

CONVERSATIONAL FUNCTIONS OF ARABIC/FRENCH CODE SWITCHING AMONG WOMEN IN TLEMCCEN

BELHADJ-TAHAR KAMILA

Doctoral Student in Sociolinguistics University of Tlemcen, Algeria

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to shed light on some discourse functions of Arabic/French code switching among women in Tlemcen Speech community. The aim of this work is to determine whether conversational functions, as described by Gumperz (1982), are found in their speech or not. The results of the analysis of natural occurring examples from daily conversations of women speech are given. In order to understand what French represents to women, and what CS serves, data are analysed in the light of theories explaining the social meaning of CS. The study has revealed that code switching among women has a specific function and social symbolism to each individual group in different contexts.

KEYWORDS: Bilingualism Code Switching Female Attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the relationship between language and gender has aroused the interest of sociolinguists. The early studies were initiated in the English-speaking world such as the US with Labov, 1966 and in Britain with Trudgill, 1972. As far as the Arabic-speaking world is concerned, works on language variation according to gender, in Morocco (Sadiqi 2007), Egypt (Bassiouney 2009), and Algeria (Abdel hay 2008) are few. Bilingualism is seen as an advantage that brings social power to bilingual speakers. Be it in private or public spheres, the mastery of more than one language is a necessity.

However, in bilingual communities, the fact that people have different attitudes towards the existing languages is due to the status of each language. In the Algerian context, though Arabic is considered as the official language, French is learned by almost all Algerian speakers. In fact, it is taught from primary school to the university, especially in technical, scientific and medical studies. Hence, French is seen as a prestigious language used by the educated in sciences, politics and economics, etc. Speakers may have positive attitudes towards the second language over the other one or attribute no quality to one of these languages. Just as in Morocco, Algerian women consider French as a symbol of modernism and thus code switch (Arabic/French) more than men.

CODE SWITCHING

Code switching is one of the consequences of bilingualism and may be defined as “the regular use of two or more languages” (Grosjean, 1982:1) within a speech community. In this study code switching (hereafter CS), is the “juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (Gumperz 1982: 59). The switching may occur either between utterances or within an utterance. Gumperz (1982) is seen as discourse mode or a communicative option having pragmatic meaning available to bilinguals. As far as the Algerian context is concerned, there are different reasons why bilinguals (Arabic/French) code switch. They may

switch because of the topic under discussion or the participants. Sometimes, code switching may be the mood of speakers, i.e., a person might swear only in Arabic. Code switching between Algerian Arabic and French is a widespread phenomenon among Algerian speakers. It is very common to hear a conversation where speakers use one sentence in Arabic and another one in French or mix the two languages in the same sentence.

SOME THEORETICAL MODELS OF CODE SWITCHING

The works of Gumperz are considered as the most important and leading in the field of sociolinguistics on the study on CS. Blom and Gumperz (1972), Gumperz (1982), etc., have proposed two types of CS that they called: 'situational' and 'metaphorical'. Situational code switching occurs when speakers use one code for one situation and another code for another situation, whereas metaphorical code switching depends on the topic to determine which language will be used; for example, a speaker will use two different languages for different topics (religion and medical problem) in the same situation. Gumperz (1982) suggests some conversational functions that CS fulfils.

CONVERSATIONAL FUNCTIONS OF CS

Many Scholars (Gumperz, 1982; Heller, 1988; Miroy and Muysken, 1995, etc.) have identified a number of code-switching functions, such as emphasizing, quoting, clarification and language skill showing, etc. Gumperz (1982) explains that analyzing naturally-occurring speech is necessary to identify the function of code switching. Gumperz suggested a list of six CS functions which he named: quotation marking, addressee specification, interjection, reiteration, message qualification, and personalization versus objectivization. We attempt in this research work to reveal some CS functions that appear to be favoured by Tlemcen women. Many researchers have extensively studied the patterns and reasons for code switching. In fact, there are different motivations; to better understand this phenomenon of code switching and code mixing we take into consideration different approaches. For Gumperz (1982: 75), CS may fulfill various and diverse functions. He explains that

since speakers do understand each other and can agree on what is being accomplished in particular settings, there must be some sharing of codes and principles of interpretation, but this takes the form of taken for granted, tacit presuppositions which are best recovered through indirect conversational analysis.

Gumperz (1982) explains that even code switching conveys meaning; this does not mean that each switch can be assigned a meaning. The aim of this work, then, is to determine whether the conversational functions as described by Gumperz (1982) are found in Arabic-French code switching among women in Tlemcen speech community or not.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

In this research, data are collected by means of audio-recording and note-taking (participant observation) about men's and women's language to observe their behaviours in social context. Many conversations have been collected by means of audio-recordings. Not all the recordings were exploitable. Consequently, only recordings with clear enough sound to produce useable data were kept so that language use was clearly identifiable. This research aims at giving some illustrations of code switching that occur in women's speech. The method is that of discourse analysis. The analysis will identify CS instances with the further aim of finding out which functions they serve.

FUNCTIONS OF CS IN TLEMCCEN

The speakers know how to interpret these changes of language choice by using an underlying knowledge which

they use to convey meaning. Gumperz provides six functions of CS. Examples are taken from women's Tlemcen speech to illustrate each function.

- **Quotations**

Gumperz explains that "in many instances the code switched passages are clearly identifiable either as direct quotations or as reported speech." (ibid: 75-76). It is common in bilingual situations that an individual repeats word for word what his/her interlocutor has said. For example, a woman is talking about her medical consultation to another woman (French appears in italics):

μΣιτ νΣυφ □βιβ+ ?αλλι **c'est pas méchant c'est juste un coup de froid.**

I went to see a doctor he told me it's not serious, it's just a cold.

The speaker switches from Arabic to French to report word for word what the doctor told her. In quoting what exactly the doctor said in the language he used, the speaker seems to be authentic. We believe that in the context of Tlemcen speech community, such function of reporting what has been said in French is more likely among women given their overall better proficiency in this language.

- **Addressee Specification**

"The switch serves to direct the message to one of several possible addressees." (ibid, 77) In the following example, a man (A) is speaking with his wife (B), who turns to ask another woman (C).

A: Σκυν λλιφ↔μΣι μΣ ανα

Who's going to go with us.

B: φ↔βαλλι νΣαββιωηυμ καμ↔λ ω↔λλα λα

It seems to me that we take them all, shall we?

++ *et toi qu'est ce tu penses toi*

And you, what do you think?

In this example, a first answers B in Arabic but switches to French to ask the opinion of a third person (C). Probably, C is the mother of the children or some of them, so she wanted to know precisely what she thinks about the situation.

- **Interjections**

"The code switch serves to mark an interjection or sentence filler" (ibid, 77). This kind of switching is what Poplack (1981) calls 'tag' switching or extra-sentential switching (Milroy and Muysken, 1995). While a woman (A) is speaking to her little daughter (B), she code switches to French to denote an interjection then switches back to Arabic:

A: ρανι ω↔δZ↔τλ↔κ κυλΣι Φι νυ|

I have prepared everything for you, just wake up!

B: μαζαλΣωιφφα

Not yet

A: *bon*, τνυ| ω↔λλαλα

Well, you wake up or not.

- **Reiteration**

It is when “frequently a message in one code is repeated in the other code, either literally or in a somewhat modified form. In some cases such repetitions may serve to clarify what is said, but often they simply amplify or emphasize a message” (ibid: 78). In this case, the speaker repeats the message or part of it in the other language, in order to clarify or emphasize. While calling someone on the phone, speaker A seems not to hear her interlocutor. She switches to French and repeats exactly what she said in Arabic.

μαρανι ν↔σμαξ ωαλυ + **j’entends rien du tout!**

I hear nothing, I hear nothing.

- **Message Qualification**

The switching is produced to qualify or specify something that has been previously said in the other language. In the following example, a woman switches to French to specify what she has just said in Arabic:

ρανι ναηδ↔ρ ξλα ω↔λδι λκβιρ **il a 18 ans**

I’m speaking about my elder son, he is 18.

- **Personalization Versus Objectification**

“The code contrast here seems to relate to such things as: the distinction between talk about action and talk as action, the degree of speaker involvement in, or distance from, a message, whether a statement reflects personal opinion or knowledge, whether it refers to specific instances or has the authority of generally known fact.” (ibid: 80).

A mother, who is annoyed by the behaviour of her son while she is speaking to her friend, started speaking in Arabic then switches to French:

γξυδ ω↔λδι βαρκα ματαΞρ↔β + **vient ici tout de suite!**

Sit down my son stop touching + come here right now.

It seems that the woman switches to French to reinforce her authority.

Though Gumperz’s (1982) list does not account for all conversational functions of CS, it is however, valuable background information to the present research on functions of CS in women’s speech. The aim of this work, then, is to determine whether the conversational functions are found in Arabic-French code switching among women in Tlemcen speech community or not.

DISCUSSIONS

For the discussion of the findings above, bilingual speakers, just as those in Algeria, are capable of using one of their two languages to various extents and with varying competency in the second language. The choice is not random but influenced by some factors. Among these, the attitudes of the speaker towards the two languages may urge her to use one instead of the other. The choice may be based at times on emotions of speakers. In Algeria, French is considered as the

language of modernism and social advancement. Many Algerian women code switch between AA and Fr very frequently even if they do not speak French fluently. Meyerhoff (1996) explains that differences between women's and men's language behaviour lies in the fact that their 'social network ties' differ. Speaking about the Algerian context, Taleb Ibrahim (1997: 104) says that "...the women's social position their ambiguous and contradictory status made them adopt particular behaviours that distinguish them from their male compatriots" Similarly, in her work on Moroccan women, Sadiqi (2003) found that women use code switching as discourse strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have seen that code switching is a common language phenomenon among women in Tlemcen. Throughout the different examples, it has been shown that Arabic/French CS serves different communicative functions and at the same time reveals some features that are particular to women's speech. The functions set by Gumperz (1982) seem to occur in Tlemcen women's speech. However, the findings are limited to the data set collected. For future research, it will be interesting to try to apply other theories that deal with the functional aspect of code switching.

REFERENCES

1. BASSIOUNEY, R. (2009). Arabic sociolinguistics. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
2. BLOM, J-P. & GUMPERZ, J. J. (1972) "Social meaning in linguistic structure: Code-Switching in Norway", in Gumperz and Hymes (Eds.).
3. GROSJEAN, F. (2008). Studying Bilinguals. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. GUMPERZ, J. J. (1982). Discourse Strategies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. HELLER, M. (ed.) (1988). Code switching. Anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
6. LABOV, W. (1966). The Social Stratification of English in New York City. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
7. MEYERHOFF, M. (1996). "Dealing with Gender Identity as a Sociolinguistic Variable", in Bergvall et al. (eds.)
8. MILROY, L. & MUYSKEN, P. (eds). (1995). One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Code-Switching, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. POPLACK, S. (1981). "Syntactic structure and social function of code switching", in Duran, R.P. (Ed.). Latino language and communication behaviour, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
10. SADIQI, F. (2003), Women, Gender and Language in Morocco. Leiden-Boston: Brill. (2007). Language and gender in Arabic, Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics. Brill: Lei den, vol. 2.
11. TALEB IBRAHIMI, K. (1997) Les Algériens et leur(s) langue(s). Eléments pour une approche sociolinguistique de la société algérienne, Les Editions El Hikma, Alger.
12. TRUDGILL, P. (1972). "Sex, Covert Prestige and Linguistic Change in the Urban British English of Norwich". Language in Society 1 (2).

