

Conversational Code-Switching between Arabic and Kurdish in Duhok City

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Abstract: *In Kurdistan of Iraq, the phenomena of code-switching (henceforth CS), the use of two more than two languages with the same conversation, happens most often between the two languages Arabic and Kurdish in the region of Kurdish inhabitant area. The present paper provides a sociolinguistics analysis of the CS phenomenon between Arabic and Kurdish in the northern city of Iraq Duhok as it is employed by Kurds speakers from a functional perspective. Data of the present study were gathered by using audio-recording of participant's conversation. The conversations of fifty-six bilinguals native speakers of the Kurdish language have been recorded and used for analyzing their speech for the purposes of this study. Realizing the implications of this study for future research and recognizing the effect of these results, it is crucial to have a basic understanding of the phenomenon of CS in general. Furthermore, this study provides a closer look at the functions of conversational CS that occurred between Arabic and Kurdish among Kurds bilingual speakers in specific.*

Keywords: code-switching, Kurds speakers, conversational CS, bilingual

1. Introduction

Since the publication of Weinreich's (1953) milestone "Language in Contact" a lot of attention has been paid to the various factors behind this interaction between languages. This seminal work motivated numerous linguists to embark on descriptive accounts of societies characterized by the use of more than one language.

Code-Switching, the use of two languages or more by bilinguals in the same discourse, has attracted the attention of researchers for the past three decades in various disciplines, including general linguistics (Milroy and Muysken, 1995), sociolinguistics (Blom and Gumperz, 1972), psycholinguistics (Myers-Scotton, 1993), and anthropology (Heller, 1988), to mention just a few. The focus of recent studies has tended to revolve around either syntactic structure of CS or the social norms of society in CS. CS has often been discussed and described in sociolinguistic studies, focusing on bilingual and multilingual speech communities because of the coexistence of two languages or two varieties of one language, each having its own social functions.

Two patterns of CS, namely situational and metaphorical CS was introduced by Blom and Gumperz (1972) in which the speaker switches languages to achieve a special communicative effect. Then they developed this concept and introduced another term "conversational CS" (Gumperz 1982) including functions such as quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, message qualification, and personalization vs. objectivization.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine CS between Kurdish and Arabic languages among Kurds in Duhok city, Iraq. The researcher investigates answers for the following questions:

1. In what context and with whom does Kurdish-Arabic CS most frequently occur?
2. What are the functions of CS?

This study is designed to show how bilingual Kurds resort to CS in their speech during their daily interactions. It seems that there has been no major and systematic study conducted on the use of CS between Kurdish and Arabic among Kurd speakers in Duhok. Thus, this study is the first of its kind to investigate CS between Kurdish and Arabic in Iraq.

It is hypothesized that Kurds in Duhok city - Iraq tend to switch language in a single conversation in order to serve a number of communicative functions enhanced by a number of socially induced factors motivations.

2. The Linguistic Situation in Iraq

Iraq is a multilingual and multiethnic country. There are a number of languages spoken in Iraq (as shown in Table 1), but Iraqi Arabic is by far the most widely spoken in the country. According to the 2005 constitution, the two official languages of Iraq are Arabic and Kurdish, the latter is the official language in regions with a Kurdish majority.

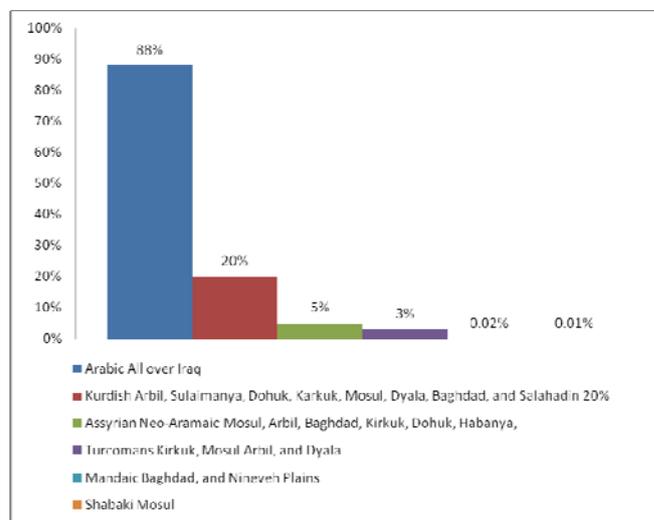


Figure 1: Languages spoken in Iraq (Ahmed1995, 35)

Fig.1. shows that various languages are spoken in Iraq, but Arabic is the most widely spoken. On the other hand, Kurdish as well as Arabic are the official languages in the formal setting in Kurdish regions such as Arbil, Sulaimanya, Duhok, and Kirkuk.

The most important contact between the two languages in Iraq dated back to the formation of Iraqi state. Arabic was the only official language in cities with Kurdish majorities including Arbil, Sulaimanya, Duhok and Kirkuk (as shown in Fig.2.)

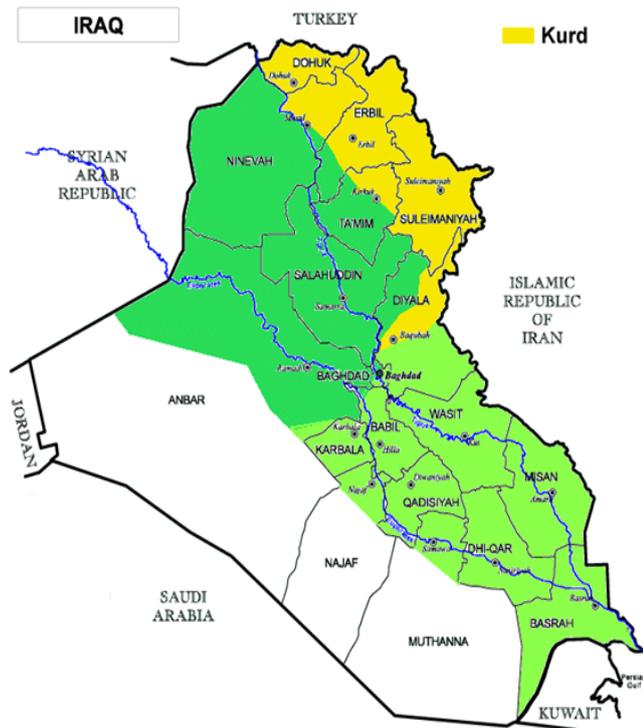


Figure 2: The map of Iraq. (cited from <http://www.iq23.com/page-47.html>)

The Kurdish language belongs to the Indo-European family of languages (Williams 1973). Actually there are two main dialects of Kurdish language and are members of the north-western subdivision of the Indo-Iranic language, Iranic branch. Therefore it is an independent language, having its own historical development, continuity, grammatical system and rich living vocabularies (Zaki 1961, 56). The Kurdish language was derived from the ancient "Median" language or "Proto-Kurdish" (Khorshid 1983, 13).

Kurdish has two main dialects, northern and central. The northern dialect, Northern Kurmanji also commonly referred to as Kurmanji (and sometimes Bahdini), is spoken in Eastern Turkey, the North-Eastern part of Syria, the North-Western part of Iraq, and the Northern part of Iran. The central dialect, called Sorani, Sorani is spoken mainly in the North-Eastern part of Iraq and Western part of Iran (Hassanpour 1992, 386). This study deals only with Kurmanji dialect (or Bahdini, as called in Duhok).

3. Conversational or Metaphorical Code-switching

The idea that speakers alternate languages for purposes other than just to respond to "appropriate changes in the speech situation" was suggested by Blom and Gumperz (1972). Both Ranamal (the local, informal dialect) and Bokmal (the formal dialect), according to Blom and Gumperz, were used interchangeably by the same speakers in the same interaction during business transaction between government officials and local citizens in Hemnesberget, a small fishing village in Norway. The participants not only were unaware that they switched, but continued to do so after their switches were pointed out to them and they had declared that they would not do it again. In order to account for the use of switches when there is no change in the situation, Blom and Gumperz introduced the notion of metaphorical CS, or the use of CS to achieve special effects. A typical example of metaphorical CS is the following exchange between a mother and her little daughter, which took place in front of a food market. The mother attempted to stop her daughter from opening and closing her little umbrella while she (the mother) was trying to carry on a conversation with a couple of friends she met on her way out of the market, the mother, who had been speaking English until then, switched to Portuguese. CS to Portuguese took place not only to convey anger, but also as an attempt on the mother's part to let her daughter know that she definitely meant what she said.

According to Gumperz (1982, 75-84), a specific language may be chosen to perform conversational functions such as:

1. Quotations or the difference between direct speech and reported speech.
2. Interjections, exclamation and sentence fillers such as discourse markers and tags;
3. Reiterations, or the emphasizing or clarification of a message.
4. Message Qualification, which refers to a topic that is introduced in one language but discussed in another;
5. Addressee Specification or the address as the recipient of a message, that is, CS to include the addressee in the conversation. In this case, the addressee is usually a person who has not been part of the conversation because he/she has been either sitting apart or talking to someone else.
6. Personalization vs. Objectivization which refers to the personal involvement or distancing of the speaker from what is being talked about (Gumperz, 1982, 75-84).

The conversational functions CS that were proposed by Gumperz (1982) will be discussed and tested to show whether Kurd speakers engaged in conversational code-switching or not.

In sociolinguistics, code-mixing and code-switching are terms for language and particularly for verbal communication that describe, to differing degrees, at least two languages merged in dissimilar manners. Tom McArthur (1991) refers to *code* as "a language or a variety or style of a language". In this regard McArthur's point of view is that the term *code-mixing* highlights hybridization, and the term *code-switching* stresses on the movement from

one language to another. At the same time he sustains that "mixing and switching probably occur to some extent in the speech of all bilinguals, therefore there is a sense in which a person capable of using two languages, A and B, has three systems available for use: A, B, and C (a range of hybrid forms that can be used with comparable bilinguals but not with monolingual speakers of A or B)".

In this paper we would like to follow Holmes' (1992) view of preferring the term "switching" rather than "mixing" as the latter suggests that "the speaker is mixing up codes indiscriminately or perhaps because of incompetence, whereas the switches are very well motivated in relation to the symbolic or social meaning of the two codes." (Holmes, 1992: 50)*

(*See also Saville-Troike, 2003:48, for more precise definitions of related terms, such as, code-switching, style-shifting, code-alternatives and code.)

Since the foundation of Iraqi state, both Arabic and Kurdish are the two official languages of Iraq. This stable contact between Arabic and Kurdish language results in the spread of CS among Kurd bilinguals in Iraq. This study aim at investigating the occurrence of switching from Kurdish to Arabic.

4. Data Collection

The data for this research were collected by audio-recording participants' conversations. It took place in various locations, including friends' homes, participants' homes, mosque, university facilities, parks, and medical centres. The topics of conversation were general and varied and covered such areas as the education, school issues, religion, technology, family life and problems, sports, politics and health issues.

Each example is preceded by a brief introduction to the context, and the location where the recording was made. Information regarding gender, age and role of the persons in relation to the other participants in the conversation is provided. The author accompanied the participants in universities, schools, work, medical centres, and parks. Total of fifty-six native speakers of the Kurdish language (forty-seven males and nine females) voluntarily participated in this study and most of them spoke Arabic as a second language. As a result, over 31 conversations have been recorded.

5. Findings and Discussion

According to Gumperz (1982), a specific language may be chosen to perform conversational functions. In conversational CS, speakers switch languages in order to evoke a different mood or change their footing with respect to other speakers. This type of CS has several subtypes, devised according to the purpose for which languages are alternated. These are: quotation, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, qualification, and personalization and objectivization (Gumperz, 1982, 75-84). All of these functions were found in the recorded data of the Kurds. The presence of each of these functions is considered below.

5.1. Quotation

According to Gumperz (1982), switching codes may distinguish a direct quotation from reported speech. This means that the CS often occurs when the language of the speaker reporting a speech is different to the one in which the original utterance was made

As a result, the sentence is more clear and the words in bold below are unnecessary

(1), Nasrollah, 37 years old telling his friends (Radhwan, Omer, and Mohamed) about the approval of the Iraqi parliament of the law of the elections.

Example (1):

Nasrollah: pərlama:ni: berjja:r da ku həlbeža:rtin na hena
(parliament decision issue to elections not
ta?ji:l krin.. kut **?ijra:?** **al?intixaba:t fi:**
delay said perform the-elections in
maww9ediha al moHadda:d
appointment the specific)

"The parliament decided that there is no delay of the appointment of elections."

In this example the speaker is engaged in CS on what the parliament decided when he used the Arabic sentence "**?ijra:?** **al-?intixaba:t fi: maww9ediha al-moHadda:d**". This indicates that CS serves the function of reporting the direct speech of what the parliament decided in Arabic.

5.2. Addressee specification

Gumperz' (1982) notion of CS serves to include certain hearers and exclude others. CS is sometimes used by the Kurds speakers to serve the specific function of including or excluding the hearer from a portion of the conversation.

In example (2) below, the conversation took place at Duhok university café. The employees Shireen, Amena, Khalat, Hussien and Hamid, all were talking about the new instructions of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research about the master and doctorate programs. Hamid switched into Arabic to direct his speech to Shreen.

Example (2):

Hamid: [direct his speech to all participants] berjja:rit ni: jet
(decisions new are
dərçu:j le wəzarəte.
issued in ministry)
"The ministry issued new decisions."

[direct his speech to Shreen only] **Haşsa:l ti qubo:l ?**
(get you acceptance)
"Did you get the acceptance?"

Shireen: **la walla:h ba9ad.**
(no swear not yet)

“No, not yet.”

Hamid: [directing to other participant] **walla:h** ?əv sa:lə zu:r

(swear this year many

qota:bjah xo ?ama:dəkkri: ko ma:stəre
bexi:nen.

students themselves ready to master study)

“Many students get ready to join the master program this year.”

Amena: bəle wəja, bəs zu:r zaHmata

(Yes right but too difficult)

“Yes that’s right, but it is too difficult”

Khalat: sa:l bu: sa:lle zaHmatira

(Year after year more difficult)

“It became more difficult year after year.”

Hussien: wəja çu:nkə qota:bi: zorin

(Right because students many)

“That is right, because there are many students.”

In the above mentioned example, Hamid directs his speech only to Shreen asking her whether she got an acceptance or not. Thus, Hamid excludes others from the conversation and only addresses Shreen.

5.3. Interjections

Interjections serve to mark sentence fillers (Gumperz, 1982). Interjections in the form of CS have been found to be a frequent occurrence in the speech of Kurds speakers. They are also called injections or sentence fillers such as tags and discourse markers. These are equivalent to Poplack’s (1988) tag switches. Below is an example illustrating how Kurds speakers use interjections.

In example below two friends, Shemal and Ahmed talking about the joining to the master program.

Example (3):

Shemal: men je xo ?ama:dəkkri: bo xa:nddina ma:stər.

(I am ready to study master)

“I am ready to join the Master program”

Ahmed: **walla:h** meniš je xa:ndi:.

(oath me too study)

“I am ready too”

Shemal: **in ša: alla:h** de hejja wargertin

(May God to have accepted)

“May God help you to have acceptance”

Interjections such as **ma: ša: alla:h**, **walla:h**, **alHamdu lilla:h**, **je9ni**, **assalamu 9aleikum**, **in ša: alla:h** (oh my God, I swear, thanks for God, I mean, Peace be upon you, God willing) uttered frequently in the speech of Kurds.

5.4. Reiteration

Reiteration occurs when a speaker repeats exactly what he says in another language (when he switches or shifts to the second language) to clarify what is said or to emphasize his point. The example below illustrates this type of CS.

Example (4), the university instructor is talking about the new instructions issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research about the scholarship funds:

Example (4):

Instructor: berjja:ra wəza:rəte ko le həjvva çar beta da:n,

(decision ministry to in month four granted
?o həjvvit çu:ji: na dən, **je9ni lajjsa bi:9ar raj9i:**

And months past not grant, means not retroactive)

“The ministry decided that the grant will be in April, not in retroactive.”

Here, the university instructor first used “not in a retroactive” in Kurdish, and then repeated it in Arabic. What motivate the speaker to repeat the message in Arabic is that Kurdish loses the exact meaning of the Arabic expression **lajjsa bi: 9ar raj9i:** “not in a retroactive”. Therefore, the speaker’s reiterates CS to clarify and to deliver the exact meaning of the message. The researcher found that this function of CS is in support of what Kanakri (1988), McClure and McClure (1988), and Sebba and Wootton (1998) found in their studies that CS function implies repeating the same idea in more than one variety or language.

By analyzing the data, the researcher also found another speaker reiterating his message by switching to Arabic for the purpose of demand, as shown in the example mentioned below.

Example (5) the conversation took place between Tahir 33 years old, and his younger brother Jameel 21 years old.

Example (5):

Tahir: wa:n teššta bi:na da **megi:ne** vəgəjin
(those things bring to machine open)

“Bring those things to open the machine”

Jameel: çe

“What”

Tahir: **ji:b el 9idda ma:l megi:na**

(bring the tools of machine)

“Bring the machine’s tools”

In the first line of the above mentioned example, Tahir did not receive a clear response to his request. Therefore, he switched from Kurdish to Arabic when he said (**ji:b el-9ida ma:l megi:na**) (**Bring the machine’s tools**). The main goal that urged Tahir to switch into Arabic was to make his brother pay more attention to his request. As we noticed from the above examples the speakers switch from one language to the another language and words are said in one language and repeated in another to reiterate a certain message. Gumperz (1982) maintained this idea by saying that a Puerto Rican mother who switches between Spanish and English is to emphasize her message.

5.5. Message qualification

When speakers code switch for message qualification, the main content is expressed in one language, while additional explanation or detail is given in another.

Example (6), was a conversation between two friends, Samir who is 34 years old and Haval who is 31 years old. They were talking about a football match.

Example (6)

Samir: *nokə beršilona ja ?ikejjah*

(Now Barcelona is first)

“Barcelona is the first now.”

Haval: *beršilona aqwa: fari:q. ?əv ti:pə le xer ti:pen*

(Barcelon strongest team. This team is all teams

esspani: zi:ra:k tera ?o hər ?o de fajjdəbi:t.

spanish best and it will win)

“Barcelona is the best. This team is better than all other Spanish teams and it will win.”

Above Haval first used Arabic when he said (**beršilona aqwa: fari:q**) (**Barcelona is the strongest team**), and then he gave an additional explanation when he switched to Kurdish.

Another example of code-switching of message qualification was found in the bulk of the current data. The following example is an illustration of this point. Example (7) describes the speech of a contractor, Khalil, in his sixties talking to his friend about a construction project.

Example (7)

Khalil: *walla:h mašro:9 fašil. heštta çe pa:rə ?o*

(swear project bad, till yet no money and

çeh ?o wa:xtiš dijjar nəgrtja

place and date specify not)

“[swear] it is a bad project, until now they did not specify the funding, the started date, and the location of the project”

Khalil first used Arabic when he said *wallah mašro:9 fašil* (I swear it is a bad project), to give a general background of the project. Then he switched to Kurdish to indicate that he could supplement more information about the project.

5.2 Personalization vs. Objectivization

In Gumperz' typology, speakers may code switch in order to make their message more personal or more objective. By switching languages, speakers can express their emotional involvement with the content and their interlocutors or they can distance themselves from the subject matter and other speakers. Such functional use of CS was present in the current data. The researcher considers instances of greetings and praises are analogous to the personalization and objectification that Gumperz identifies. From the present data it is apparent that Kurds sometimes use Arabic for the social functions of greeting and praising.

Consider the following example which expresses greeting. In example (8) Khaled in his early thirties visits his friend Sardar in his early thirties.

Example (8)

Khaled: *çəwni: ba:ši:*

“how are you”

Sardar: *ahla:n wasahla:n, to le ki:re bu:j ?əm kəla:k jel tə xari:bu:j*

(wellcome you where we too are you miss)

“Welcome, where have you been? We really miss you”

Here, Sardar used the Arabic expression (**ahla:n wasahla:n**) (welcome) it is the typical greeting used by hosts or hostesses to express their welcome.

Kurds also engage in this type of CS in order to praise others. The speaker switched into Arabic to express one's favorable judgment, since some Arabic terms do not have equivalent expressions in Kurdish or they might be unknown to the speakers of Kurdish. The majority of praise in this data set consisted of short comments in Arabic; it may be one or two words.

In example (9) below, a grandmother, 67 years old, went on a visit to her daughter who was abroad for 7 years. When her granddaughter came in, she immediately kissed her grandmother's hand.

Example (9)

Grandmother: *?əva çənt ?axla:qke çawa:ne tə həj*

(This how behavior is good you have)

“What a good behaviour you have?”

In example (9), the Grandmother switched to Arabic when she used (**?axla:q**) (**behaviors**) to praise her Granddaughter. The Grandmother used it because she was so surprised of her Granddaughter's good behavior.

In sum, the conversational functions of CS that were proposed by Gumperz (1982) found in the present study.

6. Conclusion

This study shed light on conversational functions of code-switching between Kurdish and Arabic among Kurds speakers in Duhok city. As a result of the analysis of gathered recordings, the main six conversational functions of code switching identified by Gumperz (1982) were found.

Conversational code-switching was used by Kurds in their conversation to serve a number of discourse functions, such as, quotations, interjections, addressee specification, reiteration, message qualification, and personalization versus objectivization (Gumperz, 1982).

Kurds resorted to Arabic to highlight quotations; that is the speaker recalls a speech report directly or indirectly, not necessarily in the language used by the person quoted. Gumperz (1982, 75) noted “in many instances the code switched passages are clearly identifiable either as direct quotations or as reported speech”. They also switched to Arabic to reiterate or emphasize what has already been said. Frequently a message in one code is repeated in the other

code, either literarily or in somewhat modified form (Gumperz, 1982, 78).

Along the same line, the data showed that Kurds speakers switched to serve the discourse function of message qualification in order to give additional explanation or details in another language. Interjections used by Kurds speakers to serve as sentence fillers. In addition, switching languages by speakers served as addressee specification to exclude other from the portion of the conversation. Finally, Kurds speakers switch to express their emotional involvement with the content and their interlocutors.

In sum, the sociolinguistic approach of Conversational functions of code-switching (Gumperz, 1982) was useful in analyzing the data of this study.

Future researches and studies in this field highly required because according to my knowledge this is the first case of study of Kurdish-Arabic CS conducted among Kurds in Dohuk city, Iraq. Results of the study suggest some similar characteristics of Kurdish-Arabic CS. It is highly recommended that similar CS research can be embarked on by other researchers to investigate the following topics:

- 1) Structural (morphological, syntactic) analysis on the speech of Kurds.
- 2) Linguistic constraints on the speech of Kurds.
- 3) CS among bilinguals Kurds in Mosul and Kirkuk cities, due to the huge existence of Kurds.

Future studies will be valuable if it focus on the motivations behind using this phenomena among the educated, and also the grammatical aspects of CS. It is also recommended for future studies to

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