The phenomenon of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing as Practiced among Faculty Members in a Saudi University

Abdulkhaleq A. Al-Qahtani, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract
This is an exploratory investigation of the phenomenon of code mixing/switching as practiced in the College of Languages and Translation at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. The researcher has been observing how faculty members use this technique among themselves and with their students despite the fact that they are all very fluent in English. 18 faculty members (English Lecturers and professors) from five different cultures participate in this study. The results show that they use the technique for many different reasons. People from different cultures hold slightly different views about the topic. However, despite all the differences, they all contend that mixing and switching is a communicative and social necessity that perform certain tasks without which communication competence would suffer.

Keywords: bilingualism; code mixing/switching; cross-cultural communication; multilingualism; Second Language Acquisition; sociolinguistics; TESL/TEFL

1. Introduction

Code mixing/switching is a research area that is gaining momentum over the past couple of decades (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Scholars in the field attempted to define this phenomenon. Wardhaugh (2006) attests that language is only one type of code, which could encompass style, dialect or any other system used for communication. As for mixing and/or switching many researchers in the field identified the two terms as different phenomena (Muysken, 2000). Poplack (2001) identified three types of code switching: tag, inter-sentential, and intra-sentential switching. However, other scholars see both phenomena as one (e.g. Clyne, 2000). For the purpose of this study, no distinction is made between the two terms.

As for the various functions and uses of the phenomenon of code mixing/switching a lot of research has been probing the question of why would people employ such a strategy. Moyo, T. (1996) argued that the people code switch more when they are competent users of at least two languages drawing on the phenomenon as practiced in South Africa. Other researchers thought it is used as gap fillers to ease communication or to sound cool (Sumarsih, et al. 2014).

Thus, the main impetus is to discover the various possible explanations of why people of all ages and in many different situations and contexts would resort to such technique. Reyes (2004) reports children using it for practical reasons, namely language deficiency. Children would switch to the mother tongue when they could not cope with the target language. Further, people in the educational context would utilize the technique for similar purposes (Bista, 2010; Skiba 1997). Some people would use it to show off modernity and sophistication. In most of the related literature, the phenomenon of code mixing/switching has been treated in the context of language contact in bilingual or even in multilingual communities. Very little research, if any, has treated the phenomenon in the workplace in a third country with its own dominant language that is associated with power, religious pride (Arabic). Thus, the present study is aiming to fill part of this gap.

2. The setting (context)

The College of Languages and Translation at King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia is a unique place where Code Switching and Mixing is widely used among its 122 faculty members in the Department of English and the English Language Center. The faculty population consists of many nationalities including Arabs, Pakistanis, Bengalis, Indians, Romanians, Americans, and South Africans. All of them have colleagues from their respective
mother tongues. They are engaged in academic tasks including various committees and councils. In fact, they form teams from different language and cultural backgrounds. In a single team, for instance, one would meet an American, an Indian/Pakistani, a South African and/or an Arab. Interestingly, most of them are multi-linguals or at least bilinguals with English as the common language among them.

The researcher has been observing how different faculty members use code switching/mixing as a strategy in their communication. The context is unique as these colleagues are considered a community in their own right. However, this community is linguistically and culturally diverse. Further, it is situated in a larger community of the host country, Saudi Arabia, where Arabic is the dominant language and the natives are very well attached to it. Thus, members of the college, particularly non-Arabs, find themselves in a situation where they had to teach English and at the same time deal with colleagues from all corners of the world. The present paper reports on how these colleagues perceive, use, and manipulate code mixing/switching technique for their own purposes.

3. Procedure and results

The researcher developed interview questions and were given to the language groups represented in the English department. The data was collected in two phases. The first phase was through informal chat with each possible participant in which the participants were oriented to the topic as to definitions and purpose of the present study. Then, they were intrigued to respond to the formal interview questions, which is the second phase. The original interview questions were ten but they were subsumed under four major areas.

The first area inquires about the participants' general attitude about code mixing/switching (general attitude). The second asks about the pros and cons of the phenomenon (pros and cons). The third investigates the frequency of use in three different contexts: classroom, social gatherings, and with colleagues in the workplace (frequency of use in three contexts). The last area asks if they would want to say anything else about the topic in case it was not covered in their answers (additional input).

The researcher managed to get 18 responses by participants from five different language backgrounds: Arabic, Bangla, English, Romanian, and Urdu. All of the participants are lecturers and professors of English in the English department. The results are listed below in alphabetical order in each domain of the four mentioned above:

1. Arabic native speakers: four participants from this language group. They code-mix and switch between English and Arabic and at times mix with Urdu as three of the four participants earned their PhDs from northern India and they had a working knowledge of Urdu. The results in the four domains are as follow:

   General attitude:
   The four Arabs describe the phenomenon of code switching/mixing as helpful and common among bilinguals. One of the four asserts that despite the usefulness of the technique he does not think positively about it because it is an insult to the mother tongue if used among same language speakers like Arabs among themselves, etc. Thus, three of the Arab participants think positively and one negatively about the phenomenon.

   Pros and cons:
   Pros: the four Arabs agree that code switching/mixing is helpful in educational and conversational situations when a speaker lacks a word or a phrase in one language and he/she would furnish it in the other language. Also it helps people recognize the special abilities of one person being fluent in a given language. In addition, it promotes social interaction among the speakers as it supplies a lively topic of shared interest particularly in language departments as our own where people usually are curious about languages and language learning.
   Cons: it could be an insult to the native language when code switching/mixing with a different language if used among same language speakers. It could demotivate EFL learners from
seeking the exact needed words in the target language. It could be a needless way of showing off knowledge of a different language.

**Frequency and purpose of use in three contexts:**

In the classroom: the four participants agree that they sometimes code change to Arabic with their students in situations where it is too difficult for them to get the message across. On a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is never and 10 is always, two of them say 5; one says 3 and the other admits using it but refused to give a certain number as he thinks that the phenomenon is changeable and dependent on many varying factors. They also admit that they code switch rather than code mix because Arabic is the mother tongue of both: the teacher and the students. Thus, the purpose of usage is instructional in the first place.

In social gatherings: the colleagues settle to the contention that code mixing/switching is a useful tool to show in-group membership particularly when speaking with other Arab colleagues from the department. Three of them code mix with Urdu speakers for the same purpose. The fourth added that he would never code switch in the presence of strangers to avoid being looked at as a showoff.

In the workplace: they contend that they always use code change, and they mainly use it to reinforce solidarity when dealing with non-Arabs and sometimes to learn about other languages particularly Urdu. Sometimes they resort to the technique to seek more clarity particularly when they switch to English being professors of English by trade.

**Additional input**

Two of the four suggested further readings and research feedback while one of the remaining two argues that globalization necessitates code-mixing/switching because it rids the world from the one language hegemony (English) and brings about linguistic pluralism. While the other participant adds that the phenomenon occurs among bilinguals naturally and could be due to cognitive learning processes.

2. Bangla native speakers: three Bangla speakers respond to the questions. They report that they code switch/mix with Arabic, English, and sometimes Hindi/Urdu. One of them denies that he mixes with Hindi or Urdu, as he doesn’t know them, while the other two admit that they mix with both languages because they are close to Bangla. The results in the four domains are as follow:

**General attitude:**

The three Bangla speakers seem to be descriptive and reluctant to show any specific attitude about this particular phenomenon. They all state that it is a fact and an emerging trend in the world as people from all walks of life come to contact and pressured to communicate. It could be discerned from their answers that switching and mixing are just strategies to make up for linguistic incompetency in a given language.

**Pros and cons:**

Pros: the three agree that switching and mixing help people from different languages to communicate more effectively. They are also time saving and encourage solidarity among members of certain speech communities.

Cons: too much use of the technique would hinder attaining more proficiency in the context of language learning. It would be also problematic when a speaker is used to it and becomes inadequate in maintaining the flow of speech in a given language particularly in formal speeches.

**Frequency and purpose of use in three contexts:**

In the classroom: the three deny overusing the technique. The more experienced one of the three admits using it at level 4 on the scale from 1-10 (explained above). The other one with...
lesser experience admits using mixing rather than switching to save class time and it would be only isolated words to be used to the minimal. The third and the least experienced of the three says that he almost never use mixing with his students except for fun and rarely words for some abstract ideas.

In social gatherings: they agree that they use switching between Bangla and English when among educated Bangla speakers, but they would stick to Bangla in the presence of "laymen" Bangla speakers. They would also mix with Arabic when interacting with Arab colleagues for fun or for knowing a better word in Arabic instead of an English one. Also two of them would code mix with Hindi & Urdu speaking colleagues despite the fact that English is the common language. One of them describes this as an instinctive trait to incite the closeness of these two languages and their cultures to Bangla.

In the workplace: they would code mix with Arabic when interacting with Arab colleagues but they would avoid it with their students, as they perceive using it with students as a hindrance of language learning. They would also avoid using the whole technique when they are dealing with English native speaking colleagues.

Additional input
The three respondents decide that code mixing/switching is becoming a known trend in communication. However, it is still viewed by many as a characteristic of incompetency in a given language. Thus, code mixing/switching could have advantages and disadvantages depending on how it is used.

3. English native speakers: four participants from this group respond to the questions. Two South Africans and two Americans. Despite the fact that all of them were native speakers of English but they responded differently. The two South Africans (SA) came from multilingual country while the other two came from a monolingual country, the USA (monolingual here means only one dominant language).

General attitude:
The two South Africans contend that code mixing/switching is a perfectly natural and healthy phenomenon because of living in a multilingual country. The two Americans thought of the phenomenon as lack of linguistic competence. One of them sees code switching "a little pretentious". Thus, the two Americans hold negative attitude and the South Africans a positive one.

Pros and cons:
Pros: it improves fluency in another language and leads to effective communication. It is also easy and convenient in many situations.
Cons: it could lead to misunderstanding when one fails to use the correct/suitable word in the other language. It shows lack of linguistic competence and might encourage laziness to find the correct word in the target language.

Frequency and purpose of use in three contexts:
In the classroom: they claim to have very little knowledge of Arabic and therefore could not switch but they would mix by using very few words in Arabic.
In social gathering: In South Africa, the two colleagues admit to switching with Afrikaans all the time, as they are both fluent in that language. The two other colleagues say that they would mix a little in Arabic to promote social interaction.
In the workplace: the Americans say they do not code mix/switch, the researcher attests to their statement. The South Africans admit doing it for better communication and for displaying linguistic competence in another language.
**Additional input**

One of the South Africans enticed Nelson Mandela's words as he said, "When you speak to a man in a language he understands it goes to his head, but when you speak to him in his language it goes to his heart". The colleague thinks that switching and mixing could help reaching out to people's hearts from different cultures. Both colleagues do not see a stigma attached to the phenomenon but rather a natural process.

4. Romanian native speakers: three Romanians participated in this study. The general observation about this particular group is that they use switching/mixing for more sociolinguistic reasons rather than mere expressivity or clarity. They show inextricable interest in the process. They, for example, did not really capitalize on the axiomatic function of the phenomenon in which switching/mixing would intercede to fill in with a better/more precise word, phrase or even sentence in another language. They, instead, think of how to code switch/mix to leave a given impression on the interlocutor.

**General attitude:**
The three participants contend that switching/mixing is a normal phenomenon. They also think that it could reflect a desire to showoff knowledge, include others or exclude them depending on purpose and situation. Generally, the three colleagues consider mixing/switching a pragmatic tool to convey certain messages either positive or negative. They do not believe it indicates a linguistic glitch.

**Pros and cons:**
Pros: the three decide that mixing/switching generates friendly atmosphere; switchers find common grounds with interlocutors. It would mark open-mindedness and flexibility on the part of switchers.
Cons: the three colleagues assert that positive use of this technique could change into negative if used inappropriately, in the wrong time and place, or even with the wrong people. Misunderstanding could always happen.

**Frequency and purpose of use in three contexts:**
In the classroom: they say that they do not code-switch with their Arabian students due to lack of knowledge of Arabic and they would love to be able to strike a close rapport with their students by using this technique. They admit to using few expressions in Arabic to maintain closeness to their students.
In social gatherings: the main purpose of code mixing/switching is to boast polite interaction, gain approval, create pleasant atmosphere, and perhaps attain admiration of the interlocutors.
In the workplace: they say that they mix with Arabic mainly to demonstrate their appreciation of the language and the culture of the country in which they are living.

**Additional input:**
One of the three thought that code-switching could happen unconsciously and the person may not have a known reason for it except that he/she perhaps wants to impress his/her interlocutor.
The other colleague add that code-switching could be a useful catalyst for language learning as they feel pressured to learn Arabic to cope with their surrounding environment.

5. Urdu native speakers: four Urdu native speakers took part in this investigation. They mainly code mix, switch with Arabic, and of course English. Interestingly, Speakers from this group tend not to code mix or switch with languages like Hindi and Bangla while speakers of these languages switch and mix with Urdu.
**General attitude:**
The four speakers contend that switching/mixing is a helpful technique. However, the three of them argue that this technique could be dangerous in EFL situation. Thus, generally this group holds a negative attitude towards the phenomenon in education. At the same time, they would think positively about it in other social contexts.

**Pros and cons:**
Pros: the four colleagues admit that switching/mixing is a convenient technique that eases communication. The messages are clearer and to the exact point. When switching back to Urdu from English it is relaxing and reassuring of ones' own identity.
Cons: it could signify lack of linguistic competence in more formal situations. In addition, many misunderstandings could occur when one speaker uses inaccurate words.

**Frequency and purpose of use in three contexts:**
In the classroom: switching/mixing in the class was given 3-4 on the 10 scale (described above). They state that they use it only when a communication gap occurs. They intentionally avoid unnecessary use of it.
In social gatherings: If they were among Urdu native speakers who are also fluent English users, they would switch a little to English (80% Urdu-20% English. But when they are in multilingual gathering in Saudi Arabia (in English in this case is the lingua franca) with Arab friends, they would mix as much Arabic with English as they possibly could particularly if the Arab friends were not that fluent in English. The stated purposes for doing so are first, it is considered a compliment to Arabs; second, it could be a topic and a means to learn more Arabic; and third; it of course reinforces their Muslim identity to identify with their Arab fellow Muslims.
In the workplace: the four colleagues would code mix/switch with Arabic as they speak English for showing solidarity and from English to Urdu among themselves for identity and ease of use purposes.

**Additional input:**
They thought of the topic as interesting but warn against its overuse in the classroom or with students regardless of the purpose be it social or instructional. They also recognize the fact that this phenomenon is an emerging trend in the world as various people from different linguistic backgrounds come together for a whole range of reasons.

4. **Discussion and conclusion**
The five language groups in this study use code mixing/switching as a strategy for communication. Some of them admit to mixing and that because of lack of competence in the other language as switching requires a higher degree of bilingualism. The rest of the participants admit to using both techniques. As the purpose of this investigation does not distinguish between the two strategies, both were considered one. Table 1 summarizes the main points found.

The participants generally hold a positive attitude towards the phenomenon. Even those who have some reservations agree that it is an accepted world fact. Except for the Romanian colleagues, all of the others agree to its practical convenience in sheer communication i.e. clarity, expressivity, and exact lexicon. The Romanians, however, think it is not necessarily lack of competence in one language, though it is possible, but rather it is used for social functions i.e. gaining approval, impressing the interlocutors, complimenting the other, etc. The Romanian group also do not see a problem in mixing and switching with their students in their L1 because, they contend, the strategy performs pragmatic functions that cannot be accomplished by using the L2 only. On the other hand, the other four language groups voiced their disapproval of switching to their students' L1 in the class or anywhere else because, as they say, it is not healthy for L2 learning despite its practicality.
The three contexts, as shown in table one, attest to the fact that people practice code mixing/switching despite their underlying attitudes, positive or negative. Except for the Arab group, all of the other colleagues do not use code mixing/switching with their students in their classrooms. The obvious reason, to which they attest, is that they do not possess the sufficient command of Arabic. The Romanian colleagues are willing to use switching with their students for social reasons but definitely not for instructional ones. The South African colleagues do not have a problem with mixing or even switching to Arabic with their students so long as it does not really affect the L2 instruction, had they had the sufficient command of Arabic. The other three groups think of the technique, as a possible threat to the learning process of their students, and therefore, ideally, should be avoided.

As for the other two contexts, almost everyone agree that mixing and switching in social gatherings and in the workplace outside the classroom serve a host of sociolinguistic purposes. They all agree that it promotes social interaction; compliments other members of other cultures; signifies in-group membership, be it professional, cultural or even religious group. They extend their views to go beyond our department boundaries and provide that code mixing/switching is gaining more grounds around the world; they confirm that it characterizes the world communication nowadays.

In conclusion, code mixing/switching is a trend that is gaining momentum in the field (sociolinguistics). As the world is shrinking by the hour due to the ever-expanding revolution in communication, many people and cultures come in contact, and consequently would resort to this technique for numerous purposes some of which are mentioned in this paper. As the case in the College of Languages and Translation where people who share the same profession but came from different cultures and language backgrounds make use of code mixing/switching, other situations would warrant, I suspect, similar results. Further research is definitely needed to unveil many other facets of this phenomenon.

### Table 1: summary of the results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Pros and cons</th>
<th>Additional input</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>More effective communication; demotivating to L2 learning</td>
<td>In classroom: commonly used. Social gatherings: used for solidarity and in-group membership. In workplace: a means to know other languages, compliment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangla</td>
<td>Descriptive/indifferent</td>
<td>Helpful in communication; not good for L2 acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>South Africans (SA): positive; Americans: negative</td>
<td>Effective communication, promotes social interaction; linguistic incompetence, offense in case of euphemism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>In class: rarely used</td>
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<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanians</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>In social gatherings: show friendliness, gain approval and admiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creates friendly atmosphere, marks open mindedness; misunderstanding</td>
<td>In the workplace: to show appreciation of the host culture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in class: rarely used</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In social gatherings: show friendliness, gain approval and admiration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In the workplace: to show appreciation of the host culture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>Positive socially; negative in education</td>
<td>In class: rarely used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easier communication and relaxing when falling back to mother tongue; indicates incompetence, bad for L2 learning</td>
<td>In social gatherings: identify with fellow Muslims when mixing with Arabic, compliment. Workplace: ease of use and a means to show solidarity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References**


