

AMAL ABUTAYEH
Independent researcher

Code-switching on Facebook among Jordanians

Abstract

Over the past years, the Internet has become a tool of communication among different people in the world. Due to the spread of the Internet, many researchers have focused their attention on the study of language use through the Internet. Code-switching is one of the sociolinguistic phenomena that have been observed in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). The present paper explores the sociolinguistic phenomenon of code-switching in computer mediated communication by Jordanians. The study highlighted several English words that have been utilized for code-switching through online interaction. Furthermore, it studied the participants' views about the role of Facebook in mixing Arabic with English. The methodology used in this study was descriptive, involving both qualitative and quantitative methods. An online questionnaire was shared on Facebook pages and groups. The sample included 181 participants; in addition, 35 interviews took place at home with relatives, with neighbors and in shops. The results revealed several perspectives about code-switching. Some participants mentioned that Facebook has led them to code-switch by using the most frequently switched words, such as; *comment, like, group, share*. Nevertheless, other participants mentioned that they prefer to use Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and avoid using any English words in online activities, which means that Facebook has no impact on their language. A higher percentage of participants agreed that Facebook plays a role in mixing Arabic with English.

Keywords: code-switching, Facebook, computer-mediated communication

1. Introduction

In the world of globalization, speaking two languages has become a norm in a bilingual society. These days, people switch codes in daily speeches to obtain interactional purposes, exchange ideas, and share knowledge with other speakers. Improving communication skills in several languages allows multilingual speakers to convey their messages and feelings. As Wong (2000) mentioned, bilingual speakers exploit their linguistic repertoire to express their ideas and thoughts as cited in Iqbal (2011: 89).

Facebook, as one of the most popular social media websites on the Internet, is a place where appearance of code switching is frequent. Facebook members usually switch from one language to another through online communication. Users tend to mix and switch their languages instead of using a particular

language, which is considered a natural act made by bilinguals and multilinguals (Brice and Brice 2009). Code-switching is a universal sociolinguistic phenomenon, it has received attention of many researchers. According to Myers-Scotton (1993: 47) code switching refers to the “use of two or more languages in the same conversation, usually within the same conversational turn, or even within the same sentence of that turn.” and as “juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” Gumperz (1982: 59). Wardhaugh (2010) defined code-switching as a process that happens when people choose a particular code when they speak and they may also switch from one code to another or even combine codes to create a new code. Poplack (2000) mentioned that code-switching is the ability to speak two or more languages fluently and the ability to understand two or more languages fully but not necessarily being able to speak them fluently. In addition, Gardner-Chloros (2009) defined code-switching as a phenomenon observed in bilingual communication, when people who speak the same two languages or dialects shift from one to the other in the same conversation or sentence. So with the appearance of social media sites, code-switching has appeared in Jordanians’ online interactions, since English is considered as the dominant foreign language in Jordan, particularly in the past era, they tend to use some English words such as break, update comment, like, and mention, although there are Arabic equivalents for those foreign words.

2. Jordan’s Sociolinguistic Profile

The Kingdom of Jordan has a rich history as any other nation in the world. Jordan is an Arabic speaking country located in the Middle East. The official language of Jordan is Arabic, also known as Modern Standard Arabic, which is used in formal context as in schools, media, parliament, court, and other governmental institutions, in addition to non-standard Arabic known as Jordanian dialects which are used in informal settings.

According to Arab sociolinguists (Abd-Eljawad 1987; Alkhateeb 1988; Al-Sughayer 1990; Sakarnah 2005), Jordanian Arabic is categorized into three main dialects based on economic diversity and geographical boundaries. Jordanian Arabic dialects include the rural dialect which is spoken in villages and suburbs of the main Jordanian cities; the Bedouin dialect which is spread in southern and eastern areas of Jordan; and the Urban dialect which is used in the main cities like Amman (Abd-Eljawad 1987). In the early 1920s, English had been brought into Jordanian schools and taught in a few urban centers: Al-Salt, Irbid, and Al-Karak. Teaching English was only based on the grammar-translation model and no specific curricula and textbooks were used (Hamdan and Abu Hatab 2009). English language is considered as a foreign language in Jordan, it was the first foreign language to be educated before and after the independence of Jordan in 1946, Jordan was occupied by Great Britain from 1916–1946. After the independence, all Jordanian public and private schools started to teach English at the early age of eleven. After the 1990s, the Ministry of Education has taken procedures to teach the English language from the first grade at the age of six, it is a mandatory course that all students should take and the lessons are conducted for one hour and one session a week (Drbseh 2013). In addition, Jordanian universities provide foreign languages specializations, such as Spanish, Italian, German, Russian alongside English language majors; there is an increasing number of students in the departments of English in different

public and private universities. Beside, English is the language teaching of many scientific fields, such as medicine, engineering, and computer sciences.

The main purpose of the current study is to reveal code-switching among Jordanians in computer mediated communication. In more details, the study focuses on some English words used by Jordanians during online communication. The study also aims to reveal the Jordanians perspectives on mixing Arabic with English during online activities.

3. Research studies related to code switching

Code switching is a rich topic, it has attracted the attention of many researchers particularly in online communication such as Montes-Alcala` (2007), Goldberg (2009), Huang (2004), Axelsson, Abelin, and Schroeder (2003), Al-Tamimi and Gorgis (2007) Bader (1995), Redouane (2005), Ghanem (2011) and Warschauer, El Said, and Zohry (2006) conducted research related to code-switching in electronic communication.

A study was conducted by Montes-Alcala` (2007) to examine why and when bilinguals code-switched in blogs. The data contain 15 Spanish-English blogs from 2005 to 2006. One hundred and fifty pages were discussed. Blogs that had two separate pages for English and Spanish posts were excluded. The researcher came to a conclusion that bilingual bloggers switched mostly for lexical and emphatic reasons. Another purpose for code-switching was to show “the degree of familiarity that the individual possessed with both Hispanic and Anglo worlds” (Montes-Alcala 2007: 169).

Goldberg (2009) examined Spanish-English code switching in email communication among five native speakers of Spanish who also spoke English fluently. The results revealed that English was used for professional and work-related matter and minority language for situation.

Huang (2004) conducted research on language choice and use in emails interchanges used for interpersonal communication written by eight Chinese- English bilinguals in Taiwan. He revealed that English is used for Internet and international identity, also for technology and academic topics, while Chinese is used to express their personal thoughts and ideas and used in traditional contexts. (as cited in Cardenas-Claros and Isharyanti 2009: 72). Cardenas-Claros and Isharyanti (2009) studied the phenomenon of code switching in CMC or particularly Internet chat room conversations of non-native English users from both Spanish and Indonesian backgrounds.

Fong (2011) examined the occurrences of code switching in CMC among Mandarin Chinese-English bilingual university students on Facebook to examine the various functions and reasons for code-switching.

Axelsson, Abelin, and Schroeder (2003) found out several national languages interact in Active Worlds, they examined when the participants used other languages instead of English language. The data collecting procedure was based on the observation of text interactions among Active World users. The results also showed that non-English speakers, who are generally bilingual, were willing to switch to English even in environments where the majority of the users were non-English speaking.

Though the official language in Jordan is Arabic, the importance of English as a foreign language is increasing rapidly. English is taught as a compulsory subject at primary, secondary, and higher levels, it also has become the medium of instruction in most of the universities. Therefore, there are many

studies that have discussed the use of English from many perspectives: code-mixing, code-switching, using English in online interaction. Al-Tamimi and Gorgis (2007) conducted a study among students in Jordan about code switching between Arabic and English. The data collected based on 1098 emails sent by 257 undergraduate students and on 1400 chat turns exchanged between nick-named senders, as well as in an eight-page conversation run by seven participants, all of whom have a workable knowledge of English. The results revealed that the majority of students in Jordan code-switch between Arabic and English when writing e-mails and text messages. Another researcher interested in the use of English in Jordan is Bader (1995: 14), who found that there is frequent use of English words and expressions in Jordan. He mentioned some of these expressions: Is that right?, What do you mean?, I don't think so, not at all, nothing new under the sun, so on and so forth, it doesn't matter.

Redouane (2005) conducted a study to investigate whether code-switching and code-mixing between Moroccan Arabic and French depend on the contrasting synthetic properties of the language involved. The participants selected were bilinguals speaking Moroccan Arabic and French. The conversations were recorded through phone calls. The findings of this study have highlighted the speech of these Moroccans Arabic-French involved varied switches between French and Arabic in both formal and informal settings.

Ghanem (2011) presented 'Arabizi (Romanization) as a language that destroys the mother tongue of the speaker. She stated in her article that most Arab Internet users find typing in Arabizi easier than typing in Arabic. Teachers fear that this will weaken their Arabic language ability or could replace the language in the future. Arabic professors from the Arab world consider it a threat to the Arabic language which will make it disappear in the long run.

Additionally, Warschauer, El Said, and Zohry (2006) studied the use of English and Arabic by a group of young professionals in online communication. Investigating circumstances, and reasons behind using English and Arabic in computer-mediated communication by this group of the first generation of Internet users in Egypt. The sample included 43 young Internet users in Cairo, with 23 men and 20 women. The paper involved linguistic analysis, a survey, and interviews to study English and Arabic language use in online communications. The findings found out that English is used mainly in web use and in formal e-mail communication while a Romanized version of Egyptian Arabic is used widely in informal emails and online conversation. As well as four factors of using English; general dominance of English in the professional milieu, lack of Arabic software standards, computer and Internet use learned in English environments and early adopters' fluency in English.

4. Significance of the study

The researcher believes that code switching in CMC is an interesting topic; it has attracted the attention of many scholars over the past years. The present study can be significant by offering valuable and additional information to researchers and students who are interested in this topic. Beside, this study can increase the readers' knowledge about main English words that have been used among Jordanians in online activities.

5. Limitations of the study

The major limitations of the study are that the survey was administered to a small size of sample chosen to participate in the research, which doesn't allow for a generalization of the findings to all Jordanians. In addition, as the current study was conducted in the first semester of the year 2018/2019, the researcher would like to mention that the findings are limited to time and the instruments used in this study. Nevertheless, the study has provided beneficial information about code-switching in CMC by Jordanians.

6. Methodology

6.1. Objectives

The main objectives of the current study is to highlight the most common frequently used English words that Jordanians tend to switch to when they communicate on Facebook, and discover their perspectives about whether social media (Facebook) has a role to mix their native language (Arabic language) with English language.

6.2. Research questions

This paper focuses on the following main questions:

1. Has Facebook influenced the way you speak on computer mediated communication (Facebook) by switching to English terms? If so, how?
2. Does Facebook play a role in leading you to mix your native language with English?

6.3. Participants

The participants involved in this study are 181 Jordanians living in Jordan. Female participants are form about 58% of the sample and 42% are males, of different ages and different educational backgrounds.

Data collection procedures

The study is addressed to discover the main English words that participants tend to use when switch from Arabic to English language and to reveal their opinions about the impact of computer mediated communication (Facebook) on mixing Arabic language with English. To achieve these aims, the researcher used both an online questionnaire and interviews instruments, the questionnaire was designed in August 2018 in Arabic language and English copy was constructed for research purposes. Later after consultation with the supervisor, the questionnaire was shared in several Facebook groups and pages. While interviews took place at home with relatives, with neighbors and at shops in January 2019, 35 interviewees were chosen to interview.

Data analysis of the questionnaire is limited to the descriptive statistics using graphs. All data collected through the survey coded and analyzed to obtain the results and fulfilled the objectives of the study. The interviews were transcribed and the written transcripts were studied and translated to English.

7. Results and discussion

7.1. Results of question one:

There are several responses to this question in the interviews, some of the respondents agree that Facebook has changed and influenced the way they write and speak Arabic. They think that Facebook has an important role to switch to English words, according to some respondents; they mentioned that those English terms are easy to use comparing to equivalents Arabic, and they prefer to write them in Arabic scripts (the researcher would like to mention that the respondents tend to use these English terms inside Facebook context). Here are some examples that have been mentioned by the participants: comment, share, tag, mention, like, privacy and group.

The following quotes from participants' answers show their views about the role of Facebook in influencing their language:

"Yes, social media has changed the way I speak Arabic, for example; I use the word *like* instead of the equivalent Arabic (*Ea'jab*)", another respondent mentioned that: "Yes, it has changed, only some words, for instance; *comment*, *like* and *share*". Another participant agreed that Facebook plays an important role by switching to English through online activities, by saying: "Yes, for instance, *tag*, *mention*, *like*, *comment*, *page* and *group*" also another participant agreed that Facebook has a role to get some English terms, the answer was as following: "I use the word *account* instead of *hisāb*, *share* instead of *mušāraka*, I also use *privacy* instead of *huṣūṣiyya*, etc". The same answers shared by other participants: "Yes, I use the word *post* instead of *manšūr*" and "Yes, for instance, *like* instead of the Arabic equivalent *i 'ġāb*". Also "I use the word *page* instead of *ṣafḥa*" (all the examples as data were Romanized by the author). Those answers support Bader's study which showed that there is possibility to use English words and expressions in Jordan society. Also (Al-Tamimi & Gorgis 2007; Warschauer, El Said, & Zohry 2006), which revealed possibility for switching between Arabic and English. Based on the observation of the posts and comments on Facebook, the researcher would like to mention that those results are not surprising; Jordanians usually prefer switching to English in their online communication.

On the other hand, some participants believe that Facebook has no effect on the way they speak and write Arabic, they prefer to share comments and posts in MSA without switching to the English language. They also avoid using English loan words or Arabizi. In addition, they feel annoyed because of some new English words that have been used in the Arabic language in their daily conversation. As mentioned in the following quotes:

“No, because I usually speak and write in MSA, that’s why nothing has changed”, another one doesn’t think that Facebook has any effect on the Arabic language, the answer as follows: “No, it hasn’t changed, because I prefer to write in Arabic language and don’t accept new language like Arabizi”. Also another respondent mentioned that: “I use only Arabic without change the word or writing English word in Arabic script”. Other participants were not satisfied about the role of Facebook in integrating Arabic with English language, they mentioned: “Unfortunately, yes, Facebook becomes an important tool that influences the usage of Arabic vocabulary and replaces them with English equivalent”, and another participant doesn’t think that Facebook has an impact on the Arabic language: “No, I don’t like to use borrowed words; every language has its terms”. It is observed from those answers that participants refused to use any English words on their online interactions; they prefer to have all conversations in Arabic without any code-switching or (borrowed words) as they mentioned. This is similar to what Ghanem (2011) presented that Arabizi is a threat to Arabic language.

According to the previous answers, the researcher could explain the responses as follows:

Table 1: Participant’s perspectives towards Facebook impact on language usage

Categories	Code counts	Percentage %
changed	29	83%
No change	6	17%
	Total 35	100%

Table 2: Code counts of the most used English words

Keywords/ categories	Code counts	Percentage %
Like	34	27%
Comment	20	16%
Share	17	14%
Group	16	13%
Page	16	13%
Mention	10	8%
Tag	4	3%
Account	3	2%
Privacy	3	2%
Post	2	2%
	Total 135 words	100%

7.2. Results of question two:

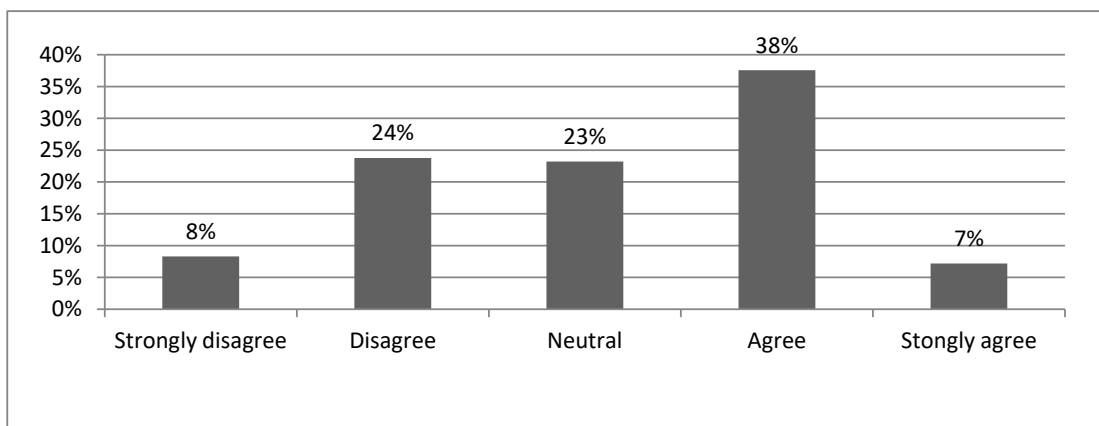


Figure 1: Participants' perspectives towards the role of Facebook in mixing their native language with English language

It is clear that there are several opinions about the role of Facebook in mixing Arabic with English. As the figure shows, the highest percentage 38% of participants agreed that Facebook plays an important role in mixing their Arabic with English, 7% of participants strongly agree, 24% of participants disagree, 8% of the participants strongly disagree, while 42 (23%) of participants remained neutral. According to their answers, the presence of code switching is existed in their online communication which supports (Al-Tamimi and Gorgis 2007; Bader 1995; Redouane, 2005) studies.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The researcher could conclude that code switching in computer mediated communication is predominant among Jordanians. The findings revealed that the highest percentage of participants agreed to the effect of Facebook in mixing Arabic with English by using some English words in their online conversations. In addition, there were different views about Arabic-English switching by participants, and also they mentioned some English words such as; *comment, like, mention, share*. In contrast, the rest of participants mentioned they avoid using English words in their posts, they prefer to post in MSA without any English words.

Arabic-English code switching is very interesting topic. It would be great to gain new information and knowledge if different reasons, functions and factors behind this phenomenon considered when conducting future studies regarding this topic.

References

Abd-Eljawad, Hassan (1987) "Cross-dialectal variation in Arabic: Competing prestigious form." [In:] *Language in Society*, vol. 16, issue 3 [18 December 2008]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 359–367.

- Alkhateeb, Mahmoud (1988) "Sociolinguistic change in an expanding urban center: A case study of Irbid City, Jordan." PhD Dissertation published at the University of Durham.
- Al-Sughayer, Khalil (1990) Aspects of comparative Jordanian and modern standard. PhD Dissertation published at Michigan State University.
- Al-Tamimi, Yaser, Gorgis Dinha (2007) "Romanised Jordanian Arabic E-messages." [In:] *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture* vol. 21; 21–34.
- Axelsson, Ann-Sofie, Åsa Abelin, Ralph Schroeder (2003) "Any one speak Spanish? Language encounters in multi-user virtual environments and the influence of technology." [In:] *New Media and Society*; 475–498.
- Bader, Yousef (1995) "Code-switching to English in daily conversations in Jordan: Factors and attitudes." [In:] *Abhath Al-Yarmouk Journal* vol. 13; 9–17.
- Brice, Alejandro, Roanne, Brice (2009) *Language development: Monolingual and bilingual acquisition*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Cardenas-Claros, Mónica, Isharyanti Neny (2009) "Code switching and code mixing in Internet chatting: case study." [In:] *The JALLT CALL Journal*, vol. 5; 67–78.
- Drbseh, Maged (2013) "The spread of English language in Jordan." [In:] *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, vol. 3; 1–5.
- Fong, Choy Wai (March 2011) "Functions and Reasons for Code-switching by Utar English- Mandarin Chinese Bilingual Undergraduates." A Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) English Language Faculty of Arts And Social Science Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.utar.edu.my/263/1/EL-2011-0803813-1.pdf> [date of access: 13.3.2020].
- Gardner-Chloros, Penelope (2009) *Code-switching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ghanem, Renad (2011) "Arabizi is destroying the Arabic language." Retrieved from ARAB NEWS: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/374897> [date of access: 12.4.2020].
- Goldbarg, Rosalyn N. (2009) "Spanish English code switching in Email communication." [In:] *Language@Internet*, vol. 6; 1–21.
- Gumperz, John J. (1982) *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamdan, Jihad. M., Wafa Abu Hatab (2009) "English in the Jordanian context." [In:] *World Englishes*, vol. 28; 394–405.
- Heller, Monica, Carol W. Pfaff (1996) "Code-switching." [In:] Hans Goebel, Peter H. Nelde, Zdenek Stary, Wolfgang Wölck (eds.) *Kontaktlinguistik / Contact linguistics*, vol. 1. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter; 594–609.
- Huang, Daphne Li-jung (2004) "Language use in asynchronous computer mediated communication in Taiwan." [In:] *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 32; 1–22.
- Iqbal, Liaqat (2011) "Linguistic Features of Code-Switching: A Study of Urdu/English Bilingual Teachers' Classroom Interactions." [In:] *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 1; 188–194.
- Montes-Alcalá, Cecilia (2007) "Blogging in two languages: Code-switching in bilingual blogs." [In:] Jonathan Holmquist, Augusto Lorenzino, Lotfi Sayahi (eds.) *Selected proceedings of the third workshop on Spanish sociolinguistics*. Somerville, Massachusetts: Cascadilla Proceedings Projects; 162–170.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol (1993) *Social motivations for codeswitching. Evidence from Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Poplack, Shana (2000) *The English History of African American English*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Redouane, Rabia (2005) "Linguistic Constraints on Code Switching and Code mixing of Bilingual Moroccan Arabic-French Speakers in Canada." [In:] *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism*. Somerville: Cascadilla Press; 19–33.

- Sakarnah, Ahmad (2005) *The linguistic status of modern Jordanian dialects*. Leiden: Brill.
- Wardhaugh, Ronald (2010) *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Warschauer, Mark, Ghada El Said, Ayman Zohry (2006) "Language choice online: Globalization and identity in Egypt." Retrieved from *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2002.tb00157.x> [date of access: 25.9.2020].
- Woolard, Kathryn (2005) "Codeswitching" [In:] Alessandro Duranti (ed.) *A companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Malden: Blackwell; 73–94.