

Why Do Algerians Code Switch on Facebook? Attitudes and Motives

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ABSTRACT: *As Facebook has expeditiously developed into one of the best-liked modes of communication on the Internet, language has also been inveigled in terms of its use, usage and practices. Code-switching (CS), the alternate use of more than one language in a discourse, is one of the language phenomena which have demonstrated actual infiltration, connotation and implication on language production and exchange among Algerian Facebook users. This research investigates attitudes that lie behind the manifestation of such language switching. The present work aims to raise its problematic in the multilingual Arabic-French-English Facebook discourse of young Algerian University students of English living in Oran. Our corpus consists of 75 participants. Data was gathered from a questionnaire which was administered to explore attitudes towards Arabic, French and English language use in concordance with code switching phenominality in online written discourse. Collected data was quantified, analysed and discussed. Results showed that a great majority of the respondents code-switch in Facebook. Furthermore, it is found that students are highly positive in their attitudes toward the use of code-switching in Facebook communication. It is suggested that many of the Algerian Facebook users employ CS as a tool not only to enhance socializing but also academic activities.*

KEYWORDS: Sociolinguistics, Bilingualism, Multilingualism, Language Change, Online Language, Facebook, Attitudes.

1. Introduction

For several decades, the bilingual behavior of individuals has been a gripping subject of study for several linguists, anthropologists and sociologists. This bilingual behavior is built on individual communication carried out in a situation of language contact: it takes various forms, among others, code switching (CS), code mixing (CM), borrowing...etc.

Weinreich, in 1953, contends about the process of bilingual language use and argues that there are factors that set the dominance of one language over the other as order of acquisition, usefulness, age, social function, and cultural value. Crystal (1985), on the other hand, considers that bilingualism or multilingualism occurs when individuals need to interact with others in order to cope with social situations, thus, they use two languages to show intimacy or distance of solidarity, prestige or power.

Among the scholarly community investigating language contact phenomena, it is undeniable to reflect on the imprecision and ambiguity surrounding definitions of bilingualism and language contact phenomena. It is somehow misleading -and to some extent confusing- to consider how the terminology varies from one author to another. By virtue of these differences, we have decided to present the definitions of bilingual phenomena as found in the abundant literature and specify those which have been chosen for this study.

In fact, the sociolinguistic situation in Algeria is characterized by the presence of three main language varieties. First, the Arabic language with its different varieties namely Classical Arabic (CA), Algerian Arabic (A.A) and Modern Standard Arabic (M.S.A). Second, the Berber language (B), and third the French language (FR).

From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, Algeria can be identified as a multilingual and a multicultural country. Algeria, like many countries in the world, offers a fairly rich panorama in terms of multilingualism. This situation does not fail to generate questions about the future of languages in Algeria. In fact, Algeria's linguistic situation mirrors many fractures that are shaking today the society. Languages in use, Arabic, French and

Berber, whose co-presence stems out from the very history of the Maghreb experience and history, are in an inmost linguistic crisis. Yet, creativity characterizes Algerians' language use whose immediate language communication needs make them create a convivial synergy and tolerance between the languages they speak.

In point of fact, there is a great linguistic and cultural diversity which makes the Algerians manipulate a good number of languages according to needs and contexts. Language contact situations between the above named languages or varieties mark the diversity of values, norms, standards of language use and grammatical rules that transcend commonly recognized ethnic boundaries; and all this will unquestionably generate code switching and code mixing instances.

In this research work, our scheme concerns questioning attitudes towards language mixing phenomenality in Algeria in the field of social networking and more specifically that of Facebook used by University students of English.

2. Literature Review

In this section, we will first set the terrain about the language contact phenomena in general terms. We will, then, unveil the phenomena in relation to the social networking episode which will be scrutinized in this research.

2.1 Language Contact Phenomena

As broached by Weinreich (1953), the notion of language contact includes any situation in which the simultaneous presence of two languages affects the language behavior of an individual (Moreau, 1997) or of a linguistic community. It is at the heart of linguistic change and variation, in diachronic analysis as in the synchronic one and is part of spaces with shifting borders, variable according to migrations, but also economic and cultural openings and closings or political projects (colonization , external cultural domination...etc.). It is also concerned with the relationships and interferences between languages, on the one

hand, and between varieties of the same language, on the other hand, from a synchronic or diachronic point of view.

In this section, we will attempt to define the terms code switching, code mixing and borrowing characterizing most bilingual communication among Algerians. It should be noted that we want to reflect upon these phenomenon to allow full understanding of the flow of discussion about the issue in what follows.

Code switching, a very common phenomenon observed in any bilingual or multilingual community has been defined extensively by many researchers. It is denoted as the juxtaposition of sentences or fragments of sentences of two different languages within the same verbal exchange: These alternated segments must be consistent, and faithful to the morphological and syntactic rules of both languages in contact (cf. Poplack, 1993). CS can be classified structurally or functionally. It can be inter-sentential, intra-sentential and extra-sentential (depending on the syntactic nature and the emblematic nature of the segment alternated) and marked or unmarked (depending on the general function it has in the speech), (cf. Poplack, 1980; Poplack and Sankoff, 1988). CS is marked and fluid when it is produced without hesitation or pauses, while marked when the speaker signals by means of CS, a break in his speech or a sign of non-fluidity.

It is relevant to acknowledge how much there is lack of consent on establishing a clear distinction between CS and the phenomenon of CM because the terminological diversity existing in the literature. For some authors such as Kachru (1978, 1982), Sridhar and Sridhar (1980), Gumperz (1982), Treffers-Daller (1991) and Drapeau (1993), CM is a subtype of CS. In this case, contact between two languages produces a new and third code of linguistic interaction which corresponds to the fusion of the rules of the two different systems.

Haugen (1956) is the first to use the term code switching. He defined it as a situation in which a bilingual individual introduces into his speech a word belonging to another language, a word which is not considered borrowed because it is not assimilated into the phonological, morphological or syntactic structures of the language in which the speech

is made. As CS has been introduced through several definitions because it does not necessarily present an absolute integrity at the phonological, morphological, syntactic and conversational discourse, we agree upon the fact that no definition has yet been found to clearly designate the phenomenon. However, most authors adopt Haugen's view.

Borrowing, on the other hand, is one of the most important outcomes of sociolinguistic studies, which can be defined as the act of integrating an item from a given language, and using it as a part of the native language. Borrowing, as its name suggests, manifests itself when an individual takes a lexical unit which can be a noun or a compound noun from Language 2 (L2) and inserts it into his Language 1 (L1). What happens to the borrowed item can however vary. The loan can be viewed from two angles: from a structural perspective and from a functional perspective. The distinction between borrowing and CS aggregates a lively debate and raises different questions and issues which have caught the attention of a considerable number of linguists namely Treffets-Dallèr (1991).

In Algeria, due to historical reasons, a great number of loanwords from different languages are introduced in AA. The long period of French colonization has made French deeply rooted in the daily life of Algerians and a large number of French words are used as if they are part of the Algerian dialects. However, AA often contains French words which are adapted phonologically and morphologically from a linguistic point of view.

2.2 Social Virtual Communication and Facebook as a Phenomenon

Social virtual communication (SVC) can be defined as any human social communication that occurs through virtual networking. There is a bulk of investigations that highlighted the increased use of SVC by academic and non academic communities permitting connection, dissemination, participation, creativity, and merging. Manipulating virtual communication in social and academic ambiances was examined by a multitude of scholars who suggested that SVC is undertaken to connect, to probe information, to brainstorm ideas, to prospect new relationships,

and share everyday news¹. Although social network sites are not designed to fulfill educational purposes, Dalsgaard (2005) argues that they can be used to support learning².

In February 4th, 2004, a novel social networking website involving college students in the University sharing their personal information on the web and using it as a platform to keep in touch with friends was originated by a Harvard student called Mark Zuckerberg. According to Zuckerberg, the creation of this was meant to aggregate Harvard students together in a huge community site where you can type someone's name and find all information about them. Yet, the site has quickly gained enormous users worldwide. Stated differently, Bodomo (2010:316) asserted that:

“Facebook, the new CMC medium [has] become one of the most popular websites ...Its popularity has increased so much so that not only the youth but some prominent members of older generations ... use it to get in touch with customers, constituents”

Facebook is an online social network that allows its users to post images, photos, videos, files and documents, exchange messages, attach and create groups and use a variety of applications. It is considered to be the third most visited website in the world after Google and YouTube according to Alexa³. The use of Facebook is a common concept between cultures, the principle and function is the same, but the content is what

¹ See Blake and Sikkal (1996), Friedman and Friedman (2008), Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, (2007), Jabr (2011)...etc.

² Dalsgaard (2005) adds that using SVC can help facilitate an approach to e-learning. The purpose is to provide students with tools which they can use to solve problems on their own and/or in collaboration with other students.

³ In December 2015, it had 1.04 billion daily active users out of a total 1.59 billion monthly active users. On August 24, 2015, for the first time, one billion people used Facebook on the same day.

really changes from one society to another depending on socio-cultural values.

As a type of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), Facebook can be considered as an asynchronous communication tool whereby one- to- one or one- to- many communications is realized. Nevertheless, determining whether Facebook is a text-based CMC or a video-based, synchronous or asynchronous one relies on the function provided by the medium itself. A typical example might be wall –to-wall messages are asynchronous CMC. On the other hand, Facebook language such as chatting, which is the focus of this study, is a form of IM and thus is a synchronous text based CMC. Unsurprisingly, Facebook is considered as a “mid way between text based CMC and video based CMC” (Bodomo, 2010:316). Concisely, this section will scrutinize Facebook as a social networking language and its functions with more emphasis upon attitudes and motives behind its use.

A Facebook profile consists of a number of different sections, including Information, Status, Friends, Photos, Notes, Groups, and The Wall. However, since December 15, 2011, a timeline was put forward to replace the Facebook Profile. In a Timeline, photos, videos, and posts of any given user are categorized according to the period of time in which they were uploaded or created. Posts and events are displayed along a timeline that runs through the center of the profile, with the option of adding events that occurred prior to the user joining Facebook as well as “hiding” posts. Timeline was originally offered as an option, but all users were migrated to the new format on March 30, 2012⁴. Facebook also offers a service called “groups”, so that users can create new ones, join and participate in others. In many cases, groups exist to bring together users who share common interests. Such as University students from the same specialty, fans of a football team ...etc. The Wall, on the other hand, is a forum for one’s friends to post comments, pictures, videos or insights about anything. Users can always remove undesirable comments from their own Wall. They can restrict who their wall is visible to, or turn it off entirely.

⁴ AbcNews Videos, 22 Sept 2011.

According to the literature, there is a growing number of research works that direct attention to code-switching in VSC websites. One of the main factors that need to be fully considered before analyzing the linguistic peculiarities of CS in these websites is the users' attitudes towards it. To this end, we are seeking to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent is code-switching used in Facebook by young bilingual Algerian students?

RQ2: How is code-switching perceived by students who use Facebook?

RQ3: What are the effects of the phenomenon of code-switching use among Algerian Arabic / French- Berber-English bilingual students undertaking social networking such as Facebook communication?

In the coming sections, we will set out the different steps of the present research methodology, display the findings, and hopefully try examine and bounce off the results.

3. Research Methodology

The scope of this study is to delve into the students' attitudes towards CS in Facebook communication within the higher educational level in Algeria which will be represented by Mohamed Ben Ahmed University-Oran 2.

3.1 Data collection

To collect data for this study, a quantitative method will be used in the form of a questionnaire instrument which is designed based on the previous literature. Twenty students pre-tested the questionnaire. Based on their suggestions, the questionnaire was revised to its final form. The collection of the data was accomplished during December 2017. Table 1 illustrates the entire details of the collected data.

University Name / Country	No. of students
Mohamed Ben Ahmed University-Oran 2, Algeria	75

Table 1: Data Collection Details.

3.2 The participants

Participants of this study consisted of students from the department of English at the University of Oran 2. A request for participation along with 100 questionnaires was shared on the English department Facebook account. This is a discussion group created by students of the department of English to share information about all updates. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire which included a variety of questions to answer the main problematic of the present study.

3.3 Questionnaire Survey Structure

The questionnaire survey⁵ is prepared and designed by the researchers themselves based on the study research questions. English language is the language that was used in preparing the survey as it is the language that is easily communicated by students enrolled in an English language degree program. The structure of the survey is illustrated in the following two sections.

3.4 Data Collection Protocol

The participants (who were later found to be aged between 18 and 25) were given access to the questionnaire –consisting of 06 questions- and were invited to fill it electronically⁶ through Microsoft word software or download it as a word format and fill it manually⁷.

⁵ Richterich & Chancerel (1980: 59): “Questionnaires are structured instruments for the collection of data which translate research hypothesis into questions”. **Questionnaire advantages** are: 1. less time and energy consuming to administer; 2. often greater anonymity to respondents. **Questionnaire disadvantages** are: 1. not everyone who receives the questionnaire returns it. 2. Lack of opportunity to clarify issues. The English language was the language of the questionnaire in the present study.

⁶ The questionnaire was designed to pile up quantitative data concurrently. The questionnaire was posted in the Facebook group of the English department by the researchers and the subjects were asked to tick the right answer.

⁷ Students who filled it electronically were provided an email address to which the questionnaire was sent to. For those who did it manually, we asked them to provide it to one of the researchers who is a doctorate student and is present most of the week in the library.

4. Results

4.1 Bilingual VS Multilingual Competence

Q1: How do you consider your competence in Arabic, French and English languages?

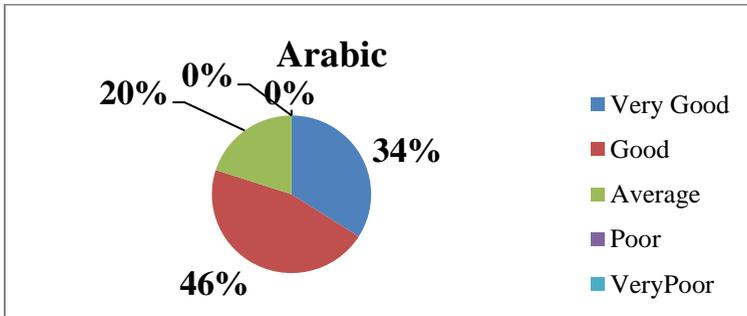


Chart 1: Arabic language competence

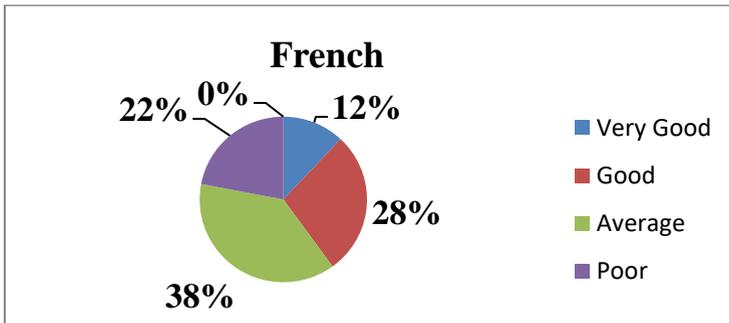


Chart 2: French language competence

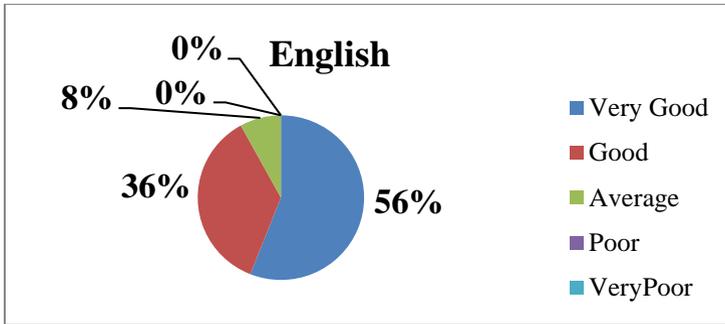


Chart 3: English language competence

The results show that 46% of the students claimed that their competence in Arabic is good, 34% said that their competence is very good, while 20% for the average variant. 0% score is shown for poor and very poor variant. Chart 2, on the other hand, shows that 38% of the students claimed that their competence in French is average, 28% good, 22% poor, 12% very good, and 0% for the very poor variant. In chart 3, 56% of the students claimed that their competence in English is very good, while 36% good, 8% average, and 0% poor very poor. The results clearly demonstrate that all respondents are bilingual if not multilingual speakers but to an unbalanced extent.

4.2 Preferred SVC network by students

Q2: Which social virtual communication network (SVCN) do you prefer to use most?

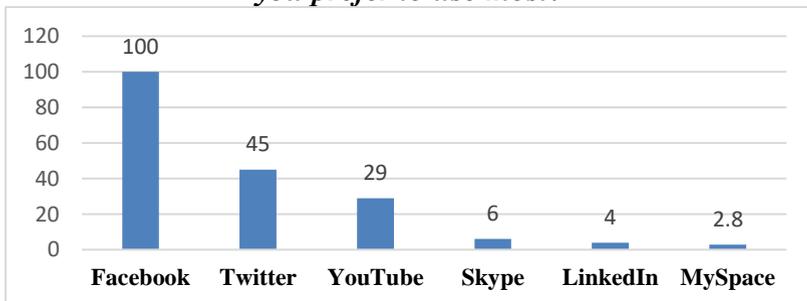


Chart 4: Preferred SVC network

All respondents (100%) gave the top rank to Facebook. Twitter is used by 45% respondents as the second most popular social network site. Respondents put YouTube in third position in terms of importance with 29% of users. Other SVC scored lower: 6 % for Skype that respondents use to communicate with family and friends abroad. 4% for LinkedIn. MySpace is ranked last with only 2.8% of respondents. Respondents were asked to indicate the purpose for using SVCNs. 78% of the respondents indicated that SVCNs are mainly used to exchange e-mails, keeping in touch with family and friends, making new friends, sharing photos, tracking an old friend...etc.

4.3 Language choice in Facebook

Q3: Which languages do you use in Facebook?

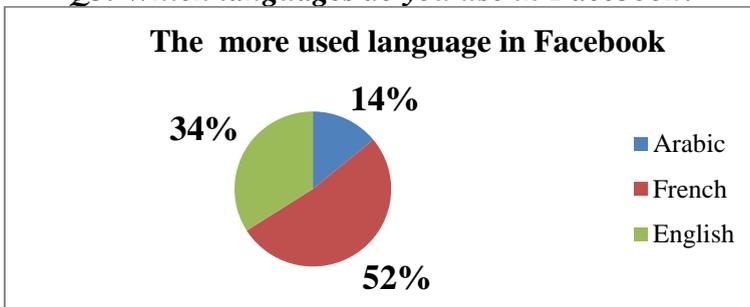


Chart 5: Language choice in Facebook

Respondents consider that, when they communicate via Facebook, the French language is the most useful language (52%), English comes (34%), and at last is Arabic (14%).

4.4 Use of code-switching in Facebook Communication

Q4: Do you use code-switching in your chatting via Facebook?

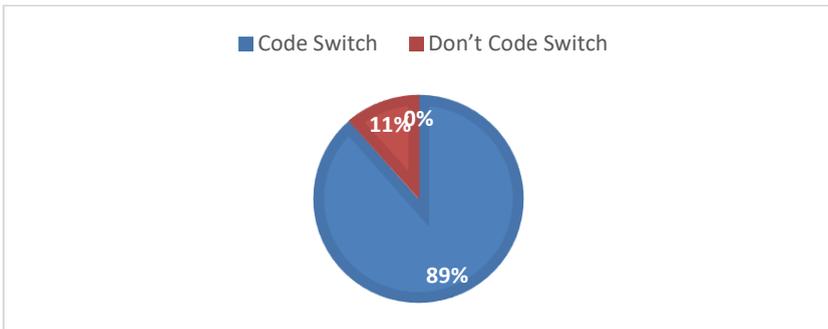


Chart 6: Use of code-switching in Facebook communication

As per chart 6, it is clearly mentioned that 88.56 % of the students code-switch in Facebook communication, while only 11.44% do not. The high relative percentage indicates that the students are highly motivated to use code-switching. This can be also attributed to the social linguistic dynamism that tends to characterize Facebook instances of communication during which people receive, deliver, and share information and news.

4.5 Attitudes and perception towards the use of code-switching in Facebook

Q5: what is your attitude towards the use of CS in Facebook, positive or negative?

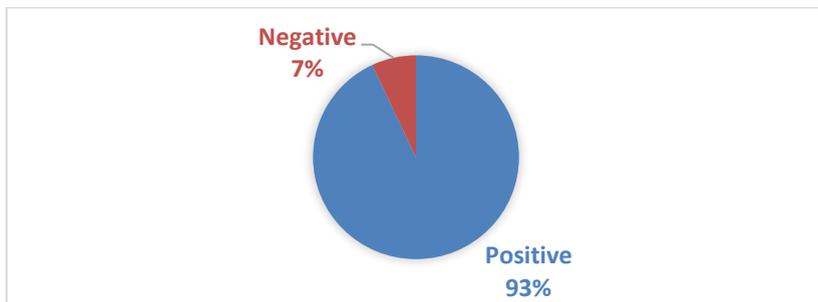


Chart 7: Attitudes towards the use of code-switching in Facebook

The respondents are highly positive in their attitudes toward the use of code-switching in Facebook communication. As per chart 7, results revealed that most of the students (93%) agreed that CS is a positive phenomenon. Only 7 % considered it as negative; probably because they are language conservatives or because they are not balanced bilinguals.

Q6: In what sense CS is positive in Facebook communication?

The respondents suggested the following:

1. It allows me to express my ideas and points of view in any language I master or wish to use, whether Arabic, French, English ...etc,
2. It provides me with a feeling of self-confidence and make me very comfortable when chatting.
3. It develops my communication and linguistic skills.
4. It pushes me to learn new words and convey new meanings in an enjoyable way.
5. It provides me with a feeling of self-confidence and make me very comfortable when chatting.

Conclusion

In this study, the aim is to highlight the attitudes and motives behind young Algerians' use of code-switching in Facebook communication. It has been noticed in the literature that code-switching in social networks and most particularly in Facebook in Algeria is not very much elaborated as a topic of interest among the scholarly community worldwide. The researchers conducted a questionnaire survey based study in order to obtain a full picture of students' attitudes towards switching between Arabic, French and English in Facebook communication. In terms of attitudes, results indicated that participants are highly positive in their attitudes towards the use of code-switching in Facebook. The study indicates also an increase in the use of Facebook networking and pinpoints its popularity among users. Further, it is suggested that many of the Algerian Facebook users employ CS as a tool to enhance their interaction, connectivity and socializing. It is also used as a strategy to communicate and negotiate meanings effectively. The findings suggest that Facebook communication is not just exploited for socializing and communication but also for academic activities like discussing group project works, sharing assignments and course work as well as files and lecture notes. However, perceptions of respondents expressed through the survey do not indicate that the use of Facebook networking is likely to enhance academic achievements.

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