Syntactic Code-switching in the Speech of Typically Developing Yemeni Arabic-English Bilingual Children

Afrah Humran and K. C. Shyamala

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Abstract

This paper investigates syntactic code switching in the speech of Yemeni Arabic- English typically developing bilingual children who live in Mysore - India. It examines the syntactic features of their speech and mechanisms employed to make code switching. Data is drawn from the speech of 30 children ranging in age from 4 to 15 years old: 15 boys and 15 girls. The total time of recordings is 60 hours. Each participant was recorded for one hour in Arabic session and one hour in English session. Data analysis reveals interesting patterns of syntactic code switching above word-level which stand in disagreement with the main constraints proposed by (Timm 1975; Gumperz 1976; Lipski 1977; Pfaff 1979; Poplack 1980) among others. This paper presents significant contributions to the field of Arabic code switching, especially Yemeni Arabic.

Keywords: code-switching, code-mixing, syntactic patterns, constraints, bilingualism, Arabic-English mixing, Yemeni Arabic.

1. Introduction

This study attempts to investigate the syntactic code-switching in above word-level in the speech of typically developing children whose first language is Arabic and who use English as a second language. It is well known that English and Arabic are genetically unrelated in any aspect. Because the English language is well described by researchers in the relevant sources, which are easily accessed, we restrict ourselves to describing the Arabic language.

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) _ the descendant of Classical Arabic branches into twenty-two vernacular dialects in the twenty-two Arab countries, each country having its regional colloquial variety. Bateson (1967) as cited in Ryding (2005) identified three kinds of change that differentiate MSA from Classic Arabic: 1) simplification in syntactic structures, 2) a vast shift in lexicon due to the need for technical terminology, and 3) a number of stylistic changes due to translation from European languages.

In terms of morphology and syntax, all varieties of Yemeni Arabic maintain the same inflectional and derivational paradigms as well as the same word order. However, there is a great deal of lexical variation from one dialect to another one.

This paper aims at answering the following research questions:
> 1. What are the features of syntactic code-switching in the speech of Yemeni Arabic-English typically developing bilingual children?

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2. How far do these features agree with the salient constraints on code-switching which are reported in the literature?

The remaining of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents a brief survey of the related literature. Section 3 gives an account of the participants, and the procedures followed in this study. Section 4 presents the data analysis and discussion. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Review of Literature

In many scholarly works of linguistics, code mixing (henceforth CM) and code-switching (henceforth CS) are used interchangeably to denote the same thing. Some linguists distinguished between CS and borrowing, so they used CS to refer to both CM and CS (e.g., Pffaf, 1979; Poplack, 1980; Gysels, 1991 and Scotton, 1992). Others used CM to denote the intrasentential alternation and CS to refer to the intersentential alternation of code (e.g., Sridhar and Sridhar, 1980 and Kachru, 1983). According to Auer (1995), CS is generally understood to mean alternation between two languages, so he used the term alternation as a hyponym to replace both CM and CS. Other scholars (e.g., Gumperz 1982; Milroy and Muysken 1995) used the term CS as a cover term to refer to CM or alternations.

Labov (1971) defined CS as "the irregular mixture of two distinct systems". Hymes (as cited in Yeomoni, 2006) states that CS is "a common term for the alternative use of two or more languages, varieties of a language or even speech styles". For Sankoff and Poplack (1981), CS is defined as "the practice of selecting or alternating linguistic elements to contextualize talk in interactions. This contextualization may relate to local discourse practices, such as turn selection or various forms of bracketing, or it may make relevant information beyond the current exchange, including knowledge of society and diverse identities".

Poplack (1980) was the first author who distinguished between the term "code-switching" and "borrowing". She used the term "code-switching" to refer to all alternations into another language that do not conform to her three criteria, viz. phonological, morphological, and syntactic integration. On the other hand, Muysken (2007: 315) used the term "code-mixing" as an umbrella to cover all kinds of code-switching. He defined code mixing as "a way of speaking which shows evidence of the substantial amount of morpho-syntactic and/ or lexical material from at least two different languages". Genesee (1989: 162) defined language mixing as "the interactions between the bilingual child's developing language systems. Mixing has been used by other researchers to refer to the co-occurrences of elements from two or more languages in a single utterance. The mixed elements may be phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, phrasal or pragmatic".

Cantone (2007: xvii) investigated CS in bilingual children. He used the term CS to cover intrasentential switches, i.e., mixing within an utterance. He avoided using CS and CM differently. Instead, he used CS as a cover term because he was interested not in terminological differentiation as much as he was interested in the grammatical structure of CM and CS.

Restrictions on where CS can occur was investigated by Timm (1975), Gumperz (1976), Pfaff (1976, 1979), Lipsky (1977, 1978), Poplack (1979, 1980) Myers-Scotton et al. (1996), Bader (2000) and Cantone (2007), amongst others. Timm (1975) studied Spanish-English CS and reported four syntactic

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switching is unacceptable, pointing out that it does not occur between pronominal subjects and their corresponding finite verbs, between verbs and their pronominal objects, between finite verbs and their infinitive complements, and between negation elements and the verb negated.

After investigating CS in Spanish and English, Hindi and English and Slovenian and German, Gumperz (1976: 35) concluded that CS might be governed by "universal underlying constraints". Poplack (1980) and Sankoff and Poplack (1981) are considered two of the few pioneer scholars who proposed constraints on CS. Their works proposed the two well-known constraints, viz., *the free morpheme constraint* and *the equivalence constraint*. The free morpheme constraint states that "codes may be switched after any constituent in discourse provided that constituent is not a bound morpheme". The equivalence constraint states that "code-switches will tend to occur at points in discourse where juxtaposition of first language and second language elements does not violate a syntactic rule of either language, i.e., at points around which the surface structure of the two languages map onto each other". Cantone (2007:182) claimed that "the proposed constraints make wrong prediction about what is to be regarded as well-formed in code-switching". He assumed that "everything is possible in mixing two languages as long as the grammars of two lexicons involved are respected".

Bentahila and Davies (1983:301) examined the syntax of Arabic-French CS at intra-sentential level. They concluded that "Arabic-French CS is possible at all syntactic boundaries above the word level, though it is not generally permitted between word internal morpheme boundaries." Bader and Minnis (2000:399) investigated the syntactic CS in the speech of Arabic-English bilingual child in Jordan. His data revealed many syntactic CS features such as deleting the verb to be, several switches related to word order, inserting the Arabic conjunction 'و' between English words, and inserting the English conjunction "and" between Arabic words. Since the mother of the child was American, the data of the child exhibited extreme cases of CS such as prefixing the English negation prefix "un" with Arabic words, e.g., baaba un*rubT-u* "Dad, untie it".

3. Methodology
This section gives a brief account of the participants, and the procedures followed in data collection, processing, and analysis.

3.1 The participants
The participants of the current study were thirty typically developing Yemeni Arabic-English bilingual children (15 boys and 15 girls) ranging in age from four to fifteen years old. These bilingual children were living in Mysore - India at the time of data collection. These bilingual children belonged to twenty-one Yemeni families. They also belonged to many cities in Yemen, such as Sana'a, Aden, Taiz, Ibb, Al-Mahweet, Al Hodeida, Lahj, Amran, Dhamar, and Hajjah.

The participants were divided into three groups according to their ages: up to 5 years, from 6 to10 years, and from 11to15 years old. Their details are listed in the following table:

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Table 1: Details of the participants of this study

S.N.	Name	Age	Period of Exposure to English	Standard Level	Gender
1	Wail	4	1 year	LKG	Male
2	Eyad	4	1 year	LKG	Male
3	Ali	4	2 years	LKG	Male
4	Alena	4	2 years	LKG	Female
5	Elena	4	2 years	LKG	Female
6	Mayar	4	2 years	LKG	Female
7	Faris	5	1 year	LKG	Male
8	Ahmed	5	2 years	UKG	Male
9	Layan	5	2 years	UKG	Female
10	Seela	5	3 years	UKG	Female
Second Age Group: From 6 to 10 Years old					
11	Ameer	6	6 years	UKG	Male
12	Aseel	6	3 years	1st	Female
13	Abdulrahman	7	2 years	1st	Male
14	Ammar	7	1 years	UKG	Male
15	Raimas	7	3 years	2nd	Female
16	Amat Al-Rahman	7	4 years	3rd	Female
17	Shaima	7	2 years	UKG	Female
18	Wala	8	3 years	3rd	Female
19	Sulaiman	9	4 years	3th	Male
20	Salsabel	10	4 years	4th	Female
Third Age Group: From 11 to 15 Years old					
21	Yaseen	11	4 years	4th	Male
22	Hamas	11	3years	5th	Female
23	Shahd	11	6 years	6th	Female
24	Othman	12	2 years	7th	Male
25	Mohammed	12	3 years	7th	Male
26	Abdul Lateef	12	4 years	9th	Male
27	Maazin	13	3 years	8th	Male
28	Sundus	13	4 years	8th	Female
29	Laith	15	15 years	9th	Male
30	Adeel	15	4 years	9th	Female

3.2 Video recordings

Data was recorded using a High Definition Video camera with inbuilt high definition audio. The participants have been recorded for 60 hours: 30 hours in English and 30 hours in Arabic, with each participant being recorded for two hours: one hour in English and another hour in Arabic. During recording

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English session, the children were instructed not to speak Arabic. During recording Arabic, instructions not to speak English were given. Other methods of data collections were interviews and notetaking.

Participants' activities included free play such as hide and seek, control games, counting numbers, role-playing (students vs. teachers), and storytelling. They were describing and naming pictures in Arabic and English (electronic) books, chess games, questions game, TV games and puzzles such as star wars and jungle hunter, iPad electronic games such as Miami voice town, Roblox, mine craft story mode, swordigo, dream league soccer, and road racing. These games were used as stimuli for the participants to trigger mixing.

3.3 Transcription
All videotapes were transcribed selecting only the CM and CS in both English and Arabic sessions. All CM sentences were transcribed by the researcher. Thousands of English and Arabic sentences and hundreds of clauses and paragraphs were found in the data. Some CS sentences were transcribed for the qualitative analyses. Borrowing was excluded from the data since the study is concerned with CM and CS. All hesitations, noise, and intonations were eliminated since they were not related to the core objectives of this study. All Arabic words are cited in the International Phonetic Alphabet. English words are cited in their natural forms.

4. Data analysis
This section analyzes the syntactic CS as attested in the speech of our participants. In the following table, five main boundaries are listed and compared to the other findings reported in the literature.

Table 2: Main boundaries as compared to related literature

S.N.	Boundaries	Impossible according to	Possible according to	Produced by our participants
1-	Subject(pronoun)+V	Timm (1975), Gumperz (1976), Lipski (1977), Pfaff (1979)	Poplack (1980), Bentahila and Davies (1983), Bader (2000), Cantone (2007)	Seela, Ahmed, Ameer, Abdul-Rahman, Raimas, Sulaiman, Aseel, Adeel, Sundus
2-	Verb+object(pro)	Timm (1975), Gumperz (1976)	Poplack (1980), Bentahila & Davies (1983), Cantone (2007)	Wail, Seela, Ahmed, Layan, Shaima, Aseel, Laith, Sundus, Adeel, Abdullateef, Othman

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3-	Because +CP	Gumperz (1976)	Poplack (1980), Cantone (2007), Bentahila & Davies (1983)	Walaa, Laith
4-	Model/Aux +VP	Belazi et al. (1994), Timm (1976)	DisSciullo et al (1986), Polack (1980), Bentahila & Davies (1983), Cantone (2007)	Ahmed, Ameer, Mohammed
5-	Adj+N	Belazi et al. (1994)	Poplack (1981)	Sulaiman

In what follows, the main boundaries will be exemplified as seen in our data.

First: Subject + Verb
Several scholars, such as Timm (1979), Gumperz (1976) Lipski (1977) and Pfaff (1979) claimed that CS is impossible to occur between subject and verb. However, such claims were refuted by Poplack (1980), Bentahila and Davies (1983), Bader (2000), and Cantone (2007). Our data revealed that CS might occur between the subject (pronoun) and verb boundaries. For example,

(1)

a. **ʔana**: play card (Abdul-Rahman)

   I

'I play card'

b. the one shoes **falat**   **minnuh** (Sundus)

                dropped   from him

'The one shoe dropped out of him'

In Example (1.a), the participant started the utterance with Arabic first person singular pronoun /ʔanaː/ which means 'I', then he switched to English and completed the utterance. In Example (1.b), Sundus started the utterance with English noun phrase which consists of three words "the one shoes" (i.e., the one shoe), then she switched into Arabic. The verb and its complement are in Arabic. Examples (1.a and 1.b) illustrate that a switch can occur between subject and verb, and that the subject can be either in Arabic or English and the subject can consist of one or more than one words. Further, it shows that verb can be in English in as Example (1.a) or in Arabic as in Example (1.b).

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Second: Verb + Object (Pronoun)

According to Timm (1975) and Gumperz (1976), CS is disallowed between a verb and object boundaries. However, it has been reported to occur in such boundaries by Poplack (1980), Bentahila and Davies (1983), and Cantone (2007). CS in this boundary was also attested in our data. For instance,

(2)

a. He is going **ʔaddukka**:**n** (Seela)

the shop

'He is going to the shop.'

b. He buy **ʃaraba**:**t**   (Shaima)

socks

'He bought socks'

In Example (2.a), Seela switched to Arabic after the main verb. She dropped the preposition "to", and this is obviously an influence of colloquial Arabic language in which it is acceptable to say /hu: sa:jir ʔaddukka:n/ i.e. "he is going to the shop". In Example (2.b), Shaima meant "he bought socks", and she switched to Arabic after the verb "buy".

Third: Because + CP

Gumperz (1976) stated that CS is disallowed to occur between *because* and a complementizer phrase (CP). However, counterexamples were cited by Poplack (1980), Bentahila and Davies (1983) and Cantone (2007). Our data adds up to the counterexamples and shows that CS may occur in this boundary. For instance,

(3)

a. kunt   ʔafakkir   law za:dat   ʔalʔajja:m **liʔan-nuh**   very exciting (Laith)

I was   thinking   if   increased   the days   because-it   very exciting

'I was thinking if days increased because it was very exciting'

In Example (3.a) the participant switched to English after the word *liʔan-nuh* which means *because*. The specificity of Arabic has to be observed in the above example, as the word *liʔan* may or may not be followed by a continuous clitic.

Fourth: Modal/Auxiliary + VP

According to Timm (1976) and Belazi et al. (1994), CS is disallowed to occur between the modal verb and the main verb. On the other hand, counterexamples were reported by Poplack (1980), Bentahila and Davies (1983), Disciullo et al. (1986), and Cantone (2007). Our data adds to the counterexamples. For instance,

(4)

a. little, but he should **jitʕallamha**: bisurʕah   (Mohammed)

learn it   fast

'Little, but he should learn it fast.'

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b. duck is **jitbaʕu**: ʔummuhum (Sundus, 13 Years)
following mother-their
'The duck is following their mother.'

In Example (4.a), the modal verb is in English while the main verb is in Arabic. In Example (4.b), the participant started in English and switched to Arabic in the main verb. It is clear that the participant was influenced by her colloquial Arabic when, in some cases, plural verbs are used with singular subjects. Examples (4.a and 4.b) are instances of switching from English modal verbs to Arabic main verbs.

Fifth: Adjective + Noun (also Arabic word order in English)
Belazi et al. (1994) stated that CS was not allowed to occur between adjective and noun boundaries, despite the fact that Poplack (1981) had provided examples of such switching in this boundary. Our data lend support to Poplack (1981). For example,

(5)
a. huː **qawi**ː wind (Sulaiman)
it strong wind
'It is a strong wind'.

In the above example, Sulaiman was influenced by English in that he maintained the English word order of Adjective + Noun. According to Arabic rules, the above example should have been /huː wind qawiː/. In fact, structures such as Example (5.a) are also getting wider spread in colloquial Yemeni Arabic. For instance, phrases like /ðakiː wald/ 'a smart boy' are common nowadays.

Now, we turn to some other common features of syntactic CS of our participants. Such features are reported to be common among other bilinguals, too.

Sixth: Deletion of copula verb
Deletion of the English copula verbs is a prominent feature of Arabic-English bilinguals. This feature can also be witnessed in fluent bilinguals, even in the speech of adults. The main reason is that Arabic has no copula verbs and a transfer of Arabic over English takes place. Examples of deletion of English copula verbs as attested in the data of our participants include:
(6)
a. his hair big (Adeel)
'his hair is big.'

b. today happy day (Aseel)
'today is a happy day.'

In Example (6.a), Adeel dropped the English copula verb, and she should have said: "his hair is big." Similarly, Aseel deleted the English copula verb and the indefinite article, and she should have said:

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"today is a happy day." Deleting the indefinite article is also common in the speech of Yemeni Arabic-English bilingual children, too.

Seventh: Use of Arabic conjunctions between English words

This feature involves the use of Arabic conjunctions such as /wa/ 'and', /willa:/ 'or' between two English words. Examples of this feature include:

(7)
a. yellow **wa** green (Ali)
    and
'yellow and green.'

b. ʔakul xubz ʕala: egg   **wa** honey (Ameer)
  I eat   bread on egg and honey
   'I eat bread with egg and honey.'

c. weeks **willa**: days (Laith)
   weeks or days

Eighth: Use of Arabic vocative particle "ja" with English words

Arabic vocative particle is very frequent in the speech of our participants. English speakers may call someone by their names with rising or falling intonation patterns. In other situations, they use 'Oh' as in 'Oh John!'. In Arabic, however, using the vocative particle /ja:/ (يا) is more frequent than the use of intonation patterns. In our study, we observed some participants using Arabic vocative particle with English words. For example,

(8)
a ja: lock, ja: lock (Ameer)
'oh lock, oh lock'

b. ja: two, ja: two (Eyad)
'oh two, oh two'

In Example (8.a), Ameer was playing a mobile game, which had a gate. The gate was locked, and Ameer was trying to open the lock when he said /ja: lock, ja: lock/. In Example (8.b), Eyad was playing math blocks. He was searching for the block bearing number two when he said /ja: two, ja: two/.

Ninth: Repetition of equivalent

In this case, the participant is noticed uttering the equivalent of a given constituent which is present in the utterance. Examples include:

(9)
a. ʔaʃti: sˤawt sound (Seela)
  I-want sound sound
   'I want to open the sound.'

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   b. ʔakl wa ruga:d sleeping and eating (Yaseen)
    eating and sleeping
    'eating and sleeping'

  In Example (9.a) Seela produced the equivalent of /sˤawt/ which is *sound*. In Example (9.b), Yaseen repeated the semantic equivalent of the Arabic phrase /ʔakl wa ruga:d/ which is *sleeping and eating*. An exact copy of the equivalent should have been *eating and sleeping*.

Tenth: Use of Arabic demonstrative pronouns with English words

  This feature is prevalent in the speech of our participants. A sentence usually starts with an Arabic demonstrative pronoun, then a switch to English is immediately triggered. For instance,

   (10)
   a. ha:ða: girl (Wail)
    this girl
    'This is a girl.'

   b. ha:ða: fall down (Mayar)
    this fall down
     'This falls down.'

   c. hawla: happy (Abdul-Rahman)
    these happy
     'These are happy.'

  Notice how Wail and Abdul-Rahman dropped the English copula verbs in Examples (10.a) and (10.c) respectively. The participants were influenced by the structure of Arabic which does not have copula verbs. In Example (10.b), Mayar deleted the third person singular marker, and it is due to Arabic influence, too. It is also noted that English influenced Wail such that he does not distinguish between the demonstrative for masculine and feminine. He should have said "ha:ðihi girl."

Eleventh: Tag question in a different language

  In this feature, a question is produced in one language, and its respective tag is produced in a different language. Examples of this feature include:

   (11)
   a. twenty eggs, sˤaħ (Adeel)
        isn't it?
    'twenty eggs, is it?'

   b. he is always silly, sˤaħ (Ameer)
         isn't he?
    'He is always silly, isn't he?'

In the above example, the participants produced the questions in English and the tags in Arabic.

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Twelfth: Double subjects

In this feature, a sentence is produced with two subjects: each subject is in a different language. For instance,

(12)
a. huː he is silly (Ameer)
   he he is silly
   'he is silly.'

b. maazen   he know little bas (Mohammed)
   proper name   only
    'Maazen knows little only.'

In Example (12.a), Ameer started the sentence with Arabic third singular masculine pronoun (huː "he"), then he switched to English with repeating the pronoun "he". In Example (12.b), Mohammed was referring to Maazen, and then he repeated the subject in English too.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the syntactic code-switching in the speech of Yemeni Arabic-English typically developing bilingual children. It highlighted 12 features and boundaries on which code-switching occurred. This study revealed that Yemeni Arabic-English code-switching is not subject to the constraints proposed by Timm (1975), Gumperz (1976), Lipski (1977), and Pfaff (1979).

Some syntactic features were common in the speech of all the participants. These features are: 1) deletion of the English copula verb, 2) deletion of –ing morpheme of the present continuous tense, 3) repeating the equivalence and 4) using the Arabic demonstrative pronouns in the beginning of English sentences.

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