Mechatronics Engineers' Perception of Code Mixing: Philadelphia University and Hashemite University as a Case Study

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Abstract

It has recently been widely recognized that code-switching is prevalent in Jordanians' daily conversation in various situations such as home, cafés, universities, restaurants and clubs. Abalhassan and Alshalawi (2000: 183) made a very related observation on code switching behavior among Arab speakers of English that "without exception, all respondents switched into English to some degree". This could be referred to the increase number of technological advances and people travelling across countries for pleasure or for pursuing further education. In light of this observation, the crucial role of language in people's life, ambivalent attitudes towards code-switching (Akbar, 2007), the dearth of research in this area, such a present study is required to explore Jordanian university students' and instructors' perceptions of code-switching in their daily classroom conversation and its expected impact on their language proficiency. In particular, it investigates the factors leading them to code mix and their underlying attitudes towards its expected future impact on their language proficiency. To the best knowledge of the present researcher, this study is the first of its kind in Jordan. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire from 70 university students and 30 instructors from both Philadelphia University and the Hashemite University. Data revealed that code mixing between English and Arabic is a common phenomenon in lectures they have attended in their academic institutions. The participants also show that they find code mixing fascinating and believe that though code switching might have a positive impact on their learning as it helps them better understand the topic. The instructors revealed that code mixing fulfill a set of functions that serve the educational process.

Keywords: Arabic-English codeswitching, language attitude, bilingualism, language proficiency

1. Introduction

Code-switching is a common phenomenon in a bilingual and multilingual community. As claimed by (Grosjean, 2010), half of the world's population is estimated to be bilingual (or even   multilingual in the present globalised world. A bilingual is described by Spolsky (1998) as 'an individual who has some realistic capacity in the second tongue'(p.45). Code-switching is defined   by many researchers as mixing or alteration between two or more languages in a conversation (Di Pietro cited in Grosjean 1982; Numan and Carter, 2001 Yao, 2011).Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) provides a detailed definition of code-switching which is the mixing of various linguistic units (morphemes, words various, modifiers, phrases, clauses as well as sentences mainly from two grammatical systems within a sentence. This definition seems to focus on the micro-level of code-switching. With regard to this issue, Breitborde (1983) point to that both macro and micro levels should be integrated in one approach. Though it is a frequent practice, Fishman (1965:583) reiterates that it is not accidental; rather it is a rule-based activity. In other words, choosing a certain language in a specific situation is governed and "influenced by who speaks what language, to whom"), where and when.

As code- switching is being recognized as a sociolinguistic phenomenon (Bilgin, 2013).The present researcher believes that eliciting young people's opinions and believes of code-switching is vital. Therefore, they should be considered for different purposes such as the selection of the language of instruction and its related strategies, both of the L1 and L2 proficiency level and to a further extent the future of the standard language. Alenezi (2010) claims that though learners' opinions and believes are of utmost importance when selecting a certain language for instruction, which is used usually imposed by a governing body, they are either excluded or rarely taken into consideration.

The controversial issue of whether or not code- switching between languages, is advantageous has been the hot topic of research by language learning and teaching experts and researchers (Rukh et al., 2012). Despite of the plethora of research conducted on code-switching, Lawson and Sachdev (2000) claim that the topic attitudes towards code switching is the most neglected area with this field of research and (Holmes, 2001 and Gill and Ahmed, 2014) argue that there are clashed perceptions of code-switch as whether it is a positive and negative strategy in classrooms and Dweik (2000) supposes that code-switching may result in meddling at phonological level and cultural level in any learning episode. Code-switching is usually deemed a sign of lack of good education or inappropriate control of two or more languages (Holmes, 2001; Chan, 2008). Asali (2011) refers this negative view of code-switching to the social norm that does not support the use of mixed languages in academic settings. According to Bhatia and Ritchie (2004), it is not only that it is not socially acceptable, but it is even perceived to be a negative practice by a vast majority of bilinguals themselves. Dweik (2000) supports Bhatia and Ritchie's (2004) perspective in that bilingual students themselves appeared to hold negative standpoint towards their teachers who code switch believing that it is an indication that they are incompetent. Such negative perceptions of code-switching support the advocate made by Ellis (1984), Wong-Fillmore (1985), Chaudron (1988) and Lightbown (2001) cited in Liu Jingxia, 2010)) that teachers should use the target language purely in EFL classrooms as any impure linguistics context would negatively influence the learners' proficiency in the target language.

In contrast, Tikunoff and Vazquez-Faria (1982), Levine (2003), Chen-Liping (2004) cited in Liu Jingxia, 2010) rather claim that code-switching could ease and accelerate the process of learning a foreign language. Hussein (1999) found out that code-switching could facilitate communication when there are English terms with no Arabic equivalents, expressing scientific concepts easily, being familiar with formulaic English expressions (i.e. Compliments, greetings, and apologies,) in various contexts (i.e. home, cafés, restaurants and clubs). Grosjean's (1982: 152) result is consistent with others' results Hussein (1999) Vazquez-Faria (1982), Levine (2003), Chen Liping (2004) in that people code-switch to ease the conversation especially when they cannot find suitable translation for the word being communicated suggest that code-switching may be viewed positively. Grosjean also adds that code switching might be used to emphasize one's group identity when quoting others' saying, or to indicate that someone in particular is being addressed, or to refer to something already being conversed between interlocutors. In addition, Auer (1999) indicates that it might be employed to switch to a new topic or make off-side comment or remark. Ahmad (2009) found a positive correlation between teachers' code-switching and learners' affective and learning success.

Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) found out that speakers may code switch for different purposes: changing topic, reiteration, paraphrasing, avoiding giving answers, quotations, gaining approval, showing distinctiveness in multi-party interaction, using idioms, hedging relative clauses, and interjections, besides citing deep-rooted cultural wisdom. Investigating the social psychological aspects of code-switching, Lawsan and Sachdev (2004)pointed out that code-switching is viewed as a distinct linguistic variety that could help to bridge the linguistic Arabic-French duality of post–colonial Tunisia and is mainly employed by the participants with friends, family, and other Tunisians more than with their teachers. Elsaadany (2003) pointed out that code-switching in Arabic and English happened as a continuum and it is always employed to enhance communication; rather it may be employed to make fun of other dialects that may not be popular.

In light of such contrasted opinions and Ferguson (2003)'s conclusion that such ideological attitudes associated with code-switching necessitate more investigations of the attitudes and position of other concerned peoples, i.e. children and their parents toward code-switching.

2. Methodology

2.1 Statement of the problem

Code-switching is an increasingly wide spread linguistic phenomenon. Code switching is a very crucial topic to be discussed since part of the courses that Mechatronics engineering students take is concerned with developing their oral presentation and communication skills besides technical writing in English. Though there is a plethora of research concentrating on code-switching, few studies so far have concentrated on the social motivations and attitudes toward Arabic and English code-switching and none was done particularly on Jordanian Mechatronics students and their instructors). Thus, this study is an attempt to fill this research gap. Therefore, it is very necessary to be given a careful investigation particularly learners' attitudes toward it, factors affect it and whether it negatively or positively affects language proficiency. As claimed by Lawson and Sachdev (2000), attitudes toward code-switching have not been investigated thoroughly in the related research.

2.2 Objectives of the study

The main goal of this study is to investigate the learners' attitudes toward code-switching from Arabic to English and vice versa and its impact on their language proficiency. Besides, it examines the perception of the participants' instructors at engineering faculty of code-switching mainly Arabic/English switching. It tries to elicit their attitudes

toward this phenomenon at classroom particularly the functions and the reasons of code switching during the interaction between the students and the instructors.

Thus, the study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions and attitudes of Mechatronics engineers non-English language major of code switching?

2. According to the participants' perception, what is the impact of code-switching from English to Arabic and vice versa on language proficiency?

3. What are the attitudes of Mechatronics engineers' lecturers toward code-switching from English to Arabic and vice versa?

2.3 Importance of the study

This study is anticipated to enrich the literature of code-switching by enhance and improve general understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects and attitudes towards Arabic and English code –switching. It is hoped that this study will give readers a wider insight into the Jordanian's tendencies to switch languages as well as serving as a useful guide for other types of codeswitching (i.e. code switch among rural and urban accents) as well as opening other avenues of research for others who are interested in this linguistic strategy and any similar or related topics.

2.4 Research population and instruments

A total number of 70 young Jordanians participated in the study comprising 35 Mechatronics at Philadelphia University and 35 Mechatronics students' at Hashemite University. The participants of the study were Jordanian speakers of Arabic who were residing in Jordan. Their age ranged from 20-25. Thirty instructors at engineering faculties from both Philadelphia University and Hashemite University also participated in the study.

A mixed methodology was employed in this study. Semi-structured interviews (i.e. where the order and wording of the questions in this type of interview can be changed based on the direction of the interview and the interviewer's discretion) is found beneficial for the present study because it can yield data that better describes people's perception of both their behavior and its associated social reality (AL-Khawaldeh, 2014).Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) claim that interview is a part of human life rather than an instrument that merely collects data about life, thus its human embeddedness is unavoidable. Using interviews is also recommended for being more flexible and reliable in getting highly personalised data, probing for more useful data with a very significant good return rate (Burns, 2000; Gray, 2004; Creswell (2009). A questionnaire was also used as it was found the quickest and most powerful instrument for collecting a large amount of data at a short time about the students' attitude(s) and learning strategies (Elgobshawi, 2012; Al-Khawaldeh et. al., 2016). Cronbach's alpha which was used to test the reliability of study instruments was found (0.877). The interview's responses were analyzed thematically whereas the questionnaire's responses were statistically analysed.

3. Results and discussion

The analysis of the interview data showed that code-switching was a frequent linguistic behavior mostly among Mechatronics Jordanian university students in their daily conversation and during lectures though Arabic language was the primary means of communication used by the participants in both contexts. The participants revealed that they switched from Arabic to English and vice versa to varying degrees and the extent of actual behavior of code-switching depended on a number of factors such as context (i.e. setting), topic, and familiarity among participants. It appeared that code-switching mostly consisted of inserting short terms such as English functional words (i.e. "once", "if" or meaningful words such as "thank you", "well done "or scientific concepts), phrases (i.e. "just in case", "what if" and "gentle man!"). Code-switching could be described as subconscious because certain such as "thank you", "sorry", "yes", "No/No way", "congrats!", "OK", "once", happy birthday", "bye", "oops" which as one of the interviewee said " these words at the tip of my tongue" are used habitually and promptly". Code-switch to English was also used in case of abbreviations and acronyms such as "ASAP", "VIP". Code switching to such words is found also powerful for reiteration such as "NO, NO. NO" and "OK, OK ". In this respect, Gumperz (1982:78) state that speakers may resort to code switching to repeat the same message but in another code (i.e. in another modified form).

The participants seemed to perceive code switching as a good way to introduce their personal views smoothly, powerful, and sometimes jokingly such as "personally speaking", "for me", " honestly, personally speaking …." as giving opinions is more frequent in daily life conversation. This result is consistent with Gumperz (1982) who indicates that code switching could serve the function of personification (i.e. expressing personal opinions). The participants refereed this phenomenon to the fact that they are influenced by their studies which is mainly in English, English films and songs. They pointed out that this phenomenon is in increase due to the technological advances and more openness to the world. Most of the respondents pointed out that English is the language to which their mobiles are set. This could be referred to the fact that young Jordanians find English language easier for communications. It could also be attributed to the increase number of foreigners from different nationality backgrounds in Jordan who most use English as a medium of communication. This means that code switching is an activity that is also invoked/motivated by the addressees. Therefore, it might be concluded that code switching facilitates conveying messages easily.

As shown in Table 1, a great number of the participants (%68.6) agreed that they resorted to code-switching between Arabic and English in their conversation because of their deficiency in either language which is mainly English in their case as they fill in the stopgap with words in native language in order to maintain the fluency of the conversation. It was evident from the results that the participants enjoyed code-switching. It was considered more attractive among them as it eases their communication since it enables them to clarify something unclear (% 51, 4). It was found to be a necessary communicative strategy when technical words or scientific rules are needed but there were no equivalents for them in Arabic due to the difficulty finding proper Arabic equivalents (%47.1).Thus, they switch to English as it is. Due to their specializations (i.e. their books are mainly written in English) and English is found to be rich with scientific and technical terms, they code switch to English. This finding supports Hleihil's (2001:70) claim about "the easiness of the English terms in the absence of Arabic equivalents".

Code switching was also found required due to the need to ease tension, inject humour into a conversation (%47.1), express personal emotions (%45.7), eliminate misunderstanding of the of the intended message(%42,9), show respect and be respected by others (%41,4),express their loyalty to their Arabic culture (%37,1), show that they are well-educated (%35.7) , talk about sensitive topics such as discussing personal matters (%34.3),make fun of others (%34.3), to reinforce their intended message (%28.6), express their anger (%28.6), discuss religious issues(%25.7). This indicates that code-switching appears to serve personal intentions. The data also shows that code-switching between Arabic and English could be a sign of gaining more prestige and showing high level of education.

Table 1. The relative distribution of the responses of the sample on the Motives behind code-mixing

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	10	14.3	48	68.6	5	7.1	4	5.7	3	4.3
2.	18	25.7	26	37.1	8	11.4	12	17.1	6	8.6
3.	14	20.0	33	47.1	9	12.9	11	15.7	3	4.3
4.	12	17.1	32	45.7	14	20.0	12	17.1	0	0.0
5.	22	31.4	25	35.7	8	11.4	7	10.0	8	11.4
6.	11	15.7	26	37.1	24	34.3	6	8.6	3	4.3
7.	7	10.0	24	34.3	9	12.9	18	25.7	12	17.1
8.	8	11.4	24	34.3	13	18.6	22	31.4	3	4.3
9.	15	21.4	36	51.4	13	18.6	6	8.6	0	0.0
10.	12	17.1	30	42.9	22	31.4	6	8.6	0	0.0
11.	18	25.7	24	34.3	14	20.0	6	8.6	8	11.4
12.	18	25.7	18	25.7	25	35.7	3	4.3	6	8.6
13.	6	8.6	33	47.1	21	30.0	10	14.3	0	0.0
14.	10	14.3	44	62.9	14	20.0	2	2.9	0	0.0
15.	14	20.0	20	28.6	24	34.3	9	12.9	3	4.3
16.	16	22.9	30	42.9	13	18.6	8	11.4	3	4.3
17.	12	17.1	20	28.6	11	15.7	21	30.0	6	8.6
18.	16	22.9	29	41.4	14	20.0	7	10.0	4	5.7
19.	16	22.9	23	32.9	14	20.0	9	12.9	8	11.4

Table 2 shows the relative distribution of the responses of the sample on the expected impact of code-switching on language proficiency. Forty eight percent of the participants pointed out that there might be several impacts of code-switching between Arabic and English, among which is that code-switching between Arabic and English leads to strengthening of both languages rather than to their weakness. However, the (%41.4) of the participants disagreed on the point that code-mixing may lead to strengthening of one language at the expense of the other or even to the weakness of one language at the expense of the other. This means that they code switch to keep track with both languages in order to develop their communicative competence. This could further indicates that code-mixing to English may not lead them to dissociate themselves from their original culture. This finding is not in line with Bader's (1995:22) claim that code mixing may be an insult to Arabic language and it can make the society lose its identity". This finding goes along with Poplack's (1980)finding that the frequency of code mixing could be increased with improved competence in both languages and Berk-Seligson's (1986) observation that greater code mixing use increases higher bilingual fluency.

With regard to course learning, (%40) of the participants agreed that teaching the course solely in one language is helpful to students though teaching the course in both languages makes it fascinating and more convenient for students to understand the topic better. It appeared that (%28.6) of the respondents do not find using both languages confusing. This finding is in line with Hughes' et al., 2006) findings that, CS In school settings may be used to facilitate comprehension, to establish and maintain solidarity or group membership, and to clarify concepts. In addition, (%51.4) of them feel more respect for teacher who teaches in both Arabic and English this is because the participants believe that teaching the course in both languages will increase my possibilities of passing the exams. They find code mixing between English and Arabic is a common phenomenon in lectures that they have attended in their academic institution.

Table 2. The relative distribution of the responses of the sample on the impact of code-switching on language proficiency

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	9	12.9	34	48.6	12	17.1	8	11.4	7	10.0
2.	10	14.3	24	30.3	8	11.4	25	39.7	3	4.3
3.	10	14.3	22	21.4	16	22.9	22	41.4	0	0.0
4.	7	10.0	27	28.6	15	21.4	21	40.0	0	0.0
5.	23	32.9	28	40.0	14	20.0	3	4.3	2	2.9
6.	17	24.3	24	34.3	11	15.7	9	12.9	9	12.9
7.	13	18.6	22	31.4	17	24.3	15	21.4	3	4.3
8.	20	28.6	21	10.0	10	14.3	13	28.6	6	8.6
9.	10	14.3	36	51.4	11	15.7	9	12.9	4	5.7
10.	14	20.0	26	37.1	16	22.9	14	20.0	0	0.0
11.	18	25.7	28	40.0	9	12.9	12	17.1	3	4.3
12.	24	34.3	18	25.7	15	21.4	8	11.4	5	7.1

The findings support Al-Nofaie's (2010) result in that code-switching may be perceived positively by students but the excessive code-mixing that might cause negative consequences. The analysis of the interviews with instructors revealed their general attitudes towards this phenomena at classroom. All the instructors confirm their students' response that mixing English and Arabic is a common phenomenon in the lectures they deliver in these institutions though their main language when delivering lectures should be English all the time and they do not have any difficulty delivering lectures in English. They assert that though they usually maintains the English terminology they frequently mix Arabic with English in their lectures to create solidarity with students, give further explanation when their students face difficulty understanding certain points, reiterate some very crucial points, better elucidate assignment guideline as well as evoke reactions from their students, support, encourage and acclaim students. The majority of the instructors stated that they resorted to code mixing in order to better manage the classrooms; better train students, direct them, negotiate with them and attract their consideration and attention, thus demand quiet.

4. Conclusion

The controversial issue of the ambivalent attitudes towards code-switching between languages is a very necessary topic to be tackled by language learning and teaching expert sand researchers. Though there is a plenty of research on this issue, the present study which aims to investigate the attitude of Mechatronics engineering students toward Arabic and English code-switching and its expected impact on their L1 or L2 language proficiency is the first of its kind in Jordan, to the best knowledge of the present researcher. Jordanians tend to switch between Arabic and English in talk shows, street, workplace, even in English language and literature classes, which are expected to be taught in merely pure English, as one of the teaching strategies. The study is a qualitative and quantitative research in nature; it employs semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. The data collected revealed mixing between English and Arabic is a common phenomenon in lectures they have attended in their academic institutions. The participants also show that they find code mixing fascinating and believe that though code switching might have a positive impact on their learning as it helps them better understand the topic. Further research is required to explore university lectures' attitudes toward such phenomenon.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

No.	Items	5	4	3	2	1
	Motives behind code-mixing	Strongly agree	agree	Uncertain	disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I code-switch between Arabic and English in their conversation due to deficiency in either language					
2.	I code-switch between Arabic and English at the end of a sentence for shortcuts.					
3.	I code-switch between Arabic and English because it is hard to find proper Arabic equivalents.					
4.	I code-switch between Arabic and English to express personal emotions.					
5.	I code-switch between Arabic and English to show they are well-educated.					
6.	I code-switch between Arabic and English to express their loyalty to their Arabic culture.					
7.	I code-switch or code-mix to make fun of others.					
8.	I code-switch to English because English is rich with scientific and technical terms					
9.	I code-switch to Arabic to let others understand what I am saying					
10.	I who code-switch to Arabic when discussing certain topics, such as politics.					
11.	I code-switch to English to sensitive topics such as discussing personal matters.					
12.	I code -switch to Arabic to discuss religious issues					
13.	I code -switch to ease tension and inject humor into a conversation					
14.	I code -switch to floor-hold (i.e. fill in the stopgap with words in native language in order to maintain the fluency of the conversation.					

15.	I code -switch to reinforce the intended message
16.	I code -switch to eliminate misunderstanding of the of the intended message
17.	I code-switch between Arabic and English to express anger.
18.	I code-switch between Arabic and English to be respected by others.
19.	I code-switch to Arabic when discussing topics related to my country.

	Influence / impact of code-switching
1.	Code-mixing leads to strengthening of both languages
2.	Code-mixing leads to weakness in both languages
3.	Code-mixing leads to strengthening of one language at the expense of the other.
4.	Code-mixing leads to weakness in one language at the expense of the other.
5	Teaching the course solely in one language is helpful to students.
6	Teaching the course in both languages makes it convenient for students to understand.
7	Teaching the course in Arabic and English is fascinating to students
8	It confuses me when teacher uses both languages to teach one topic
9	I feel more respect for teacher when he teaches in Arabic and English
10	Teaching the course in either will increase my possibilities of passing the exams.
11	Teaching the course in both languages will increase my possibilities of passing the exams.
12	Mixing English and Arabic is a common phenomenon in lectures I have attended in my academic institution