Arabic-English Code-Switching among Arab Students at UUM, Malaysia

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to elaborate some aspects regarding the use of code-switching. The objectives of this study were to investigate, a) whether Arab students at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) code-switch to English in their daily conversations or not, b) why Arab students at UUM code switch to English, c) the relationship between familiarity with interlocutors and code-switching, and d) the type/s of code-switching used by Arab students at UUM.

This study was conducted on the 29th of September, 2007. It investigated 155 Arab students of different ages and nationalities who are enrolled at 3 levels of education, i.e., Bachelors, Masters, and Ph.D. at UUM.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. The findings have shown that the majority of Arab students at UUM do code-switch to English in their daily conversations and that there is no relationship between familiarity with interlocutors and code-switching.

Another finding shows that tag switching is the most frequent type used by Arab students at UUM. Finally, the results show that the highest percent regarding the reasons Arab students at UUM code-switch to English was recorded for the lack of equivalents of many English words in Arabic.

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Introduction

When speakers of different speech varieties interact, it will result in languages in contact. According to Hammers and Blanc (2000), languages in contact describe a situation where two or more codes are used in interactions between persons. Further, when two languages are in contact, it will lead to the notion of bilingualism which refers to:

> the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilinguals (social bilingualism); but it also includes the concepts of bilinguality (or individual bilingualism). Bilinguality is the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication; the degree of access will vary along a number of dimensions which are psychological, cognitive, psycholinguistic, social psychological, social, sociological, sociolinguistic, sociocultural and linguistic (Hammers, 1981 cited in Hammers and Blanc, 2000: 6).

The interest in language contact phenomena such as bilingualism and code-switching has increased during the last decades. The term 'language contact phenomena' was established to denote different types of language contact phenomena such as code-switching, code-mixing, and borrowings. The term also covers phenomena that are not counted as code-switching, for example, loans and interference (Jonsson, 2005).

The study of language contact focuses more on various types of language contact situations and various forms of bilingualism. However, the main issue in bilingualism research is code-switching, the alternative use of two or more languages in the same conversation by bilingual speakers (Lesley and Muysken, 1995).

Code-switching can be seen as a natural product of the bilinguals' interaction in two or more languages in multilingual and multicultural communities. Haugen (1956 cited in Romaine, 1995: 52) distinguishes between: "switching, the alternate use of two languages; interference, the overlapping of two languages, or application of two systems to the same item; and integration, the use of words or phrases from one language that have become so much a part of the other that it cannot be called either switching or overlapping."

Chung (2006) indicates that meeting the complex communicative demands requires the speakers of a community where two or more languages are used to switch from one language to another.

According to Haugen (1956), bilinguals tend to use or form sentences that have elements from both languages especially in the first stages of the language development. It is natural for a speaker who speaks two or more languages fluently to

switch between them occasionally or frequently when talking to other people who speak the same languages. It also seems that if a speaker spends a lot of time in a bilingual or multilingual environment, he/she will start to switch from one language to another.

The question of why a person who is competent in two or more languages code switch between these languages is one of the main questions which is investigated in sociolinguistic studies (e.g. Poplack, 1980; Reyes, 2004).

The aim of this exploratory study is to investigate the phenomenon of code-switching among Arab students at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). The study attempts to determine whether Arab students at UUM code switch to English and the reasons they code-switch to English in daily conversations. It also attempts to find out whether knowing the interlocutors would affect code-switching. Furthermore, the study aims to determine the type/s of code-switching used by the Arab students.

Problem Statement

Bilinguals are known for their ability to code-switch between the languages they speak during their conversations by substituting words or phrases from one language with words or phrases from another language. The phenomenon of code-switching is demonstrated in the conversations among Arabic bilingual speakers of English where they use hundreds of English loanwords and expressions.

Many studies have been conducted on code-switching (e.g. Bentahila and Davies, 1983, on Arabic/French bilinguals in Morocco; Backus, 1993, on Turkish/Dutch code-switching among Turkish immigrants in Tilburg, the Netherlands). However, few studies have been done on Arabic bilingual speakers of English. Thus, there is a lack of information about the way Arabic speakers of English code-switch between the two languages in daily conversations.

Previous studies on code-switching focused on the reasons why Arab bilinguals code switch to English (e.g. Othman, 2006; Hazaymeh, 2004; Dashti, 2007) in such settings as the home setting, and school setting, etc. Previous studies did not focus on the types of code-switching used by Arab bilinguals.

Not many studies have been conducted at the university setting to examine the phenomenon of code-switching among Arab bilinguals. Thus, this study will investigate code-switching in a university setting, i.e., UUM. The study will focus on the reasons why Arab students at UUM code-switch to English in their daily life. It will also investigate the types of code-switching used by Arab students at UUM.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

> 1. To determine whether Arab students at UUM code-switch to English or not.

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2. To determine the relationship between familiarity with interlocutors and code-switching.
3. To determine the reasons Arab students at UUM code-switch to English in their daily conversations.
4. To determine the types of code-switching used by Arab students at UUM.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. Do Arab students at UUM code-switch to English?
2. Is there a relationship between familiarity with interlocutors and code-switching?
3. What are the reasons Arab students at UUM code-switch to English in their daily conversations?
4. What are the types of code-switching used by Arab students at UUM?

Significance of the Study

1. The findings of this study would be particularly significant for their potential in creating a better understanding of the code switching phenomenon among Arabic bilinguals.
2. The researcher, further, believes this study will make a modest contribution in bridging the gap of the noted lack of studies in the area of bilingualism, particularly in code-switching of Arabic bilinguals of English.
3. The findings would contribute to both L1 and ESL/EFL teachers' understanding of language use and communication among Arabs.
4. Finally, it is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to second language acquisition research on the use of the second language. Hopefully, this study will contribute to the SLA literature on the issue of code-switching.

Definition of Concepts

Code-switching

The term *code-switching* is one of the most frequently used terms in the field of language contact. Grosjean (1982) defines code-switching as the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance, and this can be in a form of a single word, or a phrase, or a sentence/s. Spolsky (1998) defines code-switching as the phenomenon which occurs when bilinguals switch between two common languages they share in the middle of a conversation, and the switch takes place between or within sentences, involving phrases, words, or even parts of words.

In Skiba's (1997) definition, code-switching refers to the alternation between two languages or dialects in the conversations between people who share these particular languages and dialects. Skiba further adds that code-switching can take on multi forms including single word switches, phrase switches, and clause switches. Gumperz, (1982: 59) defines code-switching as "the juxtaposition within the same

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speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems".

There are many similarities among the definitions:

1. Code-switching is the alternate use of two or more languages.
2. Code-switching occurs between bilinguals.
3. Code-switching can be in a form of a single word, or a phrase, or a sentence/s.

Code-switching, in this research, is defined as the phenomenon in which bilinguals alternate words, phrases, and sentences between two or more common languages.

Bilingualism

The concept of bilingualism refers to "the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilinguals" (Hammers and Blanc, 2000: 6). Mohanty (1994: 13) defines the concept bilingualism through defining the bilingual person, who is the one with an ability to meet the communicative demands of him/herself and of the society by interacting with the other speakers in normal circumstances in two or more languages.

In defining the term bilingualism, the question of proficiency/ competence is often at the core of the discussion. Some linguists suggest that being bilingual is being able to speak two languages perfectly. For example, Bloomfield (1935: 56 cited in Jonsson 2005) defines bilingualism as "the native-like control of two languages". In contrast to this definition, McNamara, (1967 cited in Hammers and Blanc, 2000) proposes that a bilingual is anyone who possesses a minimal competence in one of the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing, in a language beside his/her mother tongue. A broader definition, on the other hand, makes clear that it is enough for the speakers to be able to "produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language" to be called bilingual (Haugen, 1953: 7 cited in Jonsson 2005).

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the various literatures relevant to this study. It describes bilingualism and code-switching as well as discusses the findings of the previous studies that investigated the social motivations for code-switching and the types of code-switching.

Bilingualism

The literature on bilingualism provides evidence that proficient bilingual speakers employ code-switching in their speeches for different purposes and at different levels, such as discourse, sentence, and words. As a point to start the discussion, Weinreich (1953: 73) argues that "the ideal bilingual switches from one language to another according to appropriate changes in the speech situation (interlocutors, topics, etc.), but not in an unchanged speech situation and certainly not within a single sentence".

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Bloomfield (1933) defines bilingualism as having the control of two languages equivalent to the native and Haugen (1953:7) asserts that bilinguals are able to produce "complete meaningful utterances in the other language". In discussing the effects of bilingualism on individuals, Haugen (1953) and Suleiman (1981) assert that bilingualism usually occurs within some particular social setting.

Bilingual speakers are different in terms of their degree of competence in their two languages, in the degree of cultural duality involved, in the linguistic relationship between the two speech varieties, and in the socio-cultural function of the two languages involved Mackey (1967 cited in Romaine 1995). Mackey argues that, since bilingualism is not a clear-cut phenomenon, any attempts to define bilingualism needs to suit the variations in degree, alternation, function, and interference.

The variation in degree of bilingualism concerns proficiency. "How well does the bilingual know each of the languages? Function focuses on the uses a bilingual speaker has for the languages, and the different roles they have in the individual's total repertoire. Alternation treats the extent to which the individual alternates between the languages. Interference has to do with the extent to which the individual manages to keep the languages separate, or whether they are fused" (Mackey, 1967 cited in Romaine 1995: 21).

Mackey (1968) contends that bilingualism is entirely relative because the point at which the speaker of a SL becomes bilingual is either arbitrary or inconceivable to determine. Mackey, therefore, considers bilingualism as the alternate use of two or more languages, which may include multilingualism. Haugen (1953 cited in Romaine 1995: 11) argues that "bilingualism begins when the speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language."

Bilingualism among Arabs

There are many Arabs who live outside Arabic native countries. Those Arabs are mostly bilinguals, but their language choice varies from the first generation who came to those countries at an early age after they acquired the preliminary basics of Arabic, and the second generation who were born outside Arabic native countries and did not acquire the Arabic basics. This reflects to some extent the status of Arabic maintenance/shift as a minority language in the immigrant Arabs situation in these nonnative countries (Othman, 2006).

Among Arab Immigrants in England

Othman (2006) investigated the language choice among first generation Arabic-English bilinguals in Manchester city in Britain i.e. the Arabic bilinguals' choice which represents the status of Arabic maintenance/shift as a minority language in Manchester.

Othman's questionnaire survey of 16 families originally from different Arab countries, including Egypt, Libya, Jordan, and Syria, show signs of Arabic maintenance in the

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informant families. Code-switching was observed in the informants' speech in settings such as home, friendship, work, and university.

The study found that code-switching is used among the informants as a strategy in communication. However, "the motivations for switching in the informants' speech are restricted to a specific set, e.g., activating association with other domains, reporting speech, reiterating, accommodating to the addressee, being used to saying certain words in English, etc" (ibid: 68). Finally, within these motivations, the informants rely on Arabic, which means that "Arabic is functional in their life, which reflects Arabic maintenance" (ibid: 69).

In Jordan

The phenomenon of bilingualism in Jordan is represented by the use of hundreds of English loanwords and expressions (Hazaymeh, 2004; Kailani, 1994). "Loanwords are relevant to bilingualism, in that the original transfer is usually effected by someone who knows the donor as well as the receiving language" Adams (2003: 29).

Since many Jordanians are bilingual in English, they prefer to code switch towards English in domains such as work and education. Hazaymeh also contends that recent cultural contacts with the English-speaking countries have introduced many aspects of English culture and English loanwords into Arabic in the Jordanian society. Cultural contacts have been established by various means such as education, technology, trade, sports, media, and communications.

Thus, many Jordanians have been encouraged to learn English and become bilinguals. Hazaymeh also found that Jordanians of different social backgrounds and ages like to code switch to English, using English words and expressions in their daily interactions because of many reasons, for example as a sign of knowing English and as a symbol of social prestige.

Among Palestinians

Smooha (1989) has observed language contact among Palestinians who dwell together with the Jewish people in the same society. They are known as *Israeli Palestinian Arabs*. According to Smooha, the Palestinians in Israel are undergoing a process of developing Arabic-Hebrew bilingualism as Arabic is being influenced by Hebrew, which is the dominant language. As a result, code-switching to Hebrew is found in the speech of Israeli Palestinian Arabs.

In Kuwait

In Kuwait, bilingualism is reflected by the fact that although English is considered as a foreign language, English has played a significant role in the country and its use is spreading in various social settings (Dashti, 2007). Dashti contends that Kuwaitis tend to employ English/Kuwaiti Arabic code-switching when speaking to different interlocutors and in different interactions. Foe example, Kuwaiti mothers and their

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children employ English/Kuwait Arabic code-switching both in and outside the home settings as one strategy of language choice.

This is only one indication that the use of English is not confined to the four walls of the classroom environment in Kuwait. Dashti analyzed the code-switching patterns used by Kuwaitis and illustrated how these patterns may be influenced by the type of interlocutors and the kind of interaction that takes place, since code-switching is used as a language choice strategy to ensure successful communication between the interlocutors.

In United Arab Emirates

The English language has also established itself in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a language of communication in both academic and nonacademic contexts even though Arabic is the mother tongue and the official language of the UAE. Due to the huge presence of expatriates, the domination of English in the UAE, and the presence of many other foreign languages such as the languages of the Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and the Filipinos have led to many communicative problems, thus producing misunderstanding and the violation of conventional communication rules. The blending of ethnics has resulted in a rather strange multilingual code switching practiced in the country (Khuwaileh, 2002).

Code-switching

One of the phenomena within the field of bilingualism is code-switching, in which bilingual speakers perform switching from one language to another during the conversation. Researchers have focused on many aspects of this phenomenon, such as the different types of code-switching, and the reasons bilingual speakers code-switch using different language/s (Malmkjær, 1991).

> How does it happen, for example, that among bilinguals, the ancestral language will be used on one occasion and English on another and that on certain occasions bilinguals will alternate, without apparent cause, from one language to another? George Barker (1947:185-86).

Study of Code-switching

Code-switching was introduced in the literature of bilingualism when Espinosa (1917) wrote about the speech mixture in New Mexico, particularly about the influence of the English language on New Mexican Spanish (Macias and Quintereo, 1992). Since then, the research in the area of bilingualism has started to investigate different aspects of code-switching.

The studies conducted have focused on the social functions of code-switching (e.g. McClure & Wentz, 1975; Poplack, 1981 cited in Macías and Quintero, 1992); on the role of code-switching in young children developing their bilingualism (e.g. Huerta,

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1980; Genishi, 1981; Fantini, 1985 cited in Macías and Quintero, 1992); on the use of code-switching in classrooms among bilingual students (e.g. Hudelson, 1983; Olmedo-Williams, 1983; Aguirre, 1988 cited in Macías and Quintero, 1992).

Focus on the Reasons for Code-switching

For decades, code-switching researchers have continued to find a sound reasoning for code-switching. Some scholars like Gumperz (1982) and Auer (1984) have considered code-switching as one of a number of discourse cues (both verbal and nonverbal) that help signal and interpret interlocutors' intentions. Whereas the focus of other scholars, like Poplack (1980, 1981), Bentahila and Davies (1983) and Nishimura (1989) was to characterize the morpho-syntactical constraints in inter-sentential switching focusing on the position or location in a sentence where code-switching would be allowed.

In the 1990s, the focus was on the social motivations for code-switching and the differences in the structural characteristics of code-switching due to the social or psycholinguistics characteristics of different groups in the community (e.g. Wei, 1994, on code-switching patterns of Cantonese-speaking Chinese immigrants in Tyneside in Britain), or the interaction between bilinguals proficiency and attitudes (e.g. Bentahila & Davies, 1992, on Arabic/French bilinguals in Morocco) (Coulmas, 1997: 219-220).

Recent Studies on Code-switching

More recent studies continue to focus on the social motivations of code-switching (e.g. Lipski, 2005; Ncoko et al., 2000; Wong, 2000; Othman, 2006) and what functions it serves in the conversation (e.g. Reyes, 2004; Don, 2003; Al-Khatib, 2003). This study is an attempt to investigate the reasons Arab students at UUM code-switch to English in their daily conversations.

Types of Code-switching

Three types of code-switching have been identified (Poplack, 1980: 581-616):

- Tag switching – where tag parts of sentences occur in a different variety from the main part of the sentence;
- Inter-sentential switching – where a code switch occurs at a sentence or clause boundary;
- Intra-sentential switching – where a code switch occurs within a single sentence.

1. Tag Switching

Tag-switching involves the insertion of a word or phrasal tag in one language into an utterance in another language. Tags are used as they bring about the least fear in the

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speaker since the use is only subjected to a minimal syntactic adjustment (Poplack, 1980).

Example 1. Finnish/English tag switching: (The tag here is English)
Mutta en mə viittinyt, no way.
'But I'm not bothered, no way!'

Example 2. English/Serbian tag-switching: (The tag here is Serbian *znas#* for 'you know')
So he asked me for money, *znas#*, and I had to say no, *znas#*.

2. Inter-sentential switching

Inter-sentential switch occurs between sentences at the sentence boundaries, which serves to emphasize a particular point uttered in the other language. The switch helps to indicate to whom the speech is addressed and provides a direct quote from another conversation (Poplack, 1980). Inter-sentential switching that can even occur between speaker turns requires the speakers' greater fluency in both languages since a larger portion of the utterance must conform to the linguistics rules of both languages as compared to the minimal adjustment needed in tag-switching.

Example: French/English inter-sentential code-switching
*Y luego me dijo "**don't worry about it**."*
And then he told me "**don't worry about it**."

Example: Inter-sentential switching between English/Spanish.
*Sometimes I'll start a sentence in **y terminó in español**.*
Sometimes I'll start a sentence in **English and finish it in Spanish**.

3. Intra-sentential switching

The type of code switching with the greatest syntactic risk is intra-sentential switching, which happens at the clause, phrase level, or at word level, specifically in the middle of a sentence, with no interruptions, hesitations, or pauses indicating a shift if no morpho-phonological adaptation occurs (Poplack, 1980). Here, switching of different types occurs within the clause or sentence boundary.

Example : Tok Pisin/English intra-sentential code-switching
What's so funny? Come, be good. Otherwise, yu bai go long kot. –
' What's so funny? Come, be good. Otherwise, you'll go to court.'

It may also include mixing within word boundaries, for example, English words used in India with Panjabi inflectional morphology. e.g. *shppaˇ-* 'shops.' This type of code-switching happens within a single sentence or even a single phrase.

Example: English/Greek intra-sentential code-switching
You have to find a ***kalo pedi*** and marry him.
You have to find a good guy and marry him.

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Example: Spanish/English intra-sentential code-switching
*Abelardo tiene los **movie tickets***.
Abelardo has the movie tickets.

In his study about language choice among first generation Arabic-English bilinguals in Manchester city in Britain, Othman (2006) contends that among the first generation, two types of intra-sentential code-switching were observed.

The first type includes the insertion of lexical items or entire constituents from Arabic into the structure English, which is the most common type. Such insertion of Arabic items in the English discourse reflects Arabic maintenance since it indicates that the informants are more proficient in Arabic than in English and that is true because they are recent immigrants.

The second type includes the insertion of English lexical items or constituents in the Arabic utterance. This type is the most frequent since it does not require much proficiency in English.

Methodology

Samples

One hundred and fifty-five Arab students, 51 males and 4 females, were chosen through random sampling, using a list of all Arab students' names obtained from the Postgraduate Programme Department (PPS). The sample included Arab students of different ages and nationalities, i.e. 6 Iraqis, 53 Jordanians, 61 Libyans, 20 Palestinians, 2 Syrians, and 13 Yemenis, who are enrolled at 3 levels of education, i.e., Bachelors, Masters, and Ph.D. at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM).

The students were Arab bilinguals of English; they speak Arabic as their mother tongue, including any of its varieties, and English as a second language. They are enrolled in different programmes at UUM.

A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed of which 162 were returned; the return rate was 90%. However, only 155 of them were analyzed. The actual sample, i.e. 155, represents 57.62% of the total population, i.e. 269. The sampling size is close to Sekaran's (2003) sampling guide of 159 respondents for a population of 270.

Instrumentation

The literature reviewed shows that researchers employed different kinds of instruments for their studies on code-switching. The instrument developed to collect the data for this study is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the findings of previous studies such as Ayeomoni (2006), Hazaymeh (2004), Skiba (1987), and Sert (2005).

Conclusion

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It has been recognized in the literature of code-switching that this phenomenon is universal in the multilingual communities; however, the reasons for this phenomenon vary between communities. Code-switching has been observed in the daily conversations of Arab students at UUM. Those students are bilingual and they prefer to code switch towards English in their speech. This study has found that the majority of Arab students at UUM do code-switch to English in their daily conversations. It has also been found that there is no relationship between familiarity with interlocutors and code-switching. Further findings show that tag switching is the most frequent type used by Arab students at UUM followed by intra-sentential switching and inter-sentential switching.

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