauty. Second, because of her talent as an actress. And because I love this kind of actresses who have their personal life **totally private**.

Answer & elaboration

I: Ok. In terms of appearance and **fashion**, who do you like?

Question

P: I love natural beauty so much because, **it's, it's my thing** (laugh). I like Halle Barry and Kate Winslet, and I love the **style** of Cameron Diaz very much. **She is very stylish**, she can be **effortless in style**. Whatever she wears looks pretty on her. Umm, Nicole Kidman and many others.

Answer & elaboration

I: **Ok**. If I am not wrong, you got married **last Summer** [is that right]?

Question

P: [**Last Summer**]

Repetition

I: How did this change you? And did it influence your **career** especially [that you ...

Question

P: [Well, so far, it didn't influence anything because my husband and I are not only a husband and wife, we work as a team and he respects my career life, and when I travel a lot he doesn't get angry.

I: Your husband is also in the **domain**, right?

P: That's right. He is a journalist. If someday we have kids, I believe making a balance between my career and motherhood will become a challenge. I think of this a lot.

Question

I: Your wedding dress was Valentino..

P: One of them. There were two dresses.

I: One of them. Ok, tell us how and why did you choose Valentino?

P: (laugh). I've always loved the **style** of Valentino, I feel it's my **style**.

Answer & elaboration

I: Very romantic.

P: Very romantic and it's always been my style and I've always loved Valentino. I was in a festival in Cannes, we had an **event** for Sarah Jessica Parker. A Chinese actress, I don't know her name, arrived and she was wearing that dress. I said: that's the one! Next day, I searched for the dress, I found it and it was sent to me in London, and I wore it for my wedding.

*Repetition &
elaboration*

Appendix II

Link to the interview

<http://www.hiamag.com/ريا-أبي-راشد-تتحدث-لهي/>