Code-switching between English and Arabic in Vernacular Poetry

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Abstract

This descriptive qualitative study investigates the types and functions of code-switching between English and vernacular Arabic in eight vernacular poems. In order to do this, eight published audio and video recordings of poems obtained from YouTube are analysed using a qualitative method of data analysis. The content analysis reveals two main types of code-switching: code-switching between sentences (inter-sentential) and code-switching within sentences (intra-sentential). Its possible functions are humour, reporting a conversation between the poet and an English speaker, quoting an English speaker or imagining a conversation with them, and attempting to be innovative. Intra-sentential code-switching is found to occur either at the beginning, middle or end of the line in a poem. However, it could occur in more than one place in the same line. Moreover, the poems follow grammatical constraints and code-switching is systematic, except in one instance where the poet aims to keep the same rhyme. In almost all of the poems analysed in this study, intra-sentential code-switching occurs more frequently than inter-sentential code-switching.

Keywords: Arabic, intra-sentential code-switching, inter-sentential code-switching, code-mixing, English, vernacular poetry

1. Introduction

Code-switching is used by bilingual and multilingual speakers of two or more languages and even by monolingual speakers when switching between different varieties of the same language (Mejdell, 2006). It is commonly found in conversations and speeches given by the same speaker, especially given the influence of globalization over the last century and the spread of the English language (Kadir, 2021). An interesting linguistic phenomenon is code-switching between Arabic and English in vernacular poetry, in which colloquial Arabic is commonly used. This study explores the use of code-switching in oral vernacular poetry, which is a genre that, to the researcher's knowledge, has not been studied before. Therefore, studying code-switching between English and vernacular Arabic in poetry may provide insights into a previously unexplored area. This paper seeks to determine how code-switching in some performances of vernacular poetry takes place, in addition to considering the possible reasons behind this practice. To achieve these aims, the focus of this paper is on the aesthetic elements of oral poems, together with their poetic structure. According to Brown (1995), given that oral poetry and performance have significance in society, performance poetry deserves more scholarly attention.

The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1) What kinds of code-switching are present in the investigated poems?

2) When intra-sentential code-switching is used, is it systematic following syntactic constraints?

3) What possible discourse functions does code-switching serve in switching between English and vernacular Arabic in vernacular poetry?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Vernacular Poetry

According to Booth (1992), vernacular poetry uses everyday speech. She stated that "an elite colloquial poetry" (p. 463) first originated in medieval Andalusia and is labelled as *aʃ-ʃiʕr aʃ-ʃaʕbi:*, which means popular or folk poetry. Booth (1992) also mentioned that other terms have been assigned to this type of poetry; for example, in the Maghrib it is described as *aʃ-ʃiʕr al-malħun* from the word *laħn*, which means that it does not follow *fusˤha*, i.e. Standard Arabic grammar. In the Arabian Peninsula it is also called *aʃ-ʃiʕr an-nabatˤi:* 'Nabatˤi: poetry', which is a traditional type of oral poetry spoken by Arab tribes and people in neighbouring areas. It is more commonly found among people living in the central regions of Saudi Arabia and the desert dwellers of the contiguous regions of the Negev, Syria, Jordan, Sinai and western Iraq (Holes, 2013). The term *Nabatˤi:* was first used in the 13th century CE (Sowayan, 2000, p. 68). Holes (2013) stated that the term was used to describe the language of Bedouin poetry compared to the yardstick of Classical Arabic. It was considered ungrammatical and hence like the "broken" Arabic spoken by ancient Nabateans. Similarly, As-Saʕi:d (1987) described modern *Nabatˤi:* poetry as a type of Bedouin verse whose language is formed from the everyday speech of Bedouin tribes and which is written as it is spoken. However, this genre of Bedouin poetry also draws on Modern Standard Arabic, where an occasional classical word or expression is inserted into a dialectal sentence. Vernacular poetry also focuses on different Bedouin items in the contemporary *Nabatˤi:* poetry of the

Arabian Peninsula.

According to Booth (1992), contemporary poets refer to this type of poetry as *ʃiʕr al-ʕa:mmijjah*, which means "poetry of the colloquial" (p. 463). For Booth (1992), *ʕa:mmi:* "means not only 'colloquial' but also 'common' or 'vulgar'" (p. 369).

Vernacular poetry, or *aʃ-ʃiʕr aʃ-ʃaʕbi:*, usually serves certain social purposes such as commenting on "all kinds of national, regional and even (as here) international political issues" (Holes & Abu Atheera, 2007, p. 273), in addition to expressing the poet's personal feelings or romance and courtship.

To sum up, in the literature vernacular poetry is believed to be a purely oral art, which is expressed in vernacular Arabic by both educated and non-educated poets.

2.2 Code-switching

Code-switching is a term used to describe regularly occurring shifts between different languages. It is a linguistic or discourse practice where elements and items from two or more linguistic systems, or codes (i.e. different languages or varieties of the same language), are used in the same speech act or interaction. It is possible to switch between languages "between the turns of different speakers in the same conversation, sometimes between utterances within a single turn, and sometimes even within a single utterance" (Milroy & Muysken, 1995, p. 7). Code-switching was defined by Gumperz (1982, p. 59) as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems". Moreover, Myers-Scotton (1993a) described it as "the selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from an embedded language (or languages) in utterances of a matrix language during the same conversation". In the present study, the lines and stanzas of the analysed poems will be treated as sentences, in alignment with the above definitions of code-switching.

Code-switching has been distinguished from other common related phenomena in bilingual speech. For instance, while borrowing involves the adoption of lexical components from a particular language into the lexicon of a different language, in code-switching "two grammars and vocabularies are used in producing a sentence or a text" (Muysken, 2000, p. 70).

Auer (1998) contended that the two linguistic phenomena of code-switching and code-mixing both involve switching between two languages and are structurally undifferentiated. McCormic (1995), however, argued that code-switching involves alternation between longer elements of speech, whereas code-mixing is often limited to single words or shorter elements.

There are two main types of code-switching and these are inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching. The latter term is also described as code-mixing and intra-sentential code-mixing (Muysken, 2000). In comparison to intra-sentential code-switching (or mixing) taking place within a clause, inter-sentential code-switching occurs at clause boundaries (Mejdell, 2006). The term alternational code-switching is favoured by some analysts to describe switching between speech belonging to a different code, language or variety. Moreover, insertional code-switching or code-mixing (Muysken, 2000) refers to the occurrence of individual items from a particular code in another code. Certain sociolinguists have recently suggested that code-switching should be used only to describe changes of code in conversational interaction that are socially meaningful (Auer, 1995, 1998).

According to Poplack (1993), code-switching should include all levels of linguistic structure; in so doing, she suggested that the term code-switching should incorporate both the intra-sentential and inter-sentential mixing of two languages: "Code-switching may occur at various levels of linguistic structure (e.g. *sentential, intrasentential, tag*) and it may be *flagged* or *smooth*" (p. 255). For Grosjean (1996), the term code-switching refers to the word, phrase and sentence level, while Myers-Scotton's (2006) examples of code-switching incorporated both inter-sentential and intra-sentential switches. Thus, it may be claimed that the location of the language switch is the primary distinction between code-switching and code-mixing. The term code-switching in the current study refers to code-switching and code-mixing, while intra-sentential code-switching will be used to describe code-mixing.

Myers-Scotton (1993b) introduced the concept of *matrix language* (ML) and *embedded language* (EL). The system morphemes and the majority of the content morphemes are provided by the ML, which also establishes the morpho-syntactic frame for the clause. In turn, the EL may provide the constituents and single content morphemes that are inserted into the ML base. In the current study, the ML is the vernacular Arabic and the EL is the English language used by the poets.

Regarding the motivation for code-switching, Gumperz (1982) referred to code-switching as an additional resource through which a range of social and rhetorical meanings are expressed, rather than simply resulting from a speaker's lack of proficiency in one of the languages they speak. According to Gumperz, switching between languages serves both expressive and pragmatic functions. Discussing contextual clues, Gumperz (1982) claimed that code choice can be affected by non-linguistic aspects of the speech situation, including the speakers' social relationship, conversation type, social roles, type of international exchange, topic, audience design and occasion. Gumperz (1982) introduced three possible discourse functions for code-switching: "situational", "metaphorical" and "conversational" (in the sense of unmarked discourse contextualization) switching. However, Gumperz argued that "to say that code switching conveys information doesn't mean that a switch can be assigned a single meaning" (p. 96). Thus, code-switching functions may be ambiguous or polysemous.

Myers-Scotton (1993a) approached code-switching by referring to "social motivations", introducing code switches in terms of their relative "markedness". Examining bilingual code-switching, she put forward "marked" (unexpected code) and "unmarked" categories (expected code).

Davies et al. (2013) added that in code-switching, the languages should form part of the oral repertoire used by the community for communication. According to Hoffmann (2014), code-switching might occur when the speaker aims to quote someone else, especially the speech of famous or prominent figures. Saeed (1997) indicated that the motivation for code-switching depends on the speaker's personality and the nature of the subject being discussed. In terms of poetic code-switching, the topic of interest in the current study, Duan (2015) noted that since code-switching is a conscious technique used by poets, they might use it for aesthetic purposes.

The analysis in this paper will be confined to code-switching found in vernacular poetry and will concentrate on its type and potential functions.

2.3 Previous Studies on Code-switching in Poetry

Few studies have been conducted on code-switching in poetry, with most related studies instead focusing on songs. No study has previously been conducted on code-switching between colloquial Arabic and English, to the researcher's knowledge.

Songs are similar to poems to a certain extent, so in this section an important study on songs will first be introduced. This study is Davies and Bentahila's (2008) investigation of code-switching between French and colloquial Arabic in "rai" lyrics in Morocco and Algeria. Their study showed how code-switching relates to the structure of this type of song in terms of line division, rhyme and stanza. They also showed how code-switching in the lyrics is used for rhetorical and aesthetic effects. Moreover, they found that code-switching may also serve a carefully constructed poetic function and not a spontaneous one. Therefore, code-switching may be a careful and purposeful strategy used by singers, songwriters and composers who are aware that their songs might spread to people outside their social context. For Davies and Bentahila (2006), code-switching as a "stylistic innovation" (p. 368) could be used by singers who want to succeed in the popular music industry.

In their study of "George Bush, Bedouin poet" examining two Bedouin poems in vernacular Arabic by two Jordanian poets, Holes and Abu Atheera (2007) found that the poets playfully used some English words in the voice of President Bush to present a more plausible image.

Two studies on code-switching in poetry between different languages will be discussed next. Duan (2015) aimed to explore poetic code-switching as acts of linguistic code-switching (i.e. switches between two or more languages) in relation to the construction of social and cultural identity within Asian American poetry by exploring the work of three contemporary Asian American poets. According to Duan, poets can represent their identities through code-switching by creating distance between thematic parts of the poem, readers and the poet. As a result, code-switching can express or reduce emotional distance in relationships and influence the accessibility of a poem to the audience.

Similarly, Dlamini Myeni and Sibiya (2021) conducted a study on code-switching in contemporary isiZulu performance poetry. The qualitative analysis was based on ethnopoetics theory and both inter-lineal and intra-lineal code-switching analysis was conducted. The findings showed that, artistically, isiZulu performance poets appeared to randomly switch between their native language and English without considering "how it will affect the overall appeal of the composition" (p. 7). However, code-switching was acceptable in certain circumstances, particularly when there were no equivalent terms or expressions. In addition, some poets employed code-switching in an innovative way, using it for stylistic reasons rather than as a trendy component of their performance.

To sum up, most of the above-mentioned studies demonstrated that code-switching is used for rhetorical and aesthetic purposes. Other obvious purposes include revealing the poets' identities and expressing emotional distance.

3. Method

A qualitative method is adopted in the current study to investigate contemporary vernacular poetry, together with its significance in current literary discourse. The qualitative method is suitable for this task because, as noted by Creswell (2009), it is an effective method for exploring the meaning assigned by individuals or even groups to human or social problems.

The data comprises eight publicly available audio and video recordings of poems found on YouTube. In selecting the poems, a main criterion was that code-switching had to occur in them. The selected poems are by different poets, thus providing an opportunity to find out the poets' different purposes for code-switching and also to explore the different types of code-switching in terms of structure. The poets are of different ages; six of them are from Saudi Arabia, while a poem by a Jordanian poet and another poem by an Emirate poet are also included. The recordings generally are of good quality.

4. Data Analysis

In this section the code-switching found in each poem will be discussed. The analysis will be divided into two sub-sections: first, inter-sentential code-switching will be discussed, followed by intra-sentential code-switching. Excerpts from the poems will show the types of code-switching found. In each excerpt, the first line is from the original poem (italics for English words and regular font for Arabic). Each excerpt is followed by transliteration of the Arabic words in each line where the English words will be underlined, followed by an English functional translation.

4.1 Inter-sentential Code-switching

In normal speech, inter-sentential code-switching occurs at the clause or utterance level within a single speaker's speech or during turn-taking between interlocutors, which could demonstrate their fluency in both languages (Mejdell, 2006). Similarly, inter-sentential

code-switching in poems, termed inter-lineal code-switching by Dlamini Myeni and Sibiya (2021), refers to a switch between one language and another at the line level in a poem. Thus, if the stanza in a poem is divided into lines, one line will be said in one language while the next will be in another language.

This type of inter-lineal code-switching occurs infrequently in the data analysed in the current study, found in only three out of the eight poems. In the first excerpt, the poet started in Arabic and then he switched to English, as can be seen in Excerpt (1):

(1)   دكتور لو تشرح ماني فاهمن شي

وشلون ابفهم شرحاً بالانجليزي

تسويتنا بالشرح تسين بأثر تسي

This is difficult. This is easy.

diktu:r law taʃraħ ma:ni: fa:hmin ʃaj

wiʃlo:n abafham ʃarħin ba-l-ingli:zjj

tsawi:tina ba-ʃ-ʃarħ tsin b-aθar tsi:

<u>*This is difficult. This is easy.*</u>

"Doctor even if you explain, I do not understand.

How would I understand your explanation which is in English?

You pushed hard on us with your teaching.

This is difficult. This is easy."

In Excerpts (2) and (3), the opposite of the above example occurs; here the poet started in English and then switched to Arabic, as follows:

(2)   *I love you*

من حر فرقاك ما اذوق

<u>*I love you*</u>

min ħirr farga:k ma: ðo:g

"I love you

  From the pain I suffer because of you abandoning me I cannot taste"

(3)   *George ask me*

وشلون عايش يا مسكين

In empty desert

مابها أنس واشجار

<u>*George ask me*</u>

wiʃlo:n ʕa:jiʃ ya miskin

<u>*In empty desert*</u>

ma: baha ins wa-ʃʒa:r

"George asked me

Poor you, how do you live?

In an empty desert,

Where there is no people nor trees."

4.2 Intra-sentential Code-Switching

Intra-sentential code-switching will be examined in this section, referred to by Dlamini Myeni and Sibiya (2021) as intra-lineal code-switching. In the poems analysed, intra-sentential code-switching occurs at the beginning, middle, and end of the line. The poems

contain the following examples of intra-sentential code-switching.

Intra-sentential code-switching occurs at the beginning of the line in these examples.

(4) *Of course,* يالخاين ترانا نسيناك

Of course, ya-l-xaːjin tarana nisiːnak

"Of course, traitor, we have forgotten you"

(5) *My heart* عافك والسبب سواياك

My heart ʕafik wa-s-sibab siwaːjik

"My heart rejected you because of your deeds"

(6) *I am sure* بفرقاك بيزول همي

I am sure ib-fargaːk bi-zuːl hammi

"I am sure with abandoning you all my pains will disappear"

Excerpts (4), (5) and (6) are taken from the same poem where the poet started using English and then switches to vernacular Arabic.

(7) *All our business* ياروحي بين ايديك

All our business yaː ruːħi beːn iːdik

"All our business (money) my beloved is between your hands"

(8) *I am* من حبك ترى قلبي جريح

I am min ħubbik tara galbi ʒiriːħ

"My heart from your love is wounded"

Similarly, Excerpts (7) and (8) show switching at the beginning of the line and are taken from the same poem.

In the next excerpts, intra-sentential code-switching occurs in the middle of the line. However, it is worth mentioning that switching in the middle of line occurs less commonly than in the other positions and therefore few examples are found.

(9) لكن *today* طاريك

is killing me

lakin *today* tˤariːk

is killing me

"but today mentioning you (or mentioning your name) is killing me"

(10) الحقيقة رحم *people* عقبوك

alħagiːgah riħim *people* ʕagabuːk

"The truth, have mercy on the womb of people who brought you to life"

Excerpt (10) is taken from another poem where the poet also inserts a word in English, i.e. 'people', instead of using the Arabic word ناس 'naːs'.

(11) ودلال *yellow twinkling* كالذهب زين

wi-dlaːl *yellow twinkling* ka-ð-ðahab ziːn

"and yellow twinkling coffee pot like gold"

(12) وال شاي *so tasty* لصار على النار

wa-ʃ-ʃaːj *so tasty* lasˤaːr ʕalaː an-naːr

"and the tea will be so tasty when it is on fire"

In the above two examples, switching also occurs in the middle of the line.

Intra-sentential code-switching at the end of the line is the most common position. In one of the poems, the poet uses switching from vernacular Arabic to English only in the last word of each line. The following part of the poem illustrates this:

(13) البارحة ليلي قضيته اب *waiting*

زين الوصايف قطع الـ *communication*

واعمري اللي راح كله *dreaming*

اصارع الامواج بالـ *navigation*

al-bariħah ljlijj giðˤiːtah ib *waiting*

zi:n al-wisˤi:f gitˤʕ al- _communication_

wa-ʕumri alli ra:ħ killuh _dreaming_

asˤariʕ al-amwaʒ ba-n- ʔia:sˤa _navigation_

"I spent my whole last night waiting

The most beautiful (lady) cuts the communication

Oh! My life that I spent dreaming

Wrestling the waves with navigation"

(14) _no longer_ انا ما عاد احتمل فرقاك

ana ma: ʕa:d aħtimil fargak _no longer_

"I cannot bear you abandoning me any longer"

(15) _any place_ لا تخلي منطقة زر

la: txallj mantˤigah zirr _any place_

"Do not leave any region (make sure to) visit any place"

(16) اما اني انجح وانطرب والعقل بي

crazy او اني ابقى طول عمري

amma: inni: anʒaħ wa-ntˤirib wa-l-ʕagil bi:

aw inni: abga: tˤu:l ʕumri: _crazy_

"either I succeed and enjoy my success while I am still sane

 Or I remain my whole life crazy"

(17) _why why?_ ٲ يـ بـ يـ بي يـ ٲ

I تلتفت خلفك وتنظر غير

ya: ħabi:bi: _Why why_

tiltifit xalfik au tanðˤir ɣe:r _I_

"My love, why why?

Do you turn behind and look at someone else rather than me?"

It is worth mentioning that it is not necessarily the case that intra-sentential code-switching occurs only in one place in each line in the poems. In some poems, intra-sentential code-switching occurs at the beginning and end of the same line or it occurs at the beginning and middle of the line, as in the following excerpts:

(18) Your وصلك لي ياخلي possible

Your wasˤlik li: ya: xili _possible_

"Your connection, my intimate friend, is possible"

(19) _Refuse_ تسكن _house_ مبني من احجار

Refuse taskin _house_ mabni: min aħʒar

"Refuse to live in house built from stones"

In Excerpt (19) the English word '_house_' is inserted in the middle of the line and is used instead of the Arabic word بيت '_be:t_' and the word _'refuse'_ is used at the beginning.

It is also evident that in intra-sentential code-switching between two languages, grammatical constraints are followed. In all the poems where this type of code-switching occurs, grammatical constraints are followed and content morphemes are more common. However, it is worth mentioning that a violation of grammatical constraints is found only once and can be seen in the following excerpt:

(20) _Flying_ لا وهني الطير يقدر

la: wa hani: tˤ-tˤjir yagdar _flying_

"How lucky is the bird as he can fly"

Here, the poet uses a gerund instead of a verb in the present tense. In vernacular Arabic, the verb is يطير '*yiṭīr*' and in English the verb is '*fly*'. A possible justification for this could be that the poet wanted to maintain the rhyme of the poem because all uneven lines end with -ing and every even line ends with -tion.

4.3 Possible Functions of Poetic Code-switching

The analysis showed that in the poems, code-switching is used as a poetic strategic device. For instance, on some occasions code-switching is used when the poet is narrating or imagining a conversation with an English speaker. In these cases, the poet tends to switch to English to make the image more believable; this is consistent with the findings of Holes and Abu Atheera (2007). Another possible function of code-switching is for a rhetorical effect such as to add humour to the context and to attract the listeners' or audience's attention. Furthermore, it seems that if the poet wants to convey strong feelings or emotions, he tends to use English. Poets may also try to be more innovative through using code-switching as it is an uncommon practice in vernacular poetry. Globalization and the spread of English may also encourage poets to be more innovative and use English in their vernacular poems because they might feel that their use of English will not hinder the listeners' understanding.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on contemporary poetic code-switching, which differs from conversational code-switching because it happens consciously. Poets intentionally switch to English in vernacular poetry, which is commonly delivered in vernacular Arabic. Analysis of the poems included in the study showed use of both inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching, with more frequent use of the intra-sentential code-switching type. Regarding the syntactic constraints of intra-sentential code-switching, code-switching was shown to be systematic and to follow the grammatical rules of the matrix language, i.e. vernacular Arabic. Only one example was found of a violation of a grammatical rule but the purpose for doing so was to maintain the rhyme of the poem. Most of the switching uses content words. Regarding the motivational functions behind code-switching, code-switching was found to be used for rhetorical purposes such as to add a sense of humour, to express strong emotions or as a means of attracting the listeners' or audience's attention. Further, it is used to quote someone's else speech. Finally, contemporary poets also appear to be trying to be more innovative by using code-switching. Future research is needed on code-switching between English or any language and the vernacular to find out if this is a growing phenomenon and to determine its possible functions. Moreover, the syntactic constraints could be examined to discover if the code-switching is systematic or whether it violates the syntactic rules of the two languages in this context.

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