

## Code-switching and Code-mixing : A Case Study of Child Bilingualism in Iraq

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تغيير الشفرة اللغوية وخطها:

دراسة لحالة ازدواجية اللغة عند الأطفال في العراق

### الخلاصة :

تعد ظاهرة دراسة الثنائية اللغوية bilingualism في المجتمعات المتعددة الاثنيات واللغات من الدراسات اللغوية المهمة. تتناول هذه الدراسة ظاهرتي خلط اللغة code mixing وتغير اللغة code switching بين الأرامية الحديثة واللغة العربية لدى عينه من الاطفال الاشوريين دون سن المدرسة. توضح نتائج البحث ان هؤلاء الاطفال يعمدون الى خلط لغتهم الام (الاولى) الأرامية باللغة الوطنية (الثانية) العربية اثناء التواصل مع اقرانهم من القوميات الاخرى وعلى المستويين الصوتي والدلالي، وكذلك يقوم الاطفال بالانتقال بين اللغتين عند حدود العبارة utterance . تتطابق نتائج البحث مع نتائج الدراسات العالمية التي اجريت في مجتمعات متعددة الاعراق واللغات عن قابلية الاطفال في تمييز الانظمة اللغوية المختلفة في عمر مبكر.

كما تفترض الدراسة بان تقارب اللغتين الارامية والعربية في الجوانب الصوتية والنحوية والدلالية على اثر انحدارها من اصل واحد (اللغة السامية الام) قد يكون عاملا في شيوع هذه الظاهرة بين هؤلاء الاطفال.

### **Abstract**

The phenomenon of bilingualism is one of the most important characteristics of multilingual societies. This study is concerned with code mixing and code switching that take place among Assyrian children at pre-school level. The results of the study indicate that these children code-mix their mother language (Neo-Aramaic) with their native language ( Arabic) when interacting with their non-Assyrian playmates both on the phonological level and the semantic level. They also code-switch across utterances.

The results of the study comply with similar results obtained from studies conducted in multilingual societies in which children show linguistic ability in differentiating two language systems at an early age.

The study concludes by stating that the close similarity between Neo-Aramaic and Arabic (as they descend from one ancestor which is the Semitic language) could be a factor that makes this phenomenon widespread among the bilingual children.

### **Theoretical Background**

Code-switching is a very interesting aspect of bilingualism that has recently received considerable attention from linguists. It is defined as "the use of more than one language by communicants in the execution of a speech act"(1) or "the alteration of two languages"( 2) or " the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction."( 3)

The phenomenon of code-switching spreads widely among members of communities of minority languages in a country whose official language is that of the majority.(4) It becomes especially common if the bilingual's language is similar to that of the larger group he/ she is living in. For example, code-switching is much more practiced between English and French than between English and Chinese.(5)

Code-switching can involve a word, a phrase, or a sentence; it can involve several sentences. This alternate use of items from two language systems in the same utterance begins early in bilingual children. The facility with which young bilingual learns to use the two languages simultaneously is astonishing . Besides. children's code-switching is worthwhile studying since it is distinct from adult's code-switching in a number of ways. Recent research on bilingualism has already isolated these differences.

McClure(1977) shows that the Mexican Americans, who speak Spanish and English produce different types of code-switches depending on their age. Young children(below the age of nine)tend to put single items from one code into the other. The inserted items are mainly nouns, then adjectives of English in Spanish utterances. Older children ( over the age of nine), however, code-changed : they inserted at least a phrase or a sentence from one language into another.(6)

Similar results are obtained by Lindhol and Padilla in their study of the language mixes of a group of Spanish /English bilingual children whose ages range from two years and ten months to six years and two months. The mixes recorded are nouns, conjunctions, adjectives and adverbs.(7)

Linguists concerned with child code-switching have also focused on the possible reasons behind child's changing from one language to another. Edith Harding and Philp Riley ,for instance, find that bilingual children use switching as a marker of solidarity by changing their language to that of the person they are speaking to in order to reinforce the closeness of the relationship between speech them and her/him. Edith and Philip quote an example from Hildegard's speech in which this five-year old girl switches from German to English to establish more intimacy with her father. (8)

But as much code-switching serves as a linguistic device to establish closeness, the two researchers find that other bilingual

children attempt code-switching to “exclude” a person from their conversation by switching to the language that the person doesn't know. The example they give is about Philip, a seven years old boy, who switches from English to French so that the English guest who is present would not understand him when he is talking to his mother.(9) Code-switching, in this case ,had, what Rene Appel and Pieter Muyskn term as ‘a directive function’ in the sense that it involves the hearer directly.(10)

Another reason that encourages the bilingual child's shift from one language to another is his desire to expand his points or win an argument. McClure shows that in a dialogue which takes place between an investigator and a bilingual girl who switches from English to Spanish in order to resolve ambiguities and clarify her statement. The girl is only three years old.(11)

In Iraq, where a number of ethnic groups exist, code-switching is widespread among the bilingual members of the minority people such as Assyrians, Kurds, the Turkmens, and Armenians. These minorities speak their mother languages, which are different from Arabic, the language of the majority. Some of the minority languages are native such as Neo-Aramaic and Kurdish; others are foreign, such as Armenian.

Here, code-switching is common among adults and children. The bilingual speaker acquires his mother tongue by the assistance of his family members, relatives, and the members of his ethnic group. But, on the other hand, he/she is simultaneously exposed to Arabic, the official and dominant language of the country. The familiarity with Arabic becomes a necessity not only for communication and integration but also for obtaining education and employment.

### **Scope of the Study**

This paper covers some aspects of the phenomenon of code-switching that takes place among the Assyrian children , at preschool age, who are able to switch from their native language ,Neo- Aramaic (12) , to their second native language , Arabic .The study gives an account of cases where code-switching is complete (intersentential switching) , extending over the level of the single utterance, and cases where it is partial, occurring within the single utterance or sentence, both at lexical level and morphological level (usually referred to as code-mixing or intra-sentential switching )(13)

### **Data**

The data on which this study is based consist of some mixed speeches of a group of three Assyrian children (one male and two female) below the age of seven in Basrah. These children ,just like other bilingual children, were brought up to learn their language,Neo-Aramaic, by which they could communicate with their families, who do not usually use Arabic at home. Nevertheless , they often use colloquial Iraqi Arabic at considerable ease and their speech even sometimes include words that belong to Standard Arabic ,a language that they are in contact with through watching children's programs on television.

### **Data analysis and disccsion**

1-Contrary to the belief that complete and switching is more common in the language of bilingual children over the age of nine, it is noticeable that the above children considerably make shifts from Neo-Aramaic to Arabic or vice versa in situations which dictate the use of one particular code rather than the other. Two factors motivate the children to switch beyond the

level of the single utterance: firstly , the presence of a participant who does not belong to the speech community that they belong to; and, secondly , the presence of a setting or a situation that normally takes place in Arabic. Let us explain these two factors in some detail.

First of all , it seems that these children decide to switch to Arabic when there is a participant who is not a speaker of Neo-Aramaic. A typical example of this is clear when the children are at play with other playmates who are not Assyrian. the bilingual children change to communicate among themselves and when this participant Arabic gains grounds and persists to be the language used. The use of Arabic, in fact, makes all the children closer. In other words , the new code becomes not only a means of communication but also a means of integration.

The following dialogue is taken from a speech extract of two of the bilingual children .Both child(1) and child (2) were speaking Neo-Aramaic with some Arabic words occasionally , but when a third playmate child (3) who does not speak their mother tongue comes to join them, they switch to Arabic and use this language continuously over the level of the single sentence.

Child(1) addressing child (2) in Neo-Aramaic:

/tila ? maanii/ There comes Emaanee.

Child (1) to child (3) in Arabic now:

/ ta'aalii hnaa? Maanii xan-nil'ab suwa/ come here. Let's play together.

Child (1) to both children in Arabic:

/al mar uuha/ Let's go into the swing.

Child (1) to child(2) still in Arabic:

/ntiihal anta/ Give her the bag.

Child (2) rejects in Arabic:

/ma/ No.

Child (1) persuades child (2) in Arabic:

/yalla ma-yxaalif/ Come on. It's ok.

Child (3):

/ʔ riid il- aaba/ I want the doll.

Child (1) and child(2) addressing child(3) in Arabic:

/ma -il- aaba maalatana mu maaltit ? x i d anta ? i a tirdiin/

No, the doll is ours .It's not yours. Take the bag if you wish so.

A pause follows in which child (3) remains unwilling to accept  
The offer made to her by one of the bilingual children.

Child(1) to child(2) in Neo-Aramaic now:

/ta uqla talax bno an / Come along. Leave her.Let's play alone.

The preceding dialogue illustrates the ease with which the two bilingual children can change to Arabic for some time in order to communicate and integrate with the playmate who can not speak their language. Their first switch from Neo-Aramaic to Arabic was aimed at including a third party by using a language that was comprehensible to all of them. However, they switch back to their language to exclude the third party from their play. So as much as switching facilitates communication it also hinders it when the three children are no longer on good terms.

Next, complete code-switching is also evident when these children acted situations which normally take place in Arabic. Two obvious examples for this of switching is when they are

acting situations in which they are purchasing items at a grocery shop, and seeing a doctor. The children make shifts to Arabic since they know that Arabic is the language that is involved in such situations.

The following dialogue clarifies the bilingual children's ability to act their roles in Arabic. One of them being the customer and the other being the grocer.

The language that is chosen is Arabic.

Child(1), the customer:

/ ammi abuu Faaris ntiinii mota/ uncle Abu-Fari, give me an ice-cream

Child(2), the grocer:

/ween fluui / where is your money?

Child(1):

/?ariid mu-ilt iis/ I want the one in nylon.

Child(2):

/haat ammu / Here are, my little girl.

2- As to code-mixing, it is observed that these children insert items from one language into the other. These inserts are at large Arabic words put into short sentences in Neo Aramaic. Noun constitute the majority of these switches. The nouns inserted indicate names of objects that the children are familiar with. Below are some examples with the Arabic mixes underlined.

1- /? t i n d isir / There is a bridge

2- / bayan haliib / I want milk.

3- /?e : ad .arra / This tree.



- 4-/halli n aal/ Give me a flip-flop.  
5-/qa:lit did aad / The noise of hens.  
6-/ ke: na malaa ibi/ Where are my toys?  
7-/ litli makaan/ I have no room(to it).  
8-/ mti: li hel darad / I reached up to the stair case.

Other lexical inserts are adjectives. The bilingual children introduced Arabic adjectives that mostly indicated color and size in Neo-Aramaic utterances. Here are some examples:

- 1- / ? enne : girwe: aswad/ These black socks.  
2-/?e: abya / That white one  
3-/bayen o: t ibiir/ I want the big one.  
4-/diyi bi ahsan/ Mine is better.  
5-/zo: nin xe maato:r sgayyir/ I will buy a small motor-cycle.  
6-/?ana pl li wahdi / I remained alone.  
7-/ pe: en haafya/ I'll remain bare-footed.

Among the other lexical items that the children use in their speech are verbs. The examples below include some of the Arabic verb switches:

- 1-/qam daaf lii/ He pushed me.  
2-/qamu: liziglax/ Why did you fix it?  
3-/ka: si t wwirni/ I have a pain the stomach.  
4-/ko: si xirab/ My hair is ruffled.  
5-/?qlax tinkisir/ Your leg will break.

Other single word switches that are recognized in the children's utterances are adverbs and interrogative pronouns. The adverbs used indicate time, place and manner. The first three sentences contain Arabic verbs whereas the rest are mixed utterances with question words in Arabic:

- 1-/ mitine: hana / I will put it here.

- 2-/hesa na:pl/ Now it will fall.  
3-/? ate sarii/ It will come quickly.  
4-/wen ta:zax/ Where are we going?  
5-/ inu loat/ What are you going to wear?  
6-/Iee npille/ Why did it fall?

A remarkable insert word from Arabic is the negative particle "maa". It is observed that these children use this item abundantly to express a personal wish in negative in their mother tongue, and in their speech "maa" almost replaces its Neo-Aramaic counterpart "Ie". Here are some examples:

- 1-/ maa bayya ? azan/ I don't want to go.  
2- /maa ta:wer/ I want break.  
3-/maa bayyan ? axlan/ I don't want to eat.

The particle "muu" was also noticed in such mixed sentences:

- 1-/muu qerta / It's not cold.  
2-/muu ? owwa/ Not this one.

Another aspect of language mixing at the lexical level detected in the utterances of these children is the juxtaposition of counterparts of both languages. It is obvious that these children would bring add the Arabic word and use it along with its Neo-Aram-Aic equivalent in the same utterance .By doing so, the child is switching to repeat in a different code(Arabic) what is already stated in his/her mother tongue; his/her purpose is , by and large, expanding his/her point. The Arabic lexical words placed adjacent to their Neo-Aramaic counterparts consist mainly of nouns, adjectives and verbs. Below are some examples:

- 1- /mettex punda ama / we'd put a candle.

2-/hemzimli qeset ginawa haraami/ Tell me a story about thieves.

3-/ ta ta aal/ Come here.

4-/ qulle haat / Take it.

5-/ alli awwa smu:qa ?ahmar/ Give me the red one.

The children also mixed at the lexical level when inserting Arabic phrase into Neo-Aramaic utterances. The following examples illustrate some of these phrasal substitutions:

1-/ ? ItIn ba ad dugam/ There are more buttons.

2-/ ? tli hzaam hilu/ I have got a beautiful belt.

3- / x Illn tuffaaha t biira/ We ate a big apple.

At the morphological level, the influence of Arabic on the children language is observed in the transfer of the Arabic morpheme of plurality /aat/ into Neo-Aramaic singular nouns when these were changed into their plural forms. The following table shows some Neo-Aramaic nouns pluralized by these children and their original plural forms in Neo-Aramaic.

Nouns(sing)	Nouns(pl)	Original plural	meaning
1-fi:la	f:laaat	f:la:	elephants
2-nu:na	nu:naat	nu:ne:	Fish
3-su:sa	su:saat	su:se:	horses
4-xu:wwa	xu:wwaat	xu:wwe:	snakes
5-ki:sa	Ki:saat	Kisyate:	Paper bag
6-xmara	Xmaraat	Xmare:	donkeys

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing presentation makes it clear that Neo-Aramaic/Arabic code-switching and code-mixing ( partial code-switching ) are not uncommon among bilingual children namely Assyrian, in Iraq, the children use them as a strategy for the sake of communicating and integrating with the other members of the society, whether these are bilinguals or not.

The children show some ability in differentiating the two linguistic systems at an early age since they code-switching to Arabic and maintain using it beyond the level of the single utterance. This is specifically observed when the children are at play with their playmates in the presence of an-Arabic-speaking interlocutor and when the setting requires the use of the majority language, Arabic. In partial code-switching, on the other hand the children include different Arabic lexical items, such as nouns, adjectives, verbs and some particles in their short utterances. This, to some extent, coincides with the findings of the researchers cited at the beginning of this work. The children, too, switch to Arabic for a single morpheme such as that of plurality.

The skill with which the bilingual children interlock their two languages is probably reinforced by the fact that both Neo-Aramaic and Arabic are sisters languages that belong to the same language family, Semitic language, and have many features in common concerning sound systems ,vocabulary, and grammar.

### **Notes**

1-Francois Grosjean, Life with Two Languages(Harvard :Harvard University, Press, 1982).

2-G.Valdes Fallis , 'Social interaction and code-switching patterns: a case study of Spanish/ English alteration' .In Bilingualism in the bicentennial and beyond,ed.

G.keller, et al (New York: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingual: 1976).

3-C.Scott et al ' Bilingual strategies: the social functions of code-switching,' Linguistics 193(1977).p.5.20.

4-Farida Abu-Haidar,' Arabic with English: Borrowing and code-switching in Iraqi Arabic.' Abhath Al-Yarmouk, vol.6,No.7 (1988), p.49-50.

5-Marlene Dolitsky, ' A modal of bilingual semantics : intersecting and non-intersecting morphemes and their acquisition,' International Journal of Psycholinguistics , 1981/ 9003(23).

6-Grosjean,p.

7-Kathryn J. Lindholm and A.M.Padilla, 'Language mixing in bilingual children, In Child Language No.5(1977),p.327-335.

8-Edith Harding and Philip Pile, The Bilingual Family: A Handbook for Parents (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press,1987),p.59.

9-Ibid .

10- Appel and Muysken ,p.119.

11-Grosjean,p.204.

12-Neo-Aramaic, generally referred to as Assyrian, is a dialect of Aramaic, and it is Spoken by about 150,000 people in Iraq ,north east Syria, Lebanon, Iran and the former Soviet Union.

13- Appel and Muysken ,p.118.

#### Appendix (A)

##### List of Phonetic Symbols of Neo-Aramaic

###### Consonants

- 1-b voiced bilabial plosive
- 2-p voiceless unaspirated bilabial plosive
- 3-p voiceless aspirated bilabial plosive
- 4-d voiced denti-alveolar plosive
- 5-t voiceless unaspirated denti-alveolar plosive
- 6-th voiceless aspirated denti-alveolar plosive
- 7-g voiced palatal plosive
- 8-k voiceless unapirated palated plosive
- 9-kh voiceless aspirated palatal plosive
- 10-q voiceless unaspirated uvular plosive
- 11-? glottal stop
- 12-ts voiceless unaspirated palato-alvaclar affricate
- 13-ts voiceless aspirated palato-alveolar affricate
- 14-d3 voiced palato-alveolar affricate
- 15-s voiceless alveolar fricative
- 16-z voiced alveolar fricative
- 17-S voicless palato-alveolar fricative
- 18-3 voiced palato-alveolar fricative
- 19-x voiceless alveolar fricative
- 20-g voiced uvular fricative
- 21-h voiceless glottal fricative
- 22-I voiced alveolar lateral
- 23-r voiced akveolar tap
- 24-m voiced bilabial nasal

25-n voiced denti-aveolar nasal

#### Vowels

1-i almost fully close spread

2-I close to half-close spread

3-e half-close to half-open front

4-a half-open to open front unrounded

5-o half-close to half-open back rounded

6-u almost fully close back rounded

#### Semi Vowels

1-y voiced palatal

2-u voiced labio-velar

#### Appendix (B)

##### List of Phonetics of Iraqi Arabic

##### Consonants

1-ʔ glottal stop

2-b voiced bilabial plosive

3-p voiceless bilabial plosive

4-t voiceless dental plosive

5-8 voiceless interdental fricative

6-dʒ voiced palatal affricate

7- ts voiceless palatal affricate

8-h voiceless pharyngeal fricative

9-x voiceless velar fricative

10-d voiced dental plosive

11- voiced dental plosive

12-r alveolar flap generally voiced

13-z voiced dental fricative

14-s voiceless dental fricative

15-S voiceless palatal fricative

16-s voiceless dental fricative

- 17- voiceless interdental fricative
- 18-t voiceless dental plosive
- 19- voiced pharyngeal plosive
- 20-g voiced pharyngeal fricative
- 21-f voiceless labio-dental fricative
- 22-q voiceless post-aveolar plosive
- 23-g voiced velar plosive
- 24-k voiceless velar plosive
- 25-l voiced alveolar-dental lateral
- 26-l voiceless alveo-dental lateral(dark)
- 27-m voiced dental nasal
- 28-n voiced dental nasal
- 29-h voiceless glottal fricative

#### Vowels

- 1-a short low central
- 2-i short high front unrounded
- 3- short mid back rounded
- 4-u short high back rounded

- 6-e: long mid front unrounded
- 7-i: long high front unrounded
- 8-o: long mid back unrounded
- 9-u: long high back rounded

#### Semi –vowels

- 1-w voiced high back rounded
- 2-y voiced high front unrounded