

## The Impact Social Networking ‘Facebook’ on EFL Learners’ Cultural Exchange and Code-switching as Young Receptors

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**ABSTRACT:** *It has been globally acknowledged that social networking and especially 'Facebook' is a means of transferring culture from one nation to another. In fact, 'Facebook' has become the leading social network platform on the internet because it attracts the attention of all the categories of the society with no exception. Men and women, students and teachers, and friends and acquaintances use it depending on their needs. For that, when someone logs into Facebook s/he observes the extent to which this universe has become a small village where all cultures are put in a melting pot and where everything is at a fingertip. Indeed, there are different languages used by EFL learners both in their lives and particularly in the use of Facebook. This results in a problem which has been a usual phenomenon known as code switching on Facebook. Most of EFL learners flee from the Arabic language or mix it with English. This paper is an attempt to spot light on how EFL learners interact when using Facebook either with people from their country or with foreigners. Doing so, we shall see if their conversations on Facebook are beneficial for learning others' cultures or not. Thus, we will shed light on the way EFL learners use Facebook and the relation between this social networking and cultural exchange.*

**KEYWORDS:** *code switching, Facebook, EFL learners' interactions.*

**RÉSUMÉ:** *Il a été reconnu à l'échelle mondiale que le réseautage social et en particulier «Facebook» est un moyen de transférer la culture d'une nation à une autre. En effet, «Facebook» est devenu la première plate-forme de réseau social sur Internet car elle attire l'attention de toutes les catégories de la société et sans exception. Les hommes et les femmes, les étudiants et les enseignants, et les amis et connaissances l'utilisent en fonction de leurs besoins. Pour cela, quand*

*quelqu'un se connecte à Facebook, il observe à quel point cet univers est devenu un petit village où toutes les cultures sont mises dans un creuset et où tout est à portée de main. En effet, il existe de différentes langues qui sont utilisées par les apprenants EFL à la fois dans leur vie et en particulier dans l'utilisation de Facebook. Il en résulte un problème qui a été un phénomène habituel connu sous le nom de changement de code sur Facebook. La plupart des apprenants EFL fuient de la langue arabe ou la mélangent avec l'anglais. Cet article est une tentative de mettre en lumière la façon dont les apprenants EFL interagissent lors de l'utilisation de Facebook soit avec des personnes de leur pays ou avec des étrangers. Ce faisant, nous verrons si leurs conversations sur Facebook sont bénéfiques pour apprendre la culture des autres ou non. Ainsi, nous mettrons en lumière la façon dont les apprenants de l'EFL utilisent Facebook et la relation entre ce réseau social et l'échange culturel.*

**MOTS-CLÉS:** *changement de code, Facebook, interactions des apprenants EFL.*

## **Introduction**

It is universally acknowledged that Facebook has become the leading social network platform on the internet. Men and women, friends and mates, students and teachers are using it with no exception or any hesitation depending on their needs. Thus, when someone logs into Facebook, he/she observes a common phenomenon shared by the majority, if not all, of the Facebook users. This phenomenon is seen when chatting, commenting, or even posting. There is always a use of a group or more than one language by the same person. In fact, this phenomenon is labelled 'Code-switching' in sociolinguistics. This paper attempts to spot light on how English and Arabic, the two varieties in contact, are related linguistically and socially among EFL learners on Facebook. In order to do so, students of English in Mentouri Brothers University of Constantine One have been under observation during the needed time through the use of both a questionnaire and an Interview.

### **1. Code switching**

Code switching is the act of using more than one language in one discourse and by the same speaker (Syazwani & Maros, 2014). It occurs when the speaker alternates between two languages or language's varieties in one single conversation. It is a natural phenomenon that not only occurs

in bilinguals' and multi-linguals' speech, but also in people's electronic discourses (spoken and written one). In fact, elements of multiple languages are used when conversing while respecting both the phonology and syntax of the different used languages.

Most of the functions of code switching can be applied to written communication such as the referential, expressive and metalinguistic function. There are also functions that are not as relevant such as the poetic function.

## **2. Reasons for Code-switching**

On Facebook, bilinguals tend to shift for many reasons. According to the observation made by (Syazwani & Maros, 2014), ten (10) have been selected as most of the frequent motives of the shifts among English learners in Malaysia. They are as follows:

Switching for: quotation, addressee specification, repetition, clarification, emphasis, message qualification, checking, emotions, availability, and free switching. In addition, bilinguals in some contexts such as expressing group solidarity, establishing good wills, and emphasising a point can use code switching to obtain positive effects in online conversations.

According to Abdel Tawwab Ahmed (2014), the reasons to code switch from one language to another are lack of facility, lack of competence, and habitual expressions. Beside these, mood of the speaker is also another contributing factor for code switching. Moreover, there are other factors such as, semantic significance, to address different audience, to show identity within a group, to amplify and emphasise a point, habitual expressions and to attract attention. Linguists argue that the reasons are pragmatic ones especially those related to the mood of the speaker.

As Skiba (1997) comments, code switching is not a language interference, on the basis that it supplements speech. Where it is used due to an inability of expression, code switching provides continuity in speech rather than presenting an interference in language. In some situations, code switching is done deliberately to exclude a person from a conversation. It is seen as a sign of solidarity within a group, and it is also assumed that all speakers in a conversation must be bilingual in order for code switching to

occur. Bilinguals do not usually translate from the weaker language to the stronger one.

### **3. Code Switching vs. Borrowing**

Many linguists have worked to describe the difference between the behaviours of code switching and borrowing of words or phrases. Borrowing is also the fact of lending some words (loan words) from one language (the donor language) and incorporating it into another language without translating them such as the word 'café' which is used nowadays in English and which has been borrowed from the French language (Genessee, 2000).

### **4. Code Switching vs. Code Mixing**

Code mixing is the use of two or more varieties or language varieties in speech. According to Bokamba, E. G. (1989) some scholars use the terms 'code-switching' and 'code-mixing' interchangeably especially in syntax, morphology and other formal aspects of the language such as literature and philosophy. Others give specific definitions that may be different in more areas that are specific and subfields such as linguistics, education theory and especially communications. Code mixing resembles pidgins, which is used when some group which do not share the same language interact, while code switching occurs within multilingual groups where speakers share more than one language.

Muysken (2000) proposes that linguists use code switching and code mixing to refer to utterances that are drawn from elements of two or more language systems. It is worth noting that code switching is related to moving from one grammatical system to another while code mixing is the fact of drawing from distinct grammar and encompasses a hybrid form of language. In other words, code mixing emphasises the formal aspects of language structures or linguistic competence, while code-switching emphasises linguistic performance.

At last, we may say that code switching, code mixing and borrowing are some labels used in bilingualism resulting from language contact as forms of mixture. These processes are interweaved and differences are so subtle, which makes it difficult to create dichotomies and clear distinct definitions between them.

## 5. Types of Code Switching

Scholars did not agree about the different names and types of code switching, but the most known ones are as follows:

- **Intersentential switching** occurs *outside* the sentence or the clause level (i.e. at sentence or clause boundaries) (Li Wei, 2000). It is sometimes called "**extrasentential**" switching. (Myers-Scotton, 1989). In Assyrian-English switching one could say, "*Ani wideili. What happened?*" ("*Those, I did them. What happened?*") (McClure, 2001).
- **Intra-sentential switching** occurs *within* a sentence or a clause. (Myers-Scotton, 1989). In Spanish-English switching one could say, "*La onda is to fight y jambar.*" ("*The in-thing is to fight and steal.*") (Woolford, 1983).
- **Tag-switching** is the switching of either a tag phrase or a word, or both, from one language to another, (common in *intra-sentential switches*) (Li Wei, 2000). In Spanish-English switching one could say, "*Él es de México y así los criaron a ellos, you know.*" ("*He's from Mexico, and they raise them like that, you know.*") (Winford, 2003).
- **Intra-word switching** occurs *within* a word itself, such as at a morpheme boundary (Li Wei, 2000). In Shona-English switching one could say, "*But ma-day-s a-no a-ya ha-ndi-si ku-mu-on-a.*" ("*But these days I don't see him much.*") Here the English plural morpheme *-s* appears alongside the Shona prefix *ma-*, which also marks plurality (Winford, 2003).

Most code-switching studies primarily focus on intra-sentential switching, as it creates many hybrid grammar structures that require explanation. The other types involve utterances that simply follow the grammar of one language or the other. Intra-sentential switching can be alternational or insertional. In alternational code switching, a new grammar emerges that is a combination of the grammars of the two languages involved. Insertional code switching involves "the insertion of elements from one language into the morphosyntactic frame of the other (Winford, 2003).

## **6. Code Switching on Facebook**

### **6.1. Facebook**

Facebook is the most widely known and used social networking site, created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. It is one of the computer-mediated communication, which refers to a system that allows people to exchange information with others via means of computer and networks (Syazwani & Maros, 2014). It has the lion share in students' daily life.

### **6.2. EFL Learners' Interactions**

#### **6.2.1. Rationale**

Indeed, there are different languages used by EFL learners while using Facebook, and in their everyday life. This leads to a problem that has turned to be a usual phenomenon known as code switching on Facebook. The latter has intrigued the attention of many sociolinguists who made many studies about that. This study will help to know why most of EFL learners switch their code from one language to another on Facebook, i.e., the reasons that attract students to make use of Arabic and English within a single conversation on Facebook. In addition, some light is going to be shed on with whom usually EFL learners code switch and the different types of code switching that exist on Facebook.

#### **6.2.2. Aim of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the use of Arabic and English on Facebook by students of English when talking to each other and even to their teachers. The study aims at knowing the motive if not the motives behind these switches on Facebook among EFL learners.

#### **6.2.3. Research Methodology**

The nature of the topic and time constraints made us think of using observation, a questionnaire and an email interview as tools for this research. The participants are meant to be EFL learners. Three months were needed to collect the data and then to generalise the results. Data are collected by using a questionnaire for one hundred (100) third year English students, specialised in applied language studies, language sciences and

civilisation. This questionnaire was answered on the time of twenty (20) minutes. The questionnaire will show the various languages used by students. The email interview was sent to four young English teachers in order to know if students code switch with their teachers while conversing with them on Facebook. This was done at the English department at Brothers Mentouri University of Constantine One.

#### **6.2.4. Research Questions**

Why do EFL learners code switch when using Facebook?

What are the different types of code switching that exist on Facebook among EFL learners?

With whom do EFL learners usually code switch?

#### **6.2.5. Hypothesis**

We hypothesise that: Most of EFL learners code switch from Algerian Arabic to English or vice-versa to achieve a communication intent, serve certain functions in conversation and fill some lexical gaps.

#### **6.2.6. Results**

To sum up with the whole study, it is worth to mention that all the Facebook users switch the code as a means to improve their interaction on Facebook. Thus, code switching on Facebook plays a vital role in the use of languages among EFL learners. Code switching is used to fill linguistic gaps of the speakers.

This study will add the existing literature on code switching, especially on computer-mediated conversation. Information gained from the study will help to provide insights about how and why code switching occurs not in spoken but also written form. It is important as bilinguals will then be aware of code switching that occurs during online communication via social networking website. As a result, code switching can be used to obtain positive effects in online conversation by bilinguals such as to express group solidarity. Establish good will and emphasise a point. Findings suggested that code switching does occur in online written discourse and the functions and reasons for switching codes are similar to

those of verbal communication. Therefore, code switching is a tool of communication and enhancing interaction on Facebook.

A week was worth to collect information from the questionnaire. In addition, the walls of other students on Facebook were under observation. Here are the findings of the most frequent answers:

➤ **From the Questionnaire**

- 90 % answered the first question by saying: of course, I have Facebook, who dofres not?
- 50% answered the second question by saying: yes, I use English on Facebook because I want to improve my level.
- 20% said that they always use English, and 80% claimed that they use it sometimes.
- 70% agreed that code switching agreed that code switching plays a role in their Facebook use (depending on the situation they are in and to whom they are talking).
- 45% said that they shift to fill some lexical gaps, and the other 55% said that this is done in order to achieve some communicative purposes or communicate easily.
- 60% said that they switch when they talk to friends and mates, 30 % to family and 10% to teachers.

➤ **From the Email Interviews**

**1. Teacher 1**

Dear researcher

I am proud to be part of your piece of research. Well, my answer for your question is a YES. Indeed, my students do code switch when chatting with me on Facebook, from time to time. Based on my own knowledge and personal observation, there are two main reasons behind these shifts:

- The lack of some English words (lexical gaps).
- When they feel like the appropriate words are supposed to be in Arabic as saying: sahaaidkom, sahaftourkom.

Best of luck.



## 2. Teacher 2

Salam to you,

As a reply for your email and concerning your question which I find very interesting!

Actually, my students have been switching the code since we met. Yes, they do shift when talking to me, commenting on my posts and even tagging me. It is nice and good to be there for the needy, and that is what I am doing with my students, being close to them and helping them whenever I get the chance to do so. So, if you ask me about the reasons behind that, I would say:

Most of the time it is because of the degree of intimacy between us. It is because it is fine for me.

Yet, they also shift when they have some vocabulary problems as being unable to find the exact word in English; so, they just say it in Arabic and ask for its equivalent in English and vice versa .

Do not hesitate to email me again if you need anything  
Best British, have a flowery day.

### 6.2.7. Discussion of the Findings

To begin with and based upon the results of both the questionnaire and the email interview, we can say that EFL learners do switch mainly due to:

- The intimacy between them and the addressee.
- The absence of some words in the language used.

As a result, the relationship between the speaker and the addressee is very important. Actually, it determines the way the speaker is going to use, his style, his choice of words and the structure. So, if the two are likely to be close to each other, i.e., they share some personal background, the conversation is going to be in a mixture of languages such as; Arabic, English and even French. To put it all together, formality and informality are two different terms that make us choose how to talk.

It is also needed to say that being a non-native speaker contribute in the use of code switching. That is to say, a learner of the English

language does not know all the vocabulary of the English language and needs to code switch because there is always lack of vocabulary. Therefore, the reason behind switching from one language to another is mainly related to losing words and being unable to find the appropriate words to say. For that, we tend to pass from one code to another where we can find the suitable words (to Arabic). The truth is that most of the students shift to another code because of their incompetence in mastering English since it is a foreign language. However, sometimes they are competent enough but they cannot find the right words. The same goes for Arabic, sometimes they are competent enough but cannot find the exact words. The same goes for Arabic, sometimes you just feel like you have a drain of words and then you shift to another code.

As a result, we can say that code switching, indeed, exists on Facebook and students do code switch in order to fill their lexical disability to express themselves on the daily Facebook interactions. Yet, this is also done according to the relationship with the addressee. This allows us to claim that these results have added some light and confirmed our hypothesis.

#### **6.2.8. The Implications**

- Get the chance to check and evaluate the level of students in English.
- Determining the good way of teaching that helps students enhancing their skills in English.
- Identifying the real reasons behind code switching and that can be done to reduce the phenomenon.

#### **6.2.9. Suggestions for Further Research**

For further research, a larger number of participants can possibly deepen the issue of code switching among EFL learners on Facebook can be more and more. That is to say, students from different faculties may be used as a sample to get results that are more considerable. It is worth saying that extended studies can be done to explore the issue taking into consideration some other aspects and features of code switching.

## Conclusion

As it has been noted previously, this attempt demonstrates that if not the majority of EFL learners code switch on Facebook in order to fill some lexical gaps, they do switch because of the nature of their relationship with the addressee. It is worth mentioning that code switching is actually a tool of communication. It is one way to achieve a communicative goal; the speaker wants to deliver. Therefore, it can be concluded that code switching is a usual process that occurs in Facebook interactions and performed by bilinguals who tend to shift for the sake of filling in lexical gaps when the intimacy between the speakers is absent.

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## Appendix

### 1. The Questionnaire

Please, do answer the following questions sincerely and obviously and objectively. This questionnaire has to do with the act of using more than one language (code switching) on Facebook interactions among students of English.

1. Do you have Facebook?  
Yes/No justify your answer!  
.....
2. Do you use English as a language of communication on Facebook?  
Yes/No justify your answer!  
.....
3. To what extent do you use English on Facebook?  
Always-often-sometimes-rarely-never  
.....
4. Does code switching have a role in your Facebook use?  
Yes/No justify your answer!  
.....
5. Why do you code switch? Justify
  1. To communicate easily
  2. To fill some lexical gaps
  3. Prestige only
  4. To show intimacy.....
6. With whom do you usually switch the code? Justify your contribution
  1. Friends
  2. Mates
  3. Family
  4. Teachers.....

You can choose more than one answer!

Thank you for your contribution ☺

## **2. The E-mail Interview**

Dear teachers,

We would like to ask you a question and we hope you to find ten minutes from your precious time to answer it. Your answer will be a step forward in order to make this work come true. The research is about code switching among students of English in their use of electronic devices and especially the social networking Facebook.

The question is:

Do your students code switch while interacting with you on Facebook?

If yes, according to your knowledge, what are the reasons behind doing so?

We are looking forward to hearing from you.

Thank you 😊