Gender and linguistic background in SMS code-switching by Lebanese students

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Lebanese society has been always known for its multi-cultural and multi-lingual interactions, a natural product of which is code-switching. Nowadays code-switching is found in computer-mediated communication. In this study, a corpus of 606 SMS messages was collected from 18 Lebanese university students. The results indicate that there are gender distinctions in the code-switching percentages, and that language background as well as linguistic repertoire is relevant.

Keywords: Code-switching, SMS messages, bilingualism, multilingualism, sociolinguistics

Introduction

Due to the accelerated globalization process, the English language has become a lingua franca that brings many societies in the world together: it is the language of technology, science and education. Lebanese society is no exception; an increasing number of English words have become essential in aspects of young people's language. Lebanese students, both men and women, from different sociolinguistic backgrounds and different universities, have become accustomed to mixing Arabic and English in their daily communications.

Code-switching is the sociolinguistic phenomenon that corresponds to this alternation between languages. Bilingualism is considered the pillar of code-switching. Research on code-switching has shown that the behavior of code-switching among bilinguals is not confined to their spoken language; it embraces their written language as well.

This research seeks to add to knowledge of written code-switching, which "remains relatively unexplored and under-researched" regardless of the "variety of data" (Sebba 2012: 1). The findings should fill a gap in the studies

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that pertain to the phenomenon of code-switching between Arabic and English in computer-mediated communication on the one hand, and to the gender differences in SMS code-switching on the other. The study is aimed at investigating the gender differences in SMS code-switching among Lebanese undergraduates at different universities. It seeks to understand the correlations between gender and other variables within a sociolinguistic framework.

Literature review

Bilingualism

Although the core of this research is code-switching, it is of utmost importance to start with discussing bilingualism since code-switching is rooted in it, and has been always considered its natural product. Code-switching is "the most creative aspect of bilingual speech" (Hoffmann 1991: 109). Regardless of the attempts that have been made by linguists to find an explicit definition for bilingualism, this sociolinguistic phenomenon has not yet received a unanimous definition. Hoffmann (1991:14) says that "[t]he most salient feature of bilingualism is that it is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Whether one is considering it at a societal or an individual level, one has to accept that there can be no cut-off points". One of the earliest definitions is made by Bloomfield in his book Language in 1933 as the "native-like control of two languages", yet the definition was questionable as for the degree of proficiency required by a "native-like" speaker. One of the shortest definitions is offered by Weinreich, who is one of the founding fathers of bilingual studies and a bilingual himself, where he describes it as "' [t]he practice of alternately using two languages will be bilingualism, and the person involved, bilingual'" (Hoffmann 1991:15). The definition provided by Mackery is, more or less, the same as that of Weinreich; "we shall […] consider bilingualism as the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual" (Hoffmann 1991:16).

So, what about bilingualism in Lebanon? Lebanon has been always known for its multiculturalism and thus, multilingualism has shaped the attitudes of most Lebanese people. It is common among Lebanese people to say 'hi, kifak, cava?'(it means hi, how are you?, are you ok?), when they meet each other, and it is so obvious that three languages, English, Arabic and then French are used in this short statement. Thus, bilingualism is not a strange phenomenon in the Lebanese society; it is something you 'see', 'hear', 'feel', 'speak' and even 'touch' wherever you go in Lebanon. It "is mainly seen in the streets, on the billboards, the way people address each other, etc. Many people are bilingual, trilingual if not multilingual" (Chahine 2011: 1). The official language in Lebanon is Arabic, but English and French are the main

instructional languages in most of the schools and universities. Thonhauser (cited in Chahine 2012:2) says: "If you were to ask a Lebanese person what the language of Lebanon is, most people would say Arabic, but is it?" Chahine (2011: 2) believes that "English and French can be included in the Languages spoken in Lebanon". This interaction among languages in Lebanon could be attributed to different reasons, one being the geographical location of Lebanon, which enables it to be a country 'where East meets West'. Moreover, the phenomenon of immigration has been always rooted in the Lebanese society; it goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The French colonization in addition to globalization that is mostly characterized by the English language, have altogether contributed to this phenomenon.

Code-switching

Milroy and Muysken (1995: 12) believe that "the field of [code-switching] research is replete with a confusing range of terms descriptive of various aspects of the phenomenon. Sometimes the referential scope of a set of these terms overlaps and sometimes particular terms are used in different ways by different writers". According to Stockwell (2007: 11), most people "have a repertoire of codes" that even those who are monolingual are capable of switching codes "from casual to formal class". Wardhaugh (2006: 101) has indicated that it is "unusual" for a person "to have command of, or use, only one […] code or system". Whether this command is "a dialect, style, or register", it would be "an extremely rare phenomenon". Thus, for him bilingualism or even multilingualism "is the norm for people around the world rather than unilingualism". "People […] select a particular code whenever they choose to speak [or] shift from code to another or to mix codes even within sometimes very short utterances and thereby create a new code in a process known as [code-switching]" (Wardhaugh 2006: 101). Romaine (2000:55-9) defines code-switching as a "normal process for growing up bilingually and acquiring competence in more than one language". She says that many linguists have considered code-switching a natural "communicative option" that is available to bilinguals the same as "switching between styles and dialects is an option" for monolinguals. She deems that for both of them, switching "serves an expressive function and has meaning". In addition she believes that most linguists resort to the term 'code' to refer to the phenomenon of code-switching because it is like 'variety; "a neutral one and does not commit us to taking a decision as to whether the varieties or codes concerned constitute languages or dialects" (Romaine 2000: 61-2).

There are different forms of code-switching. It can take place "between speakers' turns and even within a speaker's turn". As for the second case, code-switching "can occur between sentences"-this is called inter-sentential code-switching-or "within a single sentence", which is intra-sentential code-switching (Wardhaugh 2006: 101). Stockwell (2007: 12) differentiates

between another two types of code-switching, situational code-switching and metaphorical code-switching. Situational code-switching is "[w]hen a speaker moves from one domain to another, and changes their code as a result" and when a speaker "can deliberately change codes in the middle of a situation, in order to indicate to the hearer that they consider a new domain to be in operation", this is called metaphorical code-switching. In the latter kind, it is done to achieve certain effects; aware of the shifts, while in the first people are usually unaware of it. In addition, Romaine draws a "symbolic distinction" between the 'we' code and the 'they' code as "embodied in the choice of varieties". As a general rule, "the tendency is for the minority language to be regarded as the 'we' and the majority language as the 'they' variety. The 'we' variety typically signifies in-group, personalized activities, while the 'they' variety marks out-groups, more formal relations" (Romaine 2000:60).

Moreover, Myers-Scotton (1995:113-43) provides three subcategories within the negotiation principle that is modeled according to Myers-Scotton, after Grice's "co-operative" principle. Myers-Scotton believes that the negotiation principle underlies all code choices, meanwhile, it "embodies the strongest and central claim of the [Markedness model]: that all code choices can ultimately be explained in terms of such speaker motivations". As for the subcategories they are the 'unmarked choice maxim', the 'marked choice maxim' and the 'exploratory choice maxim'.

Auer (1995: 115-16) provides another type of code-switching in his theory of conversational code-alternation, "which should be applicable to a wide range of conversational phenomena". Thus, the meaning of code-alternation is conditioned by its 'sequential condition', in other words, conversational interaction.

Previous studies

Al Rousan et al. (2011), Iqbal (2010) and Dunn and Dunn (2007) all provide insights on gender differences in mobile phone use and show that men and women are unalike in their motives and use of language. As for the findings related to text messages, Dunn and Dunn (2007: 9) report that in Jamaica, "younger respondents were far more active users of SMS text messaging than older respondents" and that "women tend to send more SMS text messages than men". Iqbal (2010) indicates that men and women have different communication motives for using SMS messages. Jagero and Odongo locate "obvious distinctive code-switching pattern between the two genders" in different ranks and age groups in Nairobi Kenya (Jagero and Odongo 2011: 10).

Wong (2006) discusses gender differences from the constructionist view that differences among men and women should not be studied apart from the

cultural and social backgrounds, as the differences are not only located between men and women but within the same gender as well (Wong 2006: 57).

Rafi (2012: 1) "examines the assumption that a great motor of SMS lives among females whose lexical and morpho-syntactic choices are different from males". In their study of code-switching on the Facebook wall-posts of 24 Indonesian students, Sukyadi et al. (2012) find differences in code-switching behaviors of men and women. They also detect differences in the language used by the same sex, which could be relevant to the constructionist view and to the findings of Wong (2006) as well.

Al-Khatib and Sabbah (2008) and Warschauer et al. (2002) are among the rare studies, or perhaps the only ones in the Arab world, that examine written code-switching behavior between Arabic and English in computer-mediated communication. Al-Khatib and Sabbah (2008: 1) is the only study that spots gender differences in SMS messages among university students, although it has a different approach from our research: it basically aims at examining the functions of the SMS code-switching in addition to "investigating the distribution of the switched elements by syntactic category".

Research question and hypotheses

This study aims to answer questions about code-switching in the SMS messages of undergraduates, both men and women. The main research question is whether there are gender differences in these messages. This question gives rise to the hypothesis that language background (monolingual or bulingual) affects the percentage of code-switching among men and women in different ways. A second hypothesis is that the more languages the participants are acquainted with, the higher the percentage of code-switching.

Methodology

In order to test this hypothesss, a pilot study was conducted.

A corpus of SMS text messages

A corpus of 606 SMS messages from a time span of two weeks to one month was collected from 18 undergraduates, 8 men and 10 women. There were 220 messages from men and 386 from women. All of the messages that included Arabic, even those that were totally written in Arabic, were written in

Romanized script. The Arabic that was used in the SMS messages was written in the Lebanese dialect, which is the language of communication in Lebanon.

Participants

There were 18 participants, 8 men and 10 women, from three different Lebanese universities, distributed as follows:

- Lebanese International University (LIU): 8 participants, 4 men and 4 women.
- Islamic University of Lebanon (IUL): 4 participants, 1 man and 3 women.
- Notre Dame University (NDU): 8 participants, 3 men and 3 women.

The participants will be referred to as LIU F1, NDU M2, etc. All of the participants are bilingual or multilingual Lebanese students whose native language is Arabic, except LIU F4 who is Lebanese-Armenian. All of them are students at Anglophone universities, and are either junior or sophomore students, except for LIU M3 who is a senior student.

Procedure

The students were asked to save and copy the SMS messages sent by them. They were informed that they should only submit the messages sent by them and not the ones they received (for reasons of privacy of information). The students were also informed that they had the right to delete any private messages they did not want to disclose, and that the content of their messages would be confidential and that their identities would remain anonymous. They were asked to categorize the receiver of each message: for example, a family member, a friend from the university or outside the university, a professor or others. They were also asked to identify the gender of the receivers, whether men or women. The SMS messages were then analyzed according to the research question and hypotheses.

This analysis was followed by a questionnaire and an interview with each subject.

Findings and Analysis

Upon collecting and analyzing the SMS messages, the findings show clearly that there is a difference in the code-switching of men and women when both language background and linguistic repertoire are examined.

Language background

The language background of the students was classified as bilingual or monolingual. This was deduced from the SMS messages, the questionnaire and the interview. The data are distributed as follows:

Table 1: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of monolingual background men

Men	Messages	Messages with CS	Messages without CS
LIU M2	11	10	1
LIU M3	20	8	12
LIU M4	38	4	34
Total	69	22	47
%		32%	68%

Table 1 and Table 2 show that the percentage of code-switching in the SMS messages of monolingual background men is 32% while it is 28% in the messages sent by men with a bilingual background.

Table 2: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of bilingual background men

Men	Messages	Messages with CS	Messages without CS
LIU M1	34	21	13
IUL M1	18	14	4
NDU M1	49	4	45
NDU M2	22	3	19
NDU M3	28	0	28
Total	151	42	109
%		28%	72%

Table 3 and Table 4 show that the percentage of code-switching in the SMS messages of monolingual background women is 39% while it is 65% in the messages sent by women with bilingual backgrounds.

Table 3: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of monolingual background women

Women	Messages	Messages with CS	Messages without CS
LIU F2	73	30	43
LIU F3	47	15	32
IUL F1	52	17	35
IUL F2	24	14	10
Total	196	76	120
%		39%	61%

Table 4: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of women with bilingual backgrounds

Women	Messages	Messages with CS	Messages without CS
LIU F1	46	32	14
LIU F4	30	19	11
IUL F3	22	15	7
NDU F1	29	13	16
NDU F2	26	19	7
NDU F3	37	25	12
Total	190	123	67
%		65%	35%

Table 5 and Table 6 show that the percentage of code-switching in the SMS messages of men and women with monolingual backgrounds is 37% while it is 48% in the messages sent by men and women with bilingual backgrounds.

Table 5: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of women and men with monolingual background

Women and men	Messages	Messages with CS	Messages without CS
Total	265	98	167
%		37%	63%

Table 6: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of women and men with bilingual backgrounds

Women and men	Messages	Messages with CS	Messages without CS
Total	341	165	176
%		48%	52%

From all of the above tables, it is obvious that subjects from a bilingual background code-switch more than those from a monolingual background; 39% and 65% for groups of women and 37% and 48% for groups of men and women. However, the findings suggest that men from bilingual backgrounds code-switch less than men from monolingual backgrounds: 32% and 28% respectively. These results confirm that code-switching in SMS messages is not the same among men and women, and that it differs according to the language background.

Linguistic repertoire

In this part, I will discuss the effect of multilingualism on code-switching in these SMS messages. By multilingualism I mean the use of more than two languages. In the case of our participants, all NDU students, men and women, in addition to LIU F4, who is an Armenian native speaker, are fluent in

French. For this purpose, I will compare the percentage of code-switching among the multilingual participants, both men and women, with those who are bilinguals.

Table 7 and Table 8 show that the percentage of code-switching in the SMS messages of bilingual men is 47% while it is only 7% in the messages sent by multilingual men.

Table 7: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of bilingual men

Bilingual Men	**Messages**	**Messages with CS**
LIU M1	34	21
LIU M2	11	10
LIU M3	20	8
LIU M4	38	4
IUL M1	18	14
Total	121	57
%		47%

Table 8: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of multilingual men

Multilingual Men	**Messages**	**Messages with CS**
NDU M1	49	4
NDU M2	22	3
NDU M3	28	0
Total	99	7
%		7%

Table 9 and Table 10 show that the percentage of code-switching in SMS messages of bilingual women is 47%, while it is 62% in the case of multilingual women.

Table 9: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of bilingual women

Bilingual Women	**Messages**	**Messages with CS**
LIU F1	46	32
LIU F2	73	30
LIU F3	47	15
IUL F1	52	17
IUL F2	24	14
IUL F3	22	15
Total	264	123
%		47%

Table 10: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of multilingual women

Multilingual Women	Messages	Messages with CS
LIU F4	30	19
NDU F1	29	13
NDU F2	26	19
NDU F3	37	25
Total	122	76
%		62%

Table 11 and Table 12 show that the percentage of code-switching in the SMS messages of bilingual men and women is 47%, while it is 38% in the messages sent by multilingual men and women.

Table 11: Percentage of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of bilinguals

Bilinguals	Messages	Messages with CS
LIU F1	46	32
LIU F2	73	30
LIU F3	47	15
IUL F1	52	17
IUL F2	24	14
IUL F3	22	15
LIU M1	34	21
LIU M2	11	10
LIU M3	20	8
LIU M4	38	4
IUL M1	18	14
total	385	180
%		47%

Table 12: Percentage of of code-switching messages in code-switching messages of multilinguals

Multilinguals	Messages	Messages with CS
LIU F4	30	19
NDU F1	29	13
NDU F2	26	19
NDU F3	37	25
NDU M1	49	4
NDU M2	22	3
NDU M3	28	0
Total	221	83
%		38%

Again, the findings show that there are clear gender differences in the SMS code-switching: multilingual women code-switch much more than multilingual men (62% and 7% respectively). On the other hand, the group of multilingual men and women code-switch less than the bilingual group (38%

and 47%). However, there are no gender differences in the SMS code-switching of bilingual men and women: the percentage is 47% for both groups. Once more, these results indicate that the linguistic repertoire has a role to play in the phenomenon of SMS code-switching.

Discussion

In the results of the last section, gender has been found to correlate with various sociolinguistic variables that are interwoven in such a way that it is difficult to study the code-switching of men and women separately. As Gardner-Chloros (2009: 82) puts it, "[c]ode-switching cannot be correlated in any direct way with gender, but interacts with a large number of intervening variables which are themselves connected with gender issues". The findings of this study are similar to those of Jagero and Odongo (2011), who detected clear differences in code-switching between the genders. Similarly, in their study of code-switching on the Facebook wall posts of Indonesian students, Sukyadi et al. (2012) found differences in the code-switching behavior of men and women.

Various gender differences have been tackled in the analysis of the data. First, the results show that language background affects the percentage of code-switching among men and women, confirming my initial hypothesis.

In general, bilinguals have reported a higher percentage of code-switching, but when gender is taken as a variable, the results are different. Multilingual women have a higher percentage of code-switching than bilingual women; on the other hand, bilingual men code-switch more than multilingual men. Further, the percentage of code-switching in the messages of the multilingual group is less than that of the bilingual group. In the light of these results, the second hypothesis, that the more languages the participants are acquainted with, the higher the percentage of code-switching, has been proven valid only when women are concerned. This is closely correlated with Eckert's famous study on the "Jocks" and "Burnouts" in a high school in Detroit, where she found that "gender does not have a uniform effect on linguistic behavior for the community as a whole, across variables, or for that matter for any individual [and that it] is a social construction and may enter into any of a variety of interactions with other social phenomena" (Eckert 1989: 258).

Conclusion

As texting has become a worldwide phenomenon, research has tackled distinctions within these SMS messages. Differences "have been noted between youngsters and adults" (Crystal 2008: 32). Huffaker and Calvert

believe that adolescents are capable of forming their "online identity" through "gender similarities and differences in language use" (2005).

New studies have revealed that code-switching in young people's SMS messages is governed by diverse factors and reflects different aspects of the users. Indeed, the bilingualism that has shaped many societies around the world has also reshaped the way teenagers write their SMS messages, to an extent that code-switching has become the norm in these messages.

The findings of this study have revealed that gender differences in code-switching in these text messages are not that simple, and that they are interwoven within a set of sociolinguistic variables concerning language background. This suggests that there is something inadequate in traditional approaches that generalize gender differences internationally. As Wong (2006: 12) puts it, "researchers should pay more attention to the interaction of gender and other social constructions of identities in a particular culture rather than focusing on gender as a global category."

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