

Language alternation among Arabic speakers in Australia

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Abstract: The alternation between two or more languages is identified as code switching. Code switching is a widely observed phenomenon usually occurring in bi- and multilingual speech communities, where speakers switch back and forth between two or more languages. Further, code switching might occur in different domains that can possibly be ranged from the public to more private and from very formal to the most informal (Platt, 1977). Such domains include home, family, work, school...etc.

This paper aims to identify patterns of language alternations and their associations with domains where they occur taken from the everyday life linguistic behaviors of Arabic speakers among the first and second generation immigrants living in Australia. Adopting qualitative method, 53 participants were interviewed. Results showed that Arabic speakers code switch mainly while talking to other family members. Parents alternate between English and Arabic while talking to their children and children alternate between the two languages while talking to either one of their parents. Results also showed that friendship domain was also associated with code switching occurrences, where the person(s) engaged in the speech event is known to be able to speak more than one language. As they work in multilingual environment, other participants reported to code switch at their workplaces where both languages are used. For some Arabic speakers, language alternation took place in and public places where the addressee is known to speak Arabic. Code switch occurs in places like Arabic shops, restaurants and Arabic doctors.

Keywords: multilingualism, Arabic speaker, language alternation, domains.

Introduction

The alternate use of two languages, either within a sentence or between two sentences in the same conversation is defined as code switching. The speaker stops using language A and employs language B (Clyne, 1991, p. 160). Code switching is a widely observed phenomenon usually occurring in bi- and multilingual speech communities. Multilingualism or the ability to speak more than one language is a vital part of the social life of language around the world, which arises from the need to communicate across speech communities (Edwards, 1994). The term or concept of multilingualism is to be understood as the capacity of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage on a regular basis in space and time with more than one language in everyday life (Franceschini, 2009, pp. 33-34).

The immigration context represents a locus for the study of code switching, as the immigrant speakers add the language of the host country to their linguistic repertoire. According to different factors, immigrants may either abandon their languages in favour of the language of the host country or maintain the language in their daily life in specific contexts. Therefore, code switching behaviours may be retained or new patterns could be created (Anchimbe & Mforteh, 2011, p. 325).

Australia is often described as a 'nation of immigrants' that in all, since 1945, seven million people have migrated to Australia (Phillips, Klapdor, & Simon-Davies, 2010). Today's Australia is a multilingual nation. Among the almost 400 languages used in the homes of Australia's residents are Indigenous languages, Auslan and community languages from all corners of the earth (Clyne & Jupp, 2011, p. 54). In a multicultural society like

Australia where large populations of immigrants have settled, language alternation is very much noticeable. Most people needed several languages to communicate, where English is placed side by side with the native language (Gumperz, 1982). In this paper, we aim to identify domains of language alternation from the everyday life linguistic behavior of Arabic speakers of first and second generation migrants living in Australia.

Literature Review

Today's Australia is a multilingual nation, in a world in which there are far more multilinguals than monolinguals (Clyne & Jupp, 2011). Language alternation extends to daily life and workplaces (Ting, 2002). Speakers who are bilingual usually have English as their second language (L2) and their first language (L1) is their mother tongue and dialect. Thus, language alternation usually occurs between people who share particular languages in specific places or domains.

From a socio-linguistic perspective, domains are defined as "A socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships and interactions between communication, relationships and interactions between communicators and locales of communication in accord with the institutions of society" (Fishman, 1972, p. 82). In other words 'domains' are regarded as institutional contexts in which one language is more likely to be appropriate than another and are to be seen as constellations of other factors such as topic, location and participants. The speakers of the community know where, when and with whom to speak which language and switch between languages accordingly (Fishman, 1972; Blom & Gumperz, 1972). Thus, language alternation describes which code or codes are usually selected for use in different situations and domains.

In the context of this study, only definitions of the family, friendship, employment and transactional domains are further explored. Family domain includes members of the family who live together at home (father, mother, son and daughter) as well as all other extended family members like grandparents and other relatives (Fishman, 1965). Friendship domain includes a wide range of social networks including networks of friends that meet regularly, colleagues, neighbors, and members of clubs (Smolicz, 1979). Employment domain refers to work

environment with a range of social networks consisting of work related colleagues and persons that involve work related social interactions. Transactional domains refer to the contact with the ethnic language in public domain such as shops and restaurants (Clyne & Kipp, 1999).

In most communities domains can possibly be ranged from the public to more private (Platt, 1977, p. 368). Hence, distinguishing language's domains in a community is necessary for code switching to be considered a significant act (Heller, 1988) and in turns reflecting a conscious understanding of domain separation among speakers (Clyne, 2010).

In early studies, Fishman (1965) recommended five domains: family, home, friendship, work, education, and religion, which were helpful in giving insight into language choice in multilingual situations. Each domain has its distinctive addressee, setting and topic. For instance in family domain, family members are obviously the main addressees. The home location would be the setting and family everyday matters, would be the topic. Family domain is considered to be important because of its influence on language choice (Slavkov, 2016). Additionally, other variables, such as the topic of conversation and the place where the conversation takes place, are also important in the contexts of language choice, use and alternation (Fishman, 1965).

However, there is no agreement among scholars about the exact number of domains. Subsequent research has extended or excluded domains according to the situation of the community under investigation. In addition to three domains – family, friendships and church – of Fishman's (1965) five domains, studies among different migrant communities (Pauwels, 1986; Bettoni & Rubino, 1996; Pütz, 1991) had added new domains such as transactional domain and ethnic societies' domain. Additionally, exploring domains of language use among Arabic speakers in Australia Clyne & Kipp (1999) suggested "transaction domains" that include cafés, ethnic shops and restaurants where members of immigrant community congregate and stopover.

In exploring the occurrences of code switching, Fishman and Greenfield (1970) studied the Puerto Rican community in New York (as cited in David, 2001, p. 38) by using the concept of domains. Results showed that Spanish was regularly used in family discourse whereas English was used in education and

employment. In a similar vein, the study of Rubino and Bettoni (1996) on the use of English among Italo-Australians in Sydney had covered 46 situations in 4 domains: family, friendship, work/school and transactions. The study of Othman (2006) among Arabic-English bilinguals in Manchester investigated the different domains where English and Arabic are used with focus on which domains the two languages overlap. Othman (2006) employed different domains such as friendship, media, mosque; university/work and shops. Results showed that among this community code switching between English and Arabic occurred only in friendship domain.

In their study among Calabrian-Australian in Adelaide – South Australia; Marino, Chiro and Curnow (2013) examined language use and patterns of code switching in different domains. Two domains were used: home/family domain and public domain (transactional domain). Results showed that all participants used codeswitching, involving Calabrian and English, for communication in the home domain (Marino, Chiro, & Curnow, 2013, pp. 469-470). However, a small number of participants reported to use a combination of English and Calabrian, depending on the interlocutor (Marino, Chiro, & Curnow, 2013, p. 470).

Methodology

Qualitative data analysis was adopted in this study because of the nature of it. There is no research method that is “intrinsically better than other; everything will depend upon one’s research objectives” (Silverman, 2013, p. 128). Thus, emphasis should be on the most appropriate method for the research problem being investigated. However, qualitative research methods, through detailed interviewing and observation, could get closer to the people’s perspectives and opinions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 9). Even though there are multiple qualitative data collection methods (e.g. interviews, focus groups, audio-visuals; documentations and journals, etc.) (Locke,

Silverman, & Spriduso, 2010; Marshal & Rossman, 2010; Creswell, 2003); yet the semi-structured interview is one of the most widely used techniques for gathering data and information in research dealing with personal experiences, feelings and judgement from the participants’ perspectives (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; 2004). The recorded interviews were later transcribed, coded and analyzed.

The informants were recruited on a voluntary basis through personal contacts. The selection of participants was based on two criteria: being among first or second generations Arab migrants living in Australia; and being bilingual (the participant knows and/or uses more than one language know). The participants’ age range is between 24 and 64 years old divided between two groups: old group of participants (40-64) and young group (24-39). More than half of the participants reside in Victoria including the suburbs of Melbourne and the others reside in Sydney and in its south-west regions. For ethical considerations the participants’ names remain anonymous and they will be referred to as P1, P2, P3, etc.

Code switching and domains – discussions and findings

Participants were asked to report the domains of code switching occurrences. Information obtained from semi-structured interviews is mostly consistent among all participants in the different domains. All participants reported to code switch between Arabic and English in home/family and friendship domains. Participants, who work in multilingual environment, reported to code switch at work their workplaces, where both Arabic and English were used. A small number of participants of both generations had reported that language alternation took place in public domains where the addressee is known to speak Arabic. Another small number reported to alternate in transactional domains such as Arabic shops, Arabic restaurants and Arabic doctors.

In her study of young generation Greek-English code switching in Melbourne, (Tsokalidou, 1994) found young women code switch in a greater incidence than young men. Differently, findings of this study show no gender difference in responses. Both, men and women from older and younger generation code switch between Arabic and English within the conversation in the same frequency and in the same various domains of communication.

Home domain

Starting with home/family domain, responses showed reciprocal switch from one language to the other between family members. In the home domain, older participants and/or parents reported to alternate between Arabic and English while speaking to their children. For instance, participants P3, 54 years old father said: *"I switch most of the time while talking to my daughter; sometimes I have to tell her something she doesn't understand so I have to use the other language Arabic"*. Similar answer was given by P22, 48 years old mother. She reported: *"mostly I use English and Arabic with my children, we switch all the time"*.

Younger participants and/or adult children reported to use both languages while communicating with either one of their parents or old family members. For instance P33, 25 years old young man, said: *"I start a sentence with English and mixed up with Arabic; that's with my father"*. Similar response was given by P13, 26 years old young woman, as she explained: *"Usually I switch when I am saying something to my parents and I am saying in Arabic, during the conversation I switch to English, and I go back and forth with languages. Same thing with my relatives, I switch when I am speaking with my relatives overseas."*

As mentioned earlier, home/ family domain is not limited to the individual living in the same house (parents, children, spouses, siblings), but it exceeded it to include dyads within the family and other

relatives (Fishman, 1965). Some participants reported that in addition to their family members, they code switch with other relatives who live outside the family house. These relatives are both older generation and younger generation. Reports also showed that the use of both languages occurs among younger generation were due to the older family members' insufficient English skills. As a result, they code switch with older generation bearing in mind their limited English proficiency. For example, P9, young 28 years old man reflecting his code switching occurrences with his relatives, explained: *"knowing how their basic level of English, if I am getting stuck on a word in Arabic, I use English. Or if I am speaking English and I know they don't understand a word, I switch to Arabic"*. Another example was given by P31, young 30 years old woman echoing the use of Arabic and English with her father at home. She said: *"Even though I try to push him to speak English never works out. I have to speak in Arabic and English, to make him understand. Sometimes he can't understand all the English words."*

In conclusion, the results found that participants' self-reports of code switching are align with Marino, Chiro and Curnow (2013) study showing that all participants use codeswitching for communication at least in the home environment, and this code-switching primarily involves Calabrian and English (Marino, Chiro, & Curnow, 2013, p. 476). Similarly, all participants in the present study codeswitch in the home domain..

Friendship domain

Socializing with friends from same ethnic backgrounds was another domain for code switching occurrences. Friendship domain here as described by the participants includes networks of friends that they meet often. These friends are bilingual speakers

from Arabic background with whom the participants socialize using Arabic and English within the same conversation. Participants generally reported having an Arabic social network. In general, regardless of age, the number of participants who reported using Arabic and English in this domain was as high as the number reported in the family domain.

Home/family and friendship domains have the highest reported code switching among all the domains reported. This exemplifies that participants have the highest chance to contact Arabic members from their own community as well as from different Arabic communities within these domains.

Othman (2006) findings showed that among the Arab speakers in Manchester, code switching occurs mainly in this domain. Correspondingly, the results here show that participants alternate between Arabic and English with friends from Arabic background, as they already know that the interlocutor is able to speak their language. For instance, P6, 47 years old mother, said: *"I switch all the time while talking to my friends. My friends are from Arabic background"*. Another example, P17, 51 years old father, said: *"I use both languages Arabic and English when I meet Arabic-Australian friends"*. Similar answers were given by younger generation, for instance P12, 22 years old women, reported: *"I switch between the Arabic and English with my friends. They are from Arabic background having the same knowledge as I do and they are quiet few"*.

The above answers support Clyne's (1982), suggesting that language use in this friendship domain is governed by social relationships. The use of two languages within the same conversation is determined by communicating with multilingual friends, as the addressee is known to know both languages.

Employment domain

Another domain for code switching occurrences is the employment domain. The alternation between

Arabic and English took place in some of the participants' work places. Some work related domains reported by working participants are law firm office, travel agency, bank, and mechanic shop. Results show that the use of both languages within the same conversation at workplaces occurred with customers and clients who were often from the same or similar ethnic groups and known to be multilingual. For example P44, 43 years mechanic shop owner, said: *"I use Arabic and English at work we have business, our customers are 70-80% Arabs and they know English as well"*. Another participant P50, 52 years old, bank employee reported: *"I work in a financial company named: Arab Bank that catered more for Arabic background customers, so when I talk to the customers I use a combination of Arabic and English"*.

As for the younger participants P37, 27 years old woman, who is an employee at a travel agency explained: *"I use English and Arabic all the time at work. I work in travel agent the owners are Arabic-Australians, I deal the whole day with Arabic people from different nationalities"*.

Another example, P18, 30 years old lawyer, said: *"actually I mixed between Arabic and English at work, my law office. Majority of my clients are Ara-Australians. While conversing we use both languages"*.

In an exploration of several Australian places Clyne, (1991), contended that English is the official language where it tends to prevail, even in workplaces that employed people from different language backgrounds. In these work places, English acted as lingua franca while immigrant languages were commonly more used in informal interactions with co-worker. Differently to Clyne (1991), for some workers/employees participants in the present study, Arabic was used alongside English.

Transactional domains

Transactional domains refer to the contact with the ethnic language in public domain such as shops and restaurants (Clyne & Kipp, 1999). In these domains interactions were carried out frequently in Arabic and English. Few participants reported to alternate in different public places including Arabic doctors, Arabic shops, and Arabic restaurants. Participants' answers reflect that the participants are frequenting shops where the owners are bilinguals. For instance P18, 25 years old man, echoed: "I use Arabic and English if I have to pick some groceries for mom at the Arabic shop and if I meet people there at the shop". Another response was reflected by P7, 48 years old woman, she explained: "I switch most of time. If the person speaks two languages you always mix between languages. If I know that he speaks Arabic I always mix it with English. For example if the doctor speaks Arabic I use English and Arabic. I always mix and few shops where the lady speaks Arabic". In similar vein P9, 57 years old housewife said: "I deal with Arabic bank, when I go there I English and Arabic". P14, a young 27 years old woman explained: "Usually I go to Arabic restaurants, when I talk to the waiter or waitress there, I switch between Arabic and English when I order food".

The above corresponds with other studies (Wu, 1995; Clyne & Kipp, 1999) which examined the domain of "transactions" such as cafés, restaurants or shops where members of immigrant community congregate and stopover.

Conclusion

This paper has explored domains of code switching among Arabic speaking communities in Australia. These domains offer the member of community the opportunity to use Arabic alongside English in a range of different places. It has shown that language alternation between Arabic and English occurred most notably in home/family with family members and relatives as well as with friends from the same Arabic background. For other participants, besides

home and friendship domains, they alternate between Arabic and English language in a number of different domains such as work, public and transactional domains. Informants deliberately choose using both languages to accommodate the perceived ability of the conversation partner. If the interlocutor is already known as bilingual speaker, conversation is established through a mix of English and Arabic language use.

Studying code switching in different domains would give information about the extent of heritage languages use. Suggestions for further studies would include the effort to explore the frequency of heritage language use and how this affects maintaining the language. This involves studying the domains of community language use as well as the dominant / majority language and its effect on reserving and

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