

CODE SWITCHING IN CHILDREN'S AND ADULTS' SPEECH

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1. Introduction

Code switching between two languages is a common multifunctional feature of the speech of bilinguals. It also reveals a degree of linguistic competence in both languages. In this paper, code switching is considered a behaviour that is explained by attributing specific meanings to the switches. Much of the literature related to code switching supports the view that there are functions and intentions assigned to code switching. According to Wei (1998),

[...] sociolinguists who have studied code switching draw attention to extra-linguistic factors such as topic, setting, relationships between participants, community norms and values, and societal, political and ideological developments influencing speakers' choice of language in conversation. (Wei, 1998: 156)

The author assumes that speakers intend these meanings to be perceived by their listeners. This assumption is based on personal experience being a bilingual having two bilingual children. The author has noticed that many researchers such as Stroud (1992) and Wei (1998) based their objection to the intentions and meanings of code switching on the view that the analysts are outsiders and not participants in such bilingual behaviour. For instance, Stroud (1992) considers:

[...] the problem of intention and meaning in code switching is the problem of knowing to what extent the intentions and meanings that we assign to switches can in fact be said to be intended by the speaker or apprehended by his or her interlocutors. (Stroud, 1992: 131)

In addition, Wei (1998: 170) emphasises that:

We must be extremely careful about assigning meanings to individual instances of code switching simply on the basis of our (analyst's) knowledge of the community's social history and of the individuals' language attitudes, especially when the analyst is an outsider to the community and individuals in question.

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As a bilingual and a linguist, the author has no problem in knowing to what extent code switching on the part of herself and to a lesser extent her children reflects meanings and intentions. The author agrees that the problem could be to what extent such intentions and meanings are apprehended by interlocutors.

Although there are different aspects of code switching such as syntactic and grammatical, this paper is an attempt to investigate the similarities and differences between the functions of children's and adults' code switching from a pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspective, on the basis that code switching has both a communicative and a social meaning. In addition, this paper is an attempt to investigate the similarities between the functions associated with code switching in Arabic and other languages. Many of the previous studies related to the functions associated with code switching dealt with code switching between English and languages other than Arabic. Only a limited number of studies dealt with code switching between English and Arabic. This paper is based on the assumption that code switching is partially a conscious strategy to achieve certain goals.

2. Theoretical background

I shall introduce an important definition of code switching and other crucial related concepts and theories before analysing the functions of children's and adults' code switching in this paper.

Gumperz (1982: 59) has defined code switching as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems".

Blom & Gumperz (1972) have also introduced important concepts such as "metaphorical switching" and "situational switching". "Situational switching" emphasises the importance of situation in determining speakers' choice of language. To illustrate, the subjects of this study need to change their choice of language to keep up with changes in the situational factors in order to maintain that appropriateness to context. For instance, it is more appropriate to code switch to Arabic when you pray or say some words such as "in shaa' Allah" to indicate that God has complete power over our destiny. By contrast, metaphorical switching indicates that there are changes in the

speaker's language choice although the situation remains the same. This indicates that speakers have different communicative intents.

This paper supports analyst-oriented approaches that tend to use intuitive categories as a basis for the description of code switching and focus on the perceived and symbolic values of each language. Markedness theory is representative of such approaches. Myers-Scotton (1993) introduced the concept that code switching is universal having social motivations and predictive validity for all bilingual communities. She argued that:

[...] the interaction types are to a large extent conventionalised in all communities and carry relatively fixed schemata about the role relations and the norms for appropriate social behaviour including linguistic behaviour.

(Myers-Scotton, 1993: 85)

This study is also based on Myers-Scotton's markedness model of code switching which emphasises the analyst's interpretation of the intentions of bilingual conversation participants. It also explains the social motivation of code switching. Myers-Scotton distinguishes between unmarked and marked language choice. The unmarked language choice depends on a "rights and obligations set associated with a particular conventionalised exchange" (similar to the situational factors). The marked choice signals that "the speaker is trying to negotiate a different rights and obligations balance" (immediate personal motivation). According to Wei (1998: 157-59),

The above model is arguably the most influential theoretical model of the social and pragmatic aspects of code switching. The notion of "indexicality" in the "markedness" theory of code switching may be a convenient tool for the analyst to predict code choice and assign some social value to particular instances of code switching.

Similarly, Jorgensen (1998: 239) distinguishes between two kinds of code switching, one in which the immediate, personally motivated communicative intent is the most salient determiner of the switch, and one in which an existing set of conventions is the most salient determiner. Moreover, he distinguishes between code switching which is basically determined by apparently relatively long-term factors outside of the particular communication undertaken by the speaker (globally determined switching), and code-switching which is basically determined by apparently relatively short-term factors within the particular piece of communication (locally determined factors).

3. Previous studies

Many of the functions assigned to children's code switching in this study are similar to the results of Zentella's (1981) study of code switching among Puerto Rican bilingual children. She has distinguished between three types of factors related to language alternation:

1. "On the spot" factors. These pertain to the observables of interaction such as the topic, the "psychological setting" and the children's addressee, whom they tend to accommodate in their language choice. Changes in these parameters can lead to language alternation.

2. "In the head" factors. These are not directly observable but "come into play when the speaker, attuned to the total social context, makes language choices that are meant to achieve his/her communicative intentions". "Crutching" triggered for instance by a momentary loss for words and "footing" such as the change of the speaker's role are included in this level of communicative strategies.

3. "Out of the mouth" factors. These include linguistic knowledge about phonological and syntactic restrictions on language alternations.

Setting, topic and degree of competence are considered crucial factors that affect code switching. These will be illustrated later during the discussions of similarities.

Franceschini (1998: 63) emphasises the view that:

Language serves to differentiate the speaker from others by marking the speaker belonging to a certain group by means of a similar use of language. Hence, shaping linguistic differences also has an identity function.

Some of the functions in this study are explained by their association with playing different roles and having different identities in Franceschini's model. She considers:

[...] code switching as one possible outcome of speakers' acting in a particular situation of language contact. In the course of interchanges with other interlocutors, such as parents, playmates, teachers, friends and superiors, as well as through the media a speaker has learnt how to use codes. Furthermore, the speaker knows which values, for example values of identity, are transported thereby. Using more or less cognitive effort, she or he can focus on one of the codes. Speakers can take on roles such as that of a learner trying to tackle a new language system or, moving towards more peripheral abilities, the role of a dialect speaker who is deeply rooted locally, the role of a speaker showing off his or her proficiency in languages, the role of a speaker behaving like a native speaker, etc. These roles are also used to convey identities.

(Franceschini, 1998: 62-64)

Franceschini associates the above functions in this paper with different roles and identities. For example, the function of the parent's insistence on code switching to Arabic in their conversation with their children towards the end of the period of

observation is explained as playing a role associated with their Arabic identity. By contrast, when children speak English to their Arabic relatives, they play a role of a speaker showing off their proficiency.

4. The similarities between children's and adults' code switching

The results of the study indicate that there are some similarities between children's and adults' code switching.

First of all, code switching serves a communicative function in both children's and adult's speech. Both of them switch to English to communicate with their teachers and supervisors. For instance, children usually code switch to English in school to communicate with their teachers and classmates. Like children, adults switch to English to communicate with their supervisors and British colleagues at university. Moreover, children and adults code switch to Arabic to communicate with their Arab relatives or friends. In fact, children's mastery of the English language has a great impact on their use of Arabic to communicate with their Arab relatives and friends. At the beginning of the author's period of observation, children were willing to communicate with their relatives and Arab friends in Arabic describing their experiences in Britain. Due to the fact that English had become their native language towards the end of the author's observation period, the children had become unwilling to communicate with their Arab relatives and friends in Arabic. It had become difficult for them to initiate a complete conversation in Arabic without asking adults for some Arabic equivalents of English words. This exposes their weakness in Arabic. As a result, they chose the easiest way to hide this weakness: avoiding and refusing Arabic conversations with their relatives. On the other hand, the adults conveyed special communicative intents by using code switching; they used situational switching to communicate with different people to maintain some degree of appropriateness. Arabic is appropriate for a particular situation, "Speaking with Arabs". As a result, the adults change their choice of language and use Arabic in correspondence with the changes in the situational factors. This function is similar to the "in the head" factors in Zentella's study (1981).

In addition, both children and adults switch to English to indicate cultural differences between British and Arab culture. They frequently switch to English when they speak about English food, culture and weather. They use such forms as loans to

bridge the gap between the two cultures. Words such as *hamburger*, *jacket potatoes*, *fish and chips* are frequent in both children's and adults' conversation about British food. The author has also noticed that both children and adults code-switch to words such as Christmas and Easter. Moreover, it is noticeable in both children's and adults' Arabic conversations that they use some English words to describe the British weather. They tend to use the English sentence "it is snowing" during an Arabic conversation because snow is not a characteristic of the weather in the Arab world. Because it is also important to use words such as "sorry" and "please" in various situations as an indication of politeness, both children and adults use these English words even in Arabic conversations.

It is worth mentioning that the children in the study code-mix words such as happy 'iid from English and Arabic cultures. This indicates the influence of British culture on their choice of language. Although there is a standard Arabic term "'iid mubaarak", literally "blessed festival" to greet others at religious festival times, children use the English word "happy" from "Happy Christmas" and "'iid" to indicate that it is for Muslims. Adults in the study use "'iid mubaarak" as a situational switch because it is more appropriate to use it in such a context. On the other hand, children code-mix "Happy" and "'iid" (i.e. the Arabic for festival) both to indicate the influence of British culture and emphasize their Muslim identity. It is part of Islamic religious culture to say "in shaa allaah / if God wills" when discussing any future possibility. So adults usually switch to Arabic to say these words even in an English conversation. The children in this study are not sufficiently aware of such aspects of the Islamic religion to code-switch to these words. Adults in this study also switch to Arabic regarding any Islamic issues with their children because there is no equivalent vocabulary in English. Adults also recognize the need to emphasize their Arabic and Islamic identity in a Western culture. It is easy for their children to forget Arabic, which is the basis for all Islamic rituals. So, they usually code switch to Arabic in front of their children to remember Arabic.

The above function is similar to "on the spot" factors in Zentella's study (1981) and Romaine's views (1995: 142).

Furthermore, children and adults code-switch English and Arabic to indicate lexical gaps and lack of translation equivalence. For instance, children switch to Arabic

in class to indicate that they do not know the English equivalent of a certain Arabic word. This accords with the results of Moyer's study (1998: 220): "code switching to many simply elicits an inability to speak English or Spanish properly".

Moyer also comments on Auer's study (1984) of Italian immigrants children in Constance and their preference for German as a main language. Moyer (1998: 224) considers that the preference of the Italian immigrants' children is attributed to their lack of linguistic competence in Italian. In addition, Fantini (1985: 68) considers such use of code switching:

[...] a metalinguistic device to allow one to step out of one's language system and to view it from the perspective of the other. Children often sought explanations for the meanings of words in this way.

Adults also switch to English when they encounter scientific, technological and other lexical gaps in Arabic. For instance, adults in the study code-switch to English during Arabic conversation with their Arab colleagues to discuss certain aspects of their research. It is easier for adults to discuss some concepts in everyday life such as "detention centres" or "vouchers for asylum seekers" in English due to the lack of Arabic equivalents. This is considered metaphorical switching because the situation is the same and it is the speaker's choice to express it either in English or Arabic. Adults can speak about the issue of asylum seekers in Arabic explaining the above English terms. But, it is easier for them to use such English terms especially in case there is mutual understanding of these terms among the participants of the conversation. Moyer (1998: 228) considered as the choice of the language of conversation instead of English, Spanish could be interpreted "as a language of preference rather than linguistic incompetence".

According to Romaine (1995: 143),

In general, it would not be correct to say that speakers code-mix or switch to fill lexical gaps, at least not in the case of fluent bilinguals. Although it is popularly believed by bilingual speakers themselves that they mix or borrow because they do not know the term in one language or another, it is often the case that switching occurs most often for items which people know and use in both languages. The bilingual just has a wider choice –at least when he or she is speaking with bilingual speakers. In effect, the entire second language system is at the disposal of the code-switcher.

This function is also similar to "in the head" factors in Zentella's study (1981).

Code switching is sometimes used by the subjects of this study as an ethnic marker to emphasize Arab and Muslim identity. Franceschini (1998: 63) emphasises this view:

[...] language serves to differentiate the speaker from others by marking the speaker as belonging to a certain group by means of a similar use of language. Hence, shaping linguistic differences also has an identity function.

According to Jorgensen (1998: 239) “code switching into the minority language may be a tool to express solidarity”.

Arabic is considered a minority language in the UK. The subjects sometimes switch to Arabic when they speak to their Arab classmates and colleagues. The author’s observation indicates that this intention is clearer in adults’ than in children’s conversations. The more English becomes the children’s native language or strong language in this study, the more they tend to communicate in English even with their Arab friends especially if they know English. This is a complicated issue because this could mean that they forget their Arab identity. From the author’s observation, the concept of identity is not completely developed in children as it is in adults. As a result, it is difficult to judge whether and when children code-switch based on their Arab identity as do adults. Moyer (1998: 221) has emphasized this function in his article considering that “the frequent switching of languages is a deliberate strategy to reinforce local identities”.

Heller (1995: 171) finds that:

[...] it is essential to link language practices to the ideologies which legitimate the unequal distribution of resources and the values accorded them, and to the real world consequences they have for people’s lives.

Code switching is not considered an ethnic marker when children and adults sometimes switch to English when they speak to a mixed group of Arabs and British people. The aim of such code switching is to reduce the social distance between the people in the group and encourage all of them to become involved. Such situational switching is based on the assumption that most Arabs in the UK know English. According to the author’s observation, children tend to switch to English especially at school because the majority of their classmates are British. It is also noticeable that children code-switch to Arabic to speak to their parents when their parents speak to British people. The intention of doing so is commenting on something or saying things

that they do not want others to understand. Jorgensen (1998: 238) described this situation as follows: “code switching into the minority language may be a tool to exclude a particular conversant”.

Children in this study also emphasize their Islamic identity by code switching to Arabic. For example, One of the subjects speaks to his father saying “Let us go to the *Jami*’, we are late”. *Jami*’ is the Arabic for mosque. The above function is similar to “in the head” factors in Zentella’s study (1981).

Finally, English occupies a prestigious position because it is associated with power. To some extent, it is a means to present an educated professional identity. It can be also associated with snobbism in adulthood. This is proved by several studies related to code switching and bilingualism in adults. According to Jorgensen (1998: 238),

For linguistic minorities, the difference in status between languages is indeed an important factor. There is little doubt that bilinguals by some of their code-switching do relate to differences in power and status that go beyond the particular communication situation.

Children to some extent code switch to English to present an educated identity in front of their Arab relatives. Children even sometimes switch to English in their phone conversations with their grandmother to make her aware that they can speak English well. The author believes that such code switching is more associated with the children’s intent to convey that they had learnt something new in their stay in the UK than any thing else. This function is similar to “on the spot” factors in Zentella’s study (1981).

5. List of the functions of children’s code switching at school

The author’s observation at the children’s school indicates that children in this study code-switch in the following circumstances:

- They switch to English to socialize with their teacher and English classmates.
- They switch to Arabic to socialize with their Arab classmates. To some extent, this might be an expression that they share the same Arab identity².

² This Arab code switching was noticeable at the beginning of the observation period when Arabic was their strong language. But, their gradual reduction in code switching to Arabic implies that their English has improved.

-They use code switching as a learning strategy to understand new English words. When they switch to Arabic, this indicates that they do not know the English equivalent for the Arabic word.

-In general, they switched to Arabic to express themselves at the beginning of the observation period and switched to English for the same reason at the end of the observation period. This reflects their improvement in English over this period.

6. List of the functions of children's code switching at home

The author's observation of the children at home indicates that the children in this study code-switch in the following circumstances:

- They switch to English to demonstrate their ability to speak English fluently (note: their parents encouraged this switching).

- During their play, they switch to English to imitate their teachers and English classmates. They also switch to Arabic to imitate their parents' conversations.

- They always switch to English to use words such as please, sorry, thank you, hi, hello (This is due to the continuous emphasis from their parents and their teachers). This type of code switching includes tag switching. It involves the insertion of a tag in one language into an utterance which is entirely in other language (Poplack, 1980) such as you know, I mean, no way, please, sorry, etc.

- They usually switch to English to describe things related to English culture such as food, weather, etc. They use these English words as loan words. For example, they prefer to say snow instead of its Arabic equivalent *thalj* because it is more typical of British weather.

- Children sometimes switch to English during phone conversations with their Arabic relatives especially in greeting terms such as hi, hello. (Note: At the beginning of the observation period, they code-switched to Arabic when using greeting terms. Towards the end of the observation period, they preferred not to speak to their relatives in Arabic because they are not competent in it).

7. The effect of age, formal education and attitudes on code switching

Although children and adults have similarities in their functions of code switching, age, formal education and attitudes are factors that lead to differences in their code switching.

Age is considered an important factor in determining the accurate functions of code switching. According to Auer (1984: 3), “the meaning of code switching must be interpreted with reference to the language choice by the participants themselves”.

Functions that are associated with adults’ code switching can be judged more accurately than those of the children in this study. The analysis of the functions of children’s code switching is mainly based on the author’s judgment. The author has noticed that children sometimes code-switch without any obvious reason especially during their play at home (function of code switching is not clear). It seems that adults in this study are more conscious in their use of code switching than children due to their age. Adults use code switching in specific situations. According to (Romaine, 1995: 121), “there is an almost one-to-one relationship between language choice and social context”.

Children use code mixing more than code switching.

Moreover, formal education has a strong impact on the use of code switching and the adoption of a particular language. The children in this study have started their formal education in the UK. This had a great impact on their English and Arabic proficiency. The longer they stay in the UK, the more English becomes the first language the “Strong Language”, and Arabic the second language, the “Weak Language”. This has a direct effect on their code switching Strategy. When Arabic was the Strong Language at the start of their stay, code switching was mainly from Arabic to English to serve the function of learning new English words and their meanings. In contrast, towards the end of the author’s observation period, children’s code switching was from English to Arabic and was used in order to learn Arabic words and their meanings. On the other hand, the parents of the children are Arabic native speakers. Arabic is their Strong Language because they have had their formal education in Arabic. It will probably never be the Weak Language as in their children’s Arabic. This means that the adults in this study will code switch to English more in order to find out the meanings of some English words, not Arabic words.

In addition, parents' attitude towards their children's English is also important. The parents of the two children encouraged them since their arrival in Britain to learn and speak English. This was mainly to make them integrated in their school social environment. It was important for the children not to feel isolated. So, the strategy of their parents from the beginning is to code switch to English frequently to teach their children some basic words during their conversation. For instance, parents use basic English words such as school, water, etc in their Arabic conversation with their children. This positive attitude on the part of parents to encourage their children to master English contributes to the children's effective use of code switching at school and home. Towards the end of the author's observation period, the parents of the children code-switched to Arabic to encourage the children to speak Arabic in order not to forget it. For instance, in case one of the children asks something in English, the parent's answer is in Arabic. It is important for children to hear Arabic at home to maintain contact with their native language. The parents also use code switching to Arabic in their conversations with their children to encourage them to shift to Arabic. Parents usually answer their children's English requests by saying *aysh*, i.e. "what" in Arabic. This is a code switching strategy to emphasis that it is important for children to shift to Arabic. To some extent, this indicates that code switching can be associated with authority. At the beginning of the author's observation period, the parents code-switched to English to facilitate the children's learning of it. At the end of the observation period, however, the parents used code switching to Arabic to encourage their children to speak Arabic. Both intensions are associated with authority in language choice. The participants interpret the meaning of code switching here with reference to language choice. Jorgensen (1998: 242) describes this situation emphasizing,

Global factors (a strong pressure to learn Danish, not a strong pressure to give up Turkish and no pressure to learn Turkish) do in fact influence children's linguistic development. The trickling down of the global attitude through local administrators, teachers, or even parents is bound to have an effect on the children's choice of language in different situations, and it is bound to have an effect on the motivation to develop either language. Nevertheless, the younger the children, the more effect we can expect the home to have.

According to the parents in this study, Arabic is similar to Gumperz's terms "we-code" and English is considered the "they-code". Gumperz (1982) considered that the "we code" is the language of minorities or a sign of belonging to the minority and

the “they-code” being the “majority language”. Such terms are linked strongly with the notion of identity. Parents consider Arabic their “we-code”. Due to the children’s young age, this is to some extent not the case with the children. At the beginning of the observation period, the children mixed Arabic and English (mixed code) and considered this their “we-code” language. Towards the end of the observation period, however, children considered English as their “we-code” other than the “they-code”. This attitude could change when they grow up and return to their own country. This draws attention to the fact that there is no clear distinction between such terms related to sociolinguistic aspects. The only acceptable distinction depends on people’s attitudes towards their identity. The author agrees with Auer’s point of view that the often invoked characterization of languages as a “they-code” and a “we-code” tends to be used as an a priori schema imposed from code alternation data from outside” (1984: 333).

8. Conclusion

Although the results of this study are based on the subjects’ intention to convey specific functions, the author believes that some of the above functions are used by the majority of bilinguals and can be interpreted universally. The results of this study correspond with the results of many other studies dealing with code switching in other languages. The general category of functions could be considered the same with different details related to each individual case. Functions such as communication are used universally. This links in some way to the distinction between the two concepts: code switching as an individual strategy to achieve specific aims and code switching as a universal predictive strategy which has social motivations and is used by all bilingual communities which have social motivations.

Furthermore, Wei (1998: 173) concludes that “code switching is a conceptualisation cue that has the capacity to “bring about” higher-level social meanings such as the speaker’s language attitudes and preferences”.

This conclusion corresponds to a conclusion reached in this paper that code switching can explain the speaker’s language preferences. The adults’ preference to use Arabic to express their Arab and Islamic identity is evident from the results of this paper. So, there are two similar results based on two different approaches to the analysis of code switching. According to Wei (1998: 169),

[...] the Conversational Analysis “CA” approach to conversational code switching has been developed against the background of an overwhelming tendency in bilingual research to explain code switching behaviour by attributing specific meanings to the switches, and by assuming that speakers intend these meanings to be perceived by their listeners. It also avoids an imposition of analyst-oriented classificatory frameworks, attempting rather to reveal the underlying procedural apparatus by which conversation participants themselves arrive at local interpretations of language choice.

Wei (1998: 156-76) has used the Conversational Analysis approach to code switching which relies on the responses of the participants in a conversation. This approach tries to establish the meaning of code switching by examining in close detail the types of interaction, which involve the very act of language alternation. According to the author’s view, these similar results from the two different approaches indicate that the approach in this study is not an imposition of an analyst-oriented framework.

Finally, it is also important to investigate grammatical aspects related to code switching. The author has noticed that children in this study mixed Arabic and English grammatical features. For instance, they added the English past tense “ed” to Arabic verbs to mark the past tense “Akalted / ate” and they added the English plural “s” to singular Arabic nouns as in “Jami’s / mosques”. I hope to consider these aspects more fully in a future study.

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