

The Social Aspects of Code-Switching in Online Interaction: The Case of Saudi Bilinguals

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Abstract : This research aims to investigate the concept of code-switching (CS) between English, Arabic, and the CS practices of Saudi online users via a Translanguaging (TL) lens for more inclusive view towards the nature of the data from the study. It employs Digitally Mediated Communication (DMC), specifically the WhatsApp and Twitter platforms, in order to understand how the users employ online resources to communicate with others on a daily basis. This project looks beyond language and considers the multimodal affordances (visual and audio means) that interlocutors utilise in their online communicative practices to shape their online social existence. This exploratory study is based on a data-driven interpretivist epistemology as it aims to understand how meaning (reality) is created by individuals within different contexts. This project used a mixed-method approach, combining a qualitative and a quantitative approach. In the former, data were collected from online chats and interview responses, while in the latter a questionnaire was employed to understand the frequency and relations between the participants' linguistic and non-linguistic practices and their social behaviours. The participants were eight bilingual Saudi nationals (both men and women, aged between 20 and 50 years old) who interacted with others online. These participants provided their online interactions, participated in an interview and responded to a questionnaire. The study data were gathered from 194 WhatsApp chats and 122 Tweets. These data were analysed and interpreted according to three levels: conversational turn taking and CS; the linguistic description of the data; and CS and persona. This project contributes to the emerging field of analysing online Arabic data systematically, and the field of multimodality and bilingual sociolinguistics. The findings are reported for each of the three levels. For conversational turn taking, the CS analysis revealed that it was used to accomplish negotiation and develop meaning in the conversation. With regard to the linguistic practices of the CS data, the majority of the code-switched words were content morphemes. The third level of data interpretation is CS and its relationship with identity; two types of identity were indexed; absolute identity and contextual identity. This study contributes to the DMC literature and bridges some of the existing gaps. The findings of this study are that CS by its nature, and most of the findings, if not all, support the notion of TL that multiliteracy is one's ability to decode multimodal communication, and that this multimodality contributes to the meaning. Either this is applicable to the online affordances used by monolinguals or multilinguals and perceived not only by specific generations but also by any online multiliterates, the study provides the linguistic features of CS utilised by Saudi bilinguals and it determines the relationship between these features and the contexts in which they appear.

Keywords : social media, code-switching, translanguaging, online interaction, saudi bilinguals

Conference Title : ICDNE 2023 : International Conference on Digital Communications and Networking

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : March 06-07, 2023