Aspects of Arabic/French Code-switching among Women in an Algerian Context

✍ **Belhadj-Tahar Kamila**
kamila.belhadjtahar@univ-tlemcen.dz
University of Tlemcen, Algeria

جوانب التناوب اللغوي عربية/فرنسية بين النساء في سياق جزائري

✍ بلحاج طاهر كاملة
kamila.belhadjtahar@univ-tlemcen.dz
جامعة تلمسان/ الجزائر

ABSTRACT:

Code-switching is a complex process where speakers alternate between two or more languages for various reasons. Algeria is a multilingual country where Arabic, Berber, and French coexist. As a result of this language contact, many Algerians code-switch between these languages to achieve different communicative purposes. This paper attempts to shed some light on the type of code-switching the most used and functions among female speakers in Tlemcen speech community. Data are collected through a questionnaire and naturally occurring conversations. Results show that intra-sentential is the most used type of CS among women. Besides, findings reveal that three functions are identified. Those functions are to show solidarity, to show education and social status and to change the topic.

Keywords: Bi/multilingualism, Code-switching CS, Intra-sentential, Arabic, French, Algeria

مُلَخَّصُ البَحَثِ

إنّ التناوب عملية معقدة حيث يتناوب المتحدثون بين لغتين أو أكثر لأسباب مختلفة. الجزائر بلد متعدد اللغات حيث تتعايش العربية الأمازيغية والفرنسية. نتيجة هذا الاتصال اللغوي، يتنقل العديد من الجزائريين بين هذه اللغات لتحقيق أغراض التواصل المختلفة. يحاول هذا البحث إلقاء الضوء على نوع التناوب اللغوي الأكثر استخدامًا ووظائفه بين المتحدثين الإناث في مجتمع اللغوي في مدينة تلمسان. يتم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان والمحادثات التي تجري بشكل طبيعي. تظهر النتائج أن التناوب اللغوي داخل الجمل هو أكثر أنواع التناوب اللغوي استخدامًا بين النساء. إلى جانب ذلك، تكشف النتائج أنه تم تحديد ثلاث وظائف التي وتتمثل في : إظهار التضامن وإظهار التعليم والمركز الاجتماعي وتغيير الموضوع.

الكلمات الرئيسية: ثنائية اللغة/متعددة اللغات، التناوب اللغوي، داخل الجملة، عربي، فرنسي، الجزائر

1. Introduction:

Bi/multilingualism has become now a norm in many speech communities of the world. Indeed, bilingual[1] individuals alternate between more than two languages during the same conversation. The use of two languages within the same communication has been called code-switching. Various studies (Poplack, 1981; Gumperz 1982; Myers-Scotton 1993*a*; Auer 1998; etc) have tried to investigate CS. The present work deals with code-switching between Arabic (Ar) and French (Fr). In the Algerian context, the presence of Arabic and French results in different language phenomena including code-switching and code-mixing. Besides, the status of each language has engendered different attitudes towards Arabic and French. These attitudes are displayed among women who consider French a prestigious language. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the dominant type of code-switching among women?
2. What are the functions of CS among women and men?

2. Literature Review

Code-switching is a language phenomenon that has gained popularity in the last decades. Generally, code-switching is considered as linguistic phenomenon where bilingual speakers alternate between two or more languages in different ways to achieve different communicative purposes. In the Algerian context, people code-switch between Arabic and French in the same conversation for different reasons.

2.1 Bilingualism

The term bilingualism has been defined in different ways. An extreme view of bilingualism is defined by Bloomfield (1933, p. 55) who assumes that a bilingual maybe someone who speaks two languages perfectly, and thus, has a "native-like control of two languages." On the other hand, Macnamara (1967*a*) argues that a bilingual may possess a minimal competence in only one of the four language skills (listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing) in a language other than his mother tongue. Consequently, bilingualism is seen as a continuum, where one can have varying levels of proficiency in two languages

2.2 Code-switching

Gumperz (1982, p. 59) defines CS as "a juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems". For Bentahila and Davis (1983, p. 302), CS is "the use of two languages within a single conversation, exchange or utterance". Similarly, Myers-Scotton (2002, p. 3) argues that CS is "the use of two languages in the same clause". Romaine (1995, p. 111) believes that CS is not random but socially motivated when she says "There is an almost one-to-one relationship between language choice and social context, so that each variety can be seen having a distinct place or function within the local speech repertoire." For Gumperz (1982) CS is a skilled language behaviour used to convey meanings of socio-pragmatic nature. For example, CS is employed to increase or decrease the social distance between the interlocutors or to exclude a third party. Bilingual speakers code-switch between languages in

---

[1]. In this work, the term bilingualism will be used to refer to multilingualism too.

different ways. According to Poplack (1980), CS occurs in different parts of the discourse and three types are identified: inter-sentential, intra-sentential and extra-sentential CS or Tag-switching.

- Inter-sentential CS: switching happens between sentences, clause boundaries as in:

Example 1[2]:
ʤit bəkri ləjum wə rani həna ʔənnəhar kaməl +
I came early today and I'm here all the day +
je pense qu'on a assez de temps pour tout terminer
I think we have enough time to finish everything

- Intra-sentential CS: switching takes place within a single clause or sentence as in:

Example 2:
rəha kəjəna *une promotion* ʃabba bəSSafi jəballi təkəməl ʔəljum *mais*
There is a nice discount but I think it ends today but
tənʤəm təkɔ̃taktəhum *par téléphone*
you can contact them by phone

- Extra-sentential CS or Tag-switching: in this case, exclamations, tags or interjections from the other language are inserted into the recipient language as in:

Example 3:
Donc nəʕawəd lək baʃə təfəham ɣaja
So! I repeat so that you understand better

Code-switching is also distinguished from code-mixing. While the former represents the use of two different languages beyond the boundary of one sentence, the latter refers to the use of two languages within the same sentence. Some linguists like Poplack (1980) and Myers-Scotton (1993*a*,

2002), consider inter-sentential switching as code-switching while intra-sentential switching as code-mixing. This study adopts this typology.

2.3 Languages in Algeria

In Algeria Dialectal Arabic (DA) is the mother tongue of most of the population. Besides, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used in formal situations. French, the colonial language is still used in many domains of society including daily communication. These varieties have different statuses and functions.

2.4 Reasons for CS

---

[2]. Occurrences in Dialectal Arabic are transcribed phonetically while those in French are in bold and italics.

Gumpez (1982) Myers-Scotton (1993*a*), claim that CS is a strategic linguistic behaviour used to convey different intentional meanings. People code-switch on different occasions to show solidarity with a social group; to increase or decrease social distance; to discuss a certain topic; to express feelings and affections; to impress and persuade their interlocutors; etc. The present study tries to shed light on some of the reasons of CS among women.

3. Method

To find out gender differences in Arabic/French switchings, a bilingual corpus of naturally occurring speech is used. The corpus consists of five conversations involving female speakers aged between 30 to 50 years old. Topics of conversations are miscellaneous. Occurrences of types of switching among women are identified and discussed. On the other hand, the functions of CS among women are considered.

4. Results and Analysis

The main focus of this study is to analyze CS among women. The results begin with displaying the rate of different types of CS during conversations, and then the functions of CS are identified.
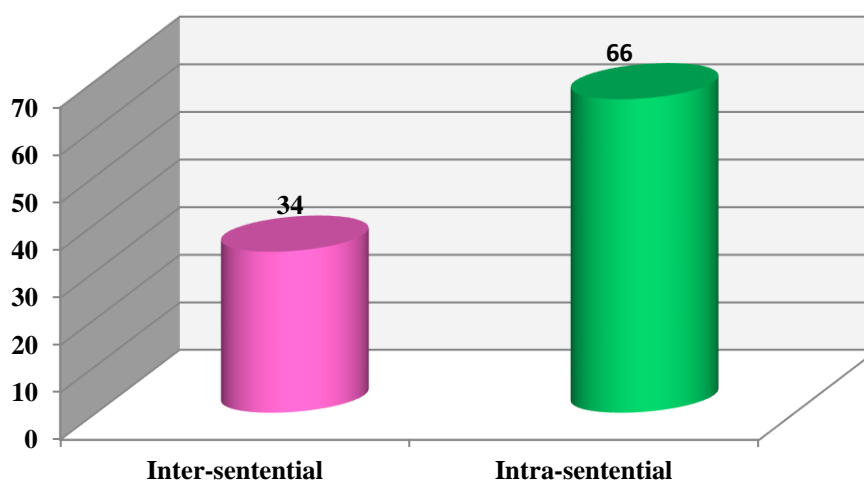

Fig 1: CS types among Women

The results of the conversations' analysis show a large difference between the two types of switching. The corpus contains 66% of occurrences of intra-sentential CS and 34% of inter-sentential ones.

4.1 Functions of CS among women

➤ *To show solidarity*

CS is found among women to express solidarity between women from different groups. Holmes (2008) argues that CS may be 'a signal of group membership'. In the following example, two women (W1 and W2) are chatting when another woman joins them:

Example 4

W1: SbaH Ɂəl χir
  Good morning

W2: Bonjour
  Good morning

W1: Bonjour + ça va
  Good morning! Are you ok?

In example **(4)**, the woman (**W1**) who joins the group starts using DA and then switched to Fr to reply to her interlocutor (**W2**) to show solidarity with her. Switching from DA to Fr is initiated by **W1**. Refusing to answer in Fr could be seen as non-membership to the group.

➤ *To show education and social status*

CS is also used by female speakers to display social status, to show their level of education, to distinguish themselves, or exert power over other speakers. The following excerpt is taken from a conversation between the secretary (a woman) and another woman at the doctor's office:

Secretary: SbaH Ɂəl χir Ɂassəm *madame*
          Good morning + do you need something madam

Doctor: *Bonjour + je suis médecin je voudrai voir le médecin dites-lui*
          Good morning, I'm a doctor and I'd like to see the doctor,
      s'il vous plait que c'est Dr….
          please tell him I'm Dr...

Secretary: *Bonjour docteur elle est déjà en consultation, je vais lui dire*
          Good morning Doctor, she is already in consultation, I'll tell her

In the beginning, the doctor's secretary greets the woman using DA. The other woman replies and carries on in Fr to show her level of education and her social rank. The secretary follows her choice and switches to Fr. In this case, Fr is used as a sign of education and social advancement.

➤ *To change the Topic*

Blom and Gumperz (1972), Holmes (2008) Myers-Scotton (1993*a*) agree on the fact that bilingual speakers may switch from one language to another to discuss a particular topic. In the next interaction, the interlocutors started talking in DA and then switched to Fr to talk about the school exams of their kids.

W1: ʕassəlama kirik + marikəʃ təban fajən rik

Hi! How are you? We don't see you? Where are you?

W2: ʕassəlama + rani ɣi həna + rani HaSəla mə∖a ddərari
Hi! I'm here + I'm busy with kids

W1: ∖əlaʃ
Why?

W2: *c'est la période des examens + tousles jours on fait des révisions …*
It's the exams period + we do revisions…

W1: *j'imagine ce n'est pas facile*
I guess it's not easy

W2: *pas du tout + donc j'ai plus le temps + Je ne vais même pas au sport*
Not at all, + I don't have the time + I don't even go to the gym

W1 uses DA to greet and ask about her interlocutor then suddenly switches to Fr to talk about exams. The fact that the interlocutor changes the topic triggers the switching to the other language (Fr). W1 signals the seriousness of the topic by switching from Arabic to French.

5. Discussion

In general terms, intra-sentential CS occurs more than inter-sentential CS in the data. There is a significant relationship between intra-sentential Dialectal Arabic/French CS and language competency of the participants. This confirms Poplack's (1980) hypothesis that intra-sentential CS requires competency in both languages. This means that bilingual speakers not only master the two languages but can to combine them in a single utterance.

Besides, studying CS in language contact situations reveals that women do not randomly use CS but rather do it intentionally to realize some objectives that have been highlighted in this research including showing solidarity, education and social status and changing topics. If the first is used to show either convergence with other interlocutors, the second displays the socioeconomic background of the speaker and the last one shows that a language may be more appropriate than another to talk about a specific topic.

6. Conclusion

CS is a complex language phenomenon studied from different perspectives. On the grammatical level, intra-sentential CS is a language behaviour that reinforces the idea that bilingual competence is necessary for code-switching. On the functional level, there are several reasons bilinguals use CS. In addition to functions highlighted in this study, other social functions are fulfilled by CS. More research is needed to better understand CS as a language phenomenon.

7. Bibliography

Auer, P. (1998). *Code-switching in conversation: Language, interaction and identity*. London: Routledge.

Bentahila, A. & Davies, E. E. (1983), The syntax of Arabic-French code-switching, in *Lingua*, n°59, North-Holland Publishing Company, Pays-Bas, pp. 301-330. https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-3841(83)90007-4

Blom, J. P and J. J. Gumperz. (1972). Social meanings in linguistic structures. In John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes (eds.) *Directions in sociolinguistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Gumperz, J. (1982), *Discourse Strategies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Holmes, J. (2008). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson/Longman.

Muysken, P. (2005). *Bilingual speech: A typology of code-mixing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Myers-Scotton, C. (1993*a*). *Social Motivation for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Myers-Scotton, C. (2002). *Contact Linguistics. Bilingual Encounters and Grammatical Outcomes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Poplack, S. (1980), Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English y terminó in espagñol: towards a typology of code-switching, in *Linguistics* 18, pp 581-618. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/ling.1980.18.7-8.581

Romaine, S. (1995). *Bilingualism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sankoff, David. & Poplack, S. (1981) A formal grammar for codeswitching, *Papers in Linguistics* 14, 3-46. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08351818109370523