

Bilingual Communication: A Case Study Of Code-Switching Among King Khalid University Students In Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This article investigates the bilingual speech patterns among students at King Khalid University (KKU) in Saudi Arabia, where collegegoers comfortably blend Arabic and English in their communication. The study aims to explore code mixing as a potential tool for second or foreign language learning, focusing on the attitudes of KKU students. Code-switching (CS), resulting from language contact, is examined as a distinctive feature of a multilingual society. Findings indicate that code-switching is not only discourse-related but is also influenced by participant preferences, showcasing a variety of functions beyond topic shift, including reiteration, change in participant constellation, self-repair, and emphasis. The article suggests the complexity of code-switching functions within discourse. Positive attitudes towards code-switching with English and Arabic are evident among KKU students, reflecting a high level of openness to this practice. Furthermore, the article discusses the potential inclusion of code-mixing as a teaching practice, with necessary refinements, in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment.

Keywords: Code-switching, Sociolinguistic study, EFL, attitudes.

1. Introduction

Code-switching (CS) stands as a consequential phenomenon arising from language contact, serving as a distinctive feature within the context of a multilingual society. Research in CS has focused dominantly on sociolinguistic and grammatical perspectives (Ge, 2007; Bokamba, 1988). Bokamba (1988) has reported that research related to code-switching and code-mixing can be categorized into functional and theoretical studies. The intricate dynamics of code-switching and code-mixing have captured the attention of linguists, sociolinguists, and psycholinguists, each offering unique perspectives on this linguistic phenomenon. Mushtaq and Zahra (2012) pointed out that 'code -hybridization' is a significant phenomenon and a 'natural by-product of language interaction and evolution'. Linguists' exploration aims to uncover how speakers seamlessly blend or switch between languages while maintaining grammatical coherence and linguistic fluidity.

The advent of English as a lingua franca in the modern years has resulted in the increase of the practice of code-mixing of English with the local languages all over the world. 'Language is vital to understanding a society and the promotion of that society' (Sultana, 2009). According to Gumperz (1982), code-switching is the use of two languages together and switching between them in one single conversation. The concept of code-switching is widely discussed in linguistic fields such as psycholinguistics, anthropology, and sociolinguistics. Code-switching is defined as the ability to switch from using one language to another within one's verbal interactions (Barbara & Almeida, 2012). The code-switching phenomenon has emerged in multilingual and bilingual communities as a type of communicative strategy used by multilingual or bilingual speakers for various needs (ZainalAriff, 2012).

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The characterization of Saudi Arabia as a monolingual country stems from the prevalence of Arabic as the official language and the primary medium of communication. However, the linguistic landscape has evolved, especially among the younger generation. It is increasingly common for children in Saudi Arabia to develop proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), challenging the traditional perception of a strictly monolingual society. The ability of Saudi children to navigate seamlessly between Arabic and English positions them advantageously in an interconnected world where multilingual proficiency is increasingly valued. Thompson (2013) mentions several reasons behind people's use of code-switching, one of which is to become members of a particular discourse community. People may or may not be aware of their code-switching practices; they may subconsciously act like people around them and agree with or take the stance of others.

The accelerated global dominance of English as the preferred language of communication has been identified in research as a catalyst for rapid changes in world languages, including Arabic. This linguistic transformation is influenced by a myriad of interconnected factors, such as demographic trends, technological advancements, international communications, and various other elements (Crystal, 2008; James, 2010; Northrup, 2013; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is defined as the teaching of English to people whose first language is not English, and who do not live in an English-speaking country (Longman's online dictionaries). Being a multilingual speaker extends advantages that incorporate cognitive, learning, communication, cultural, personal, and employment advantages.

1.1 Research Objectives:

The current study aims to explore specific research objectives to enhance understanding and contribute to the existing knowledge base. The study aims to analyze spoken discourse to investigate the most significant factors that affect code-switching between Arabic and English among college youth.

1. What is the extent and frequency of code-mixing and code-switching among Arabic-speaking college students?
2. How do code-mixing and code-switching impact daily conversations among native speakers in Saudi Arabia?
3. What social motivations drive bilingual Saudi college students to engage in code-mixing and code-switching?

1.2 The Research Questions that the study endeavors to answer are as follows:

1. What is the main motivation driving code-mixing and code-switching among college students in KKU, Saudi Arabia?
2. Is there a dominant inclination among Saudi college students to switch to English in their language use?

2. Literature Review:

The fact that you are bilingual or multilingual cannot be separated from yourself in every day speeches of students (Zainuddin, 2016). Students, exposed to both Arabic and English in their daily activities at various schools, find themselves compelled to navigate multiple languages. Educational institutions and teaching faculties innovate strategies to promote bilingualism, urging learners to effortlessly engage with both Arabic and English.

For many bilingual or multilingual individuals, language code-switching becomes second nature. Evolving as a social phenomenon, it seamlessly integrates into the social norms of linguistically diverse societies. Another contributing factor to the prevalence of code-mixing and code-switching is the access that speakers have to common languages shared by other ethnic groups coexisting within the same society. As a communicative strategy, language code-switching serves several purposes employed by various speakers to perform a range of functions such as quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, and message qualification (Gumperz, 1982).

The study conducted by Viduya (2018) with Philippine ESL students reveals that code-switching is not only a prevalent but also a healthy practice for EFL/ESL students. Viduya identified several positive outcomes associated with code-switching in the bilingual language classroom. Firstly, code-switching fosters collaboration and cooperation among students, creating an environment conducive to shared learning experiences (i). Secondly, it plays a role in encouraging enhanced learner participation and involvement in class activities (ii). Additionally, code-switching contributes to the creation of a classroom atmosphere free from fear and anxiety, promoting a more comfortable learning environment (iii). Lastly, Viduya notes that code-switching facilitates the application of knowledge from the student's first language (L1) to the second language (L2), indicating a transfer of linguistic skills (iv).

2.1 Code-switching

Gumperz (1982) defines code-switching as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (p. 59). In contrast, Myers Scotten (1990) states that code-switching can occur between more than two languages in a single conversation. Code-switching has been studied from both the structural and sociolinguistic perspectives. Code-switching from the sociolinguistic approach looks at code-switching as a discourse phenomenon and is more interested in understanding how meaning is created in code-switching and the functions of code-switching in context i.e. the function of code-switching (Poplack, 1980; Yamamoto, 2001). The primary concern of this study is to study the instances of code-switching from Arabic to English among bilingual Saudi speakers in KKU from the sociolinguistic perspective. Abedelbadi's (2003) study found that when the speakers communicate among themselves, they are inclined to code switch depending on the varieties of topics discussed, the context of the situations, and also that they do not necessarily resort to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in cross-dialectal conversations.

Studies, including the work of Reyes (2004), suggest that language proficiency levels can influence the frequency of code-switching (CS) among bilinguals. Reyes's research identified a notable statistical difference in the frequency of CS between two groups of bilinguals, and this difference was attributed to variations in their levels of language proficiency.

2.2 Sociolinguistic approach

Callahan (2004) underscores that 'sociolinguistic approaches to code-switching are concerned with the social and pragmatic functions it fulfills for individual speakers and social groups. Some universal factors can motivate or trigger code-mixing and code-switching in all contexts therefore Kim (2006) found that why bilinguals switch depends on so many factors including interlocutors, situations, messages, attitudes, and emotions towards a particular code (Kim, 2006). According to Bhatia and Ritchie (2013), the choice of a code or code-switching is also determined by the relationship between the interlocutors. The field of sociolinguistics, along with the study of code-switching, has been extensively researched. However, current calls within academia highlight the need for further investigations into different aspects of sociolinguistic trends. Saville-Troike (2003), for instance, has promoted more research that delves into different dimensions of code-switching (CS). Simultaneously, she highlighted the challenge of drawing clear conclusions from existing studies, citing the complexity arising from the intersection of code-switching with other related linguistic concepts. As advocated by (Stell 2012) the phenomenon of code-switching is an important aspect in the field of sociolinguistics as it provides clues to ethnic differences.

2.3 Arabic-English Code Switching

Abu Mathkour (2004) investigates the functions of Arabic-English code-switching among Jordanian speakers on Jordan Television. The findings specified that quotation, interjection, reiteration, message qualification, and personification vs. objectification are functions that code-switching fulfilled in these conversations. Moreover, Zerg (2006) investigates the

functions of code-switching among Libyan speakers. In her study, she collected data from sixty subjects, thirty-six females and twenty-four males. The researcher relates seventeen functions by Libyan speakers i.e. among them are ease of expression, identity, and clarifying. De Fina (2007) stressed the possibility of code-switching to aid speakers in Saudi Arabia in the socio-linguistic development of their identities.

Alsalamy (2021) hypothesized that bilinguals with high-level proficiency switched between Arabic and English more because they found English vocabulary more expressive and helped them deliver their ideas more effectively. Alhourani (2018) argues that there are different communicative functions of Arabic-English code-switching among bilinguals, such as showing off, changing topics, or expressing feelings. While numerous studies on Arabic-English code-switching exist, a significant gap remains in focusing on specific age groups of bilingual speakers. This paper aims to address this gap by investigating the social motivations and types of Arabic-English code-switching among bilingual Saudi college students.

3. Significance of the Study

This investigation holds significance both at theoretical and practical levels. Theoretically, the study aims to address the gap in sociolinguistic understanding of code-switching within an educational context. The enrichment of the Arabic lexicon is explored through various linguistic processes such as derivation, composing-coinage, resurrection, borrowing-Arabization, and native sources-deductions. The study emphasizes that code-switched words in Arabic are not treated as entirely new terms but rather undergo Arabicization in one or more Arabic language academies. Code-switching is not perceived as a method for creating entirely new Arabic words; instead, the focus lies in understanding how Saudi students organically and attitudinally expand their Arabic language lexicons through this linguistic phenomenon. The study further aims to evaluate whether these attitudinal changes have any adverse effects on the growth and flourishing of the Arabic language. Due to the growing number of bilinguals around the world, the need to investigate how those individuals go back and forth between their two languages in the same conversation has become increasingly important (Basnight-Brown & Altarriba, 2007).

3.1 Research Scope

The present study is to focus sociolinguistic perspective particularly functions and motivations for CM and CS in the EFL context.

1. This study aims to delineate the contextual circumstances in which Arabic-speaking students engage in the mixing of Arabic and English languages.
2. To investigate whether Saudi students incorporate both Arabic and English in their day-to-day communication.
3. The societal influence on students' participation in code-mixing from Arabic to English.
4. How do sociolinguistic aspects influence code-switching in spoken discourses?

3.2 Methodology

This empirical study utilized a convenience sample comprising 50 first-year students from KKU, Saudi Arabia from English and non-English major courses were selected based on their comparable proficiency in English and Arabic. These students responded to an eleven-item attitudes questionnaire. The consistent feedback indicated the instrument's reliability. Table 1 gives the details of all participants were Saudi males and females aged 18-22, scoring intermediate or higher in the mandatory course aimed at enhancing English proficiency. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert Scale, where 1 indicated "Strongly Agree" and 5 indicated "Strongly Disagree." The study focused on exploring the attitudes of these participants toward code-switching in Arabic-English communication.

Gender	Age	Total number of	Age Began to	Age Began to Speak/Respond English	The language used with peers/	The language used at home
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		Participants	Speak Arabic		friends/teachers	
Female	18-20	12	2	5-6	Arabic/English	Arabic/English
Male	18-20	10	2	6-7	Arabic/English	Arabic/English
Female	20-22	20	2	5-6	Arabic/English	Arabic/English
Male	20-22	08	2	5-6	Arabic/English	Arabic/English

Table 1. The participants' language backgrounds

Table 2 below gives the details of all the responses to the questionnaire. Upon the receipt of responses, a meticulous analysis was undertaken, involving the computation of percentages for the highest scores. This approach was employed to unveil the prevailing trends in university students' attitudes and perceptions regarding code-switching in their speech.

S.No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1.	I have a positive attitude towards switching between English and Arabic.	37	10	00	02	01
2.	I am equally comfortable speaking in English as I am in Arabic.	5	5	20	10	10
3.	I am not aware when I switch between English and Arabic.	40	5	3	2	0
4.	CS works when the interlocutor knows English well	30	10	6	02	02
5.	Due to a lack of words in one language, I switch to the other where my knowledge compensates for the deficiency.	25	9	06	03	02
6.	I am not comfortable when people switch between languages	3	2	5	25	10
7.	I am fearful of my grammatical mistakes when I mix English and Arabic.	35	10	5	00	00
8.	CS helps me explain myself better	32	18	5	00	5
9.	CS mostly at work or college	40	8	2	00	00
10.	CS has improved my English-speaking skills	42	08	00	00	00
11.	CS my superior proficiency both in Arabic and English	34	16	10	00	00

Table 2: Questionnaire on the attitudes and perceptions of bilinguals to code-switching.

The graphical representation in Figure 01 serves as a valuable tool for elucidating the notes within the collected data. It not only facilitates a quick understanding of the distribution of attitudes but also highlights potential clusters or patterns. This visual assistance enhances the transparency of the findings, making it easier for readers to grasp the overall landscape of university students' perspectives on code-switching in speech. The subsequent sections delve into a detailed discussion and analysis, aiming to extract meaningful insights from the presented results. The results, depicted in Figure 01, offer a visual representation of the distribution of responses, providing a comprehensive overview of the participants' sentiments toward this linguistic phenomenon.

3.3 Result Analysis

The prevalence of code-switching as a predominant trend among university students highlights its importance as a communicative tool and showcases the students' favorable

stance towards incorporating multiple languages in their speech. This positive disposition may be attributed to the

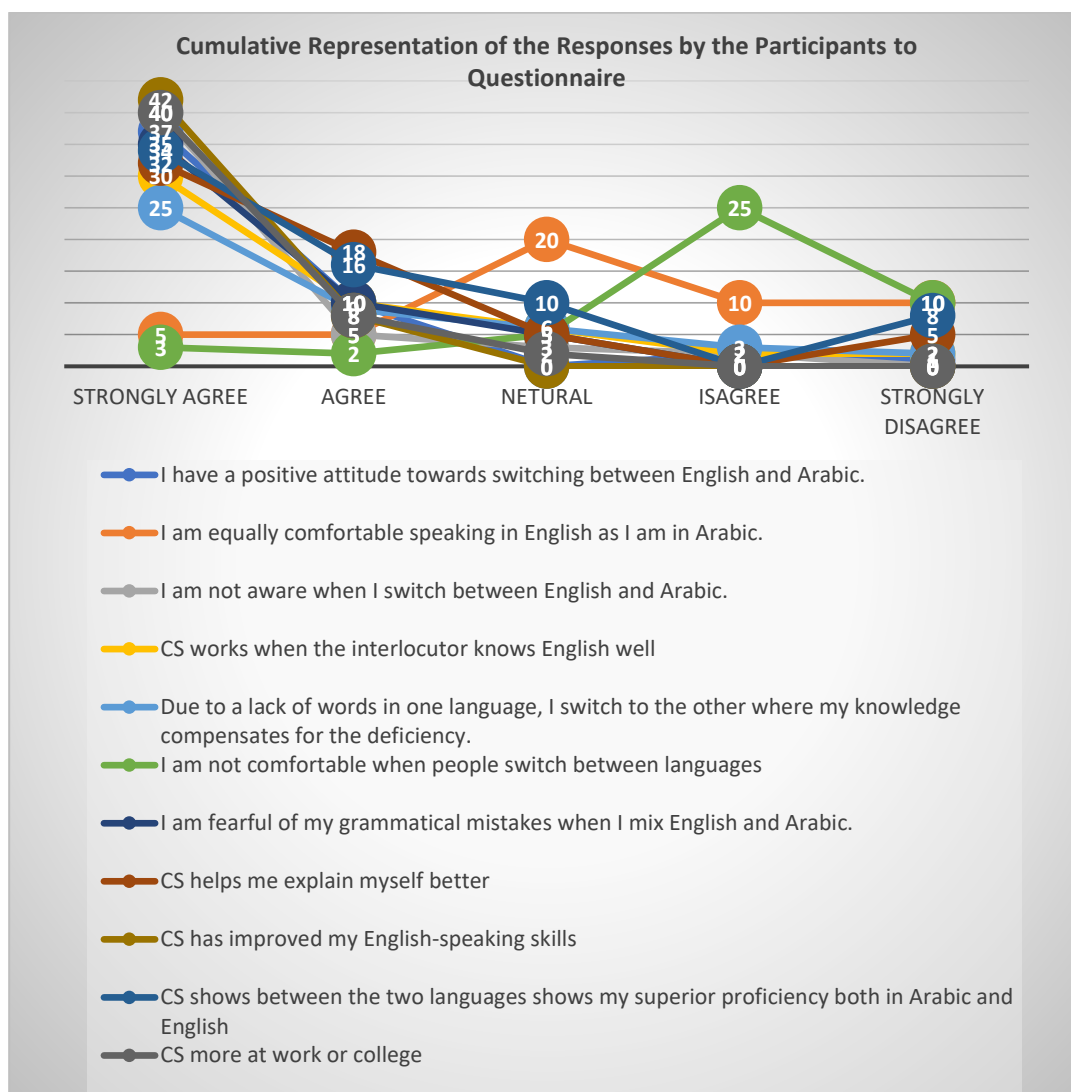


Figure 1 Cumulative Representation of the Responses by the Participants to Questionnaire

student's recognition of the functional and expressive benefits associated with code-switching in diverse social and academic contexts. The widespread acceptance of code-switching among Saudi university students not only reflects linguistic adaptability but also underscores its significance as a natural and embraced aspect of their communication patterns. This collective agreement among KKU students suggests a shared appreciation and acceptance of the practice, reflecting its integration into their linguistic repertoire. Figure 1 effectively illustrates the ease with which King Khalid University (KKU) students engage in code-switching during their daily conversations, demonstrating a high level of proficiency. Notably, 74% of participants in response to Statement 1 expressed a clear interest in code-switching, reflecting a positive disposition towards this linguistic phenomenon. Additionally, the unconscious nature of code-switching is highlighted, with 80% of participants in response to Statement 3 indicating that they are not aware when they code-switch, underscoring the natural incorporation of this practice in their communication. Further exploration reveals that university students at KKU exhibit enthusiasm and encouragement for code-switching. This positive disposition is evident in the 40% response to Statement 2, indicating their willingness to embrace bilingualism and suggesting a potential avenue for translanguaging as a learning tool in English as a Foreign Language

(EFL). Prestige (80%) and linguistic deficit (73%) emerge as dominant factors influencing code-mixing, as indicated by responses to Statements 4 and 5.

Despite concerns related to grammatical errors and fear of foreign languages (50% and 70% responses to Statements 6 and 7, respectively), the students' motivation remains unaffected. The focus shifts from correctness to effective communication, with at least 61% expressing that they are not overly concerned with grammatical accuracy when code-switching, as reflected in responses to Statements 8 and 9. Moreover, the findings suggest that Saudi university students engage in code-switching not only in informal interactions but also in formal settings with teachers and peers, contributing to a potential enhancement in their English proficiency, as indicated by responses to Statements 10 and 11.

3.4 Discussion

Individuals frequently engage in code-switching as a natural part of their daily conversations, especially among those fluent in English as their Second Language (L2). This linguistic phenomenon involves the incorporation of English words, phrases, or sentences seamlessly. While participants may unconsciously code-switch, the occurrence is often influenced by linguistic and social factors. Code-switching is prevalent in multilingual and multicultural societies, as observed in Asian countries like Nepal, Pakistan, India, and China, where bilingual individuals commonly use English as their second language alongside their mother tongue. Similarly, in European bilingual societies like France, Germany, Spain, and Italy, English may be alternately employed as the language of classroom instruction. There is a pressing need to investigate the functions and motivations behind Code Mixing (CM) and Code Switching (CS) in English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Such exploration is essential to gain insights into the multifaceted and diverse aspects of multilingual societies.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the functions of code-switching among bilingual Saudi speakers in various settings, particularly within the context of KKU. The data analysis revealed several communicative functions of Arabic-English code-switching, including quoting, showing off, changing topics, and expressing feelings. This research addresses the noted lack of studies in the field of Arabic-English code-switching, especially among Saudi bilingual speakers.

The study aspires to contribute modestly to bridging the existing gap in research on code-switching among Saudi bilingual speakers. It offers readers a broader understanding of Saudi language-switching tendencies and serves as a valuable guide for researchers exploring code-switching phenomena in different countries. The coexistence of Arabic and English in both educational and workplace settings makes code-mixing a natural tendency for many Arab students, who effortlessly combine both languages. Modern Standard Arabic, the most popular variety today, is a condensed classical Arabic language that has been accepted as the Arab World lingua franca.

5. Limitations and Recommendations

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Firstly, the exclusive focus on youth and university student participants may limit the generalizability of the results, and future research should consider including people from different sectors, even school-going children must be the participants of the study. Additionally, the study's participants were confined to KKU, implying that the findings may not be universally applicable to other groups of Saudi EFL learners. Lastly, the relatively small number of subjects suggests the need for further studies exploring the types and functions of code-switching in diverse settings to enhance the strategic competence of Arab bilingual speakers.

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