

Translatability and the Message Imbedded in Code Switching

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Abstract

Language users find themselves obliged to use more than one language to adapt to some life necessities in some communities. They become bilingual or multilingual speakers who may use one code or tend to use code switching within the same communicative interaction. Bilingual and multilingual audience are expected to, directly, perceive the message of the speaker(s), and code switching, when used, is said to serve its purpose. In the case of the speaker and audience not sharing the same code(s), conscious translation can keep the target text audience in the same atmosphere of the source text with the speaker and the other audience - who share the speaker's code(s). Despite serious efforts, it is not easy to convey the speaker's imbedded message in code switching via translation. The task of the translator becomes more difficult when he has to deal with untranslatable imbedded messages. When the message behind the switch is not part of the complete package, which is the case in most interpretations, the communication will not be as successful as the partners hope.

Keywords: code switching, translatability, message, dialect, conversation

1. Introduction

The term '*code switching*' is used to refer to the use of two or more codes within a conversation or even within the same utterance' (Soden & Mooney, 2011, p.131). A conversation can have two different meanings, according to Myers (2009), 'it can mean all interaction using language, including institutional talk such as teachers talking to students or layers questioning witnesses. Also, it can mean just those everyday uses of talk such as family talking about events of the day at the dinner table, or two acquaintances passing time on a bus.' (p. 501). Switching is considered a characteristic of local and intimate conversations (Holmes, 2013). Well prepared speech for very serious purposes will be in one code, but usually day-to-day contact may show switches from one code to another as long as the message is clear (Nortier, 2011). The point raised in this study is not the inability of the first language (code) to convey the experience and moods of the speaker. Rather, it takes the point of answering the questions 'If both codes can, theoretically, convey the message of the speaker, then why the speaker would attempt code switching? How does the switch affect the efficiency of translation?' The main areas which will be discussed are:(1) code switching and its categories (2) the reasons for code switching(3) how code switching affects the perception of the translated message. It implements analysis of corpora taken from Yemeni conversations in the media. Interpretation of each conversation is attempted in order to evaluate the efficiency of code switching translation in the target text. Conversation transcriptions will include only the information related to the quest following Myers (2009) recommendation that it is probably best to use just as much details as you need for your purpose, and no more.

2. Code Switching

Code switching is divided by some scholars like Gumperz(1982) into metaphorical or conversational code switching and situational code switching (Tong, 2009). According to him situational code switching refers to the change of language where distinct varieties are employed in certain settings that are associated with separate, bounded kinds of activities. Salazar (2011) observed trends in code switching categorization through the work of some linguists; the earliest was Sauza (1991) who categorized code switching as: competency related code switching, culturally related code switching and communicative related code switching.

Then, came Metila (2009) who mentioned Poplak's (1979 & 1980) category which include; Inter-sentential code switching, and tag switching. Inter-sentential code switching occurs outside the sentence or the close level. Next, Barredo (1997) according to whom tag switching involves the insertion of a tag in one language (e.g. you know, I mean, etc.) and the inclusion of discourse markers such as 'well, okay, all right'. Then, the concept was recategorized using form and structure into interjections and affirmative/negative particles by Shiffrin (1987).

Furthermore, code switching categories have been revised and the terms insertion and alternation assumed by Muysken (2000) replaced the old inter-sentential and intra-sentential terms as the formers are less dependent on syntactic analysis (Backus, 2010). The new concepts differ in the psycholinguistic processing mechanisms underlying them as in insertions, a grammatical frame in one language may host one or more content words from another language, while in alternation monolingual chunks in two different languages alternate (Backus, 2010). Taking these categories into consideration, code switching may take place in a conversation, within a sentence, and sometimes even in a single word (Nortier, 2011).

Khan (2009) believes that code switching occurs when speakers switch from one language to another in the same conversation. Code switching presupposes bilingualism or multilingualism of the individual. For Blomand Gumperz (2010), the factors which facilitate the understanding of the social meaning of the switch are the mastery of the systems involved in the switch, and the local values and the individual background. They observed that code switching in some communities alternates two separate languages like Hindi and Urdu, Serbian and Croatian, Thai and Laotian and many other languages. Whereas, other communities may switch between the classical and dialectal varieties or among the varieties of their shared language which is the case in the Arabic speaking regions. To identify the type of the switch there must be a clear linguistic distinction between what is classical and what is dialectal. In addition, to identify a code switch, it has to be associated with an ethnic group that the speaker does not belong to (Soden&Mooney, 2011). Code mixing is switching within terns, but not all researchers think the process underlying switching within terns and between different conversational episodes are sufficiently different to warrant completely separate terminology (Holmes, 2013).

3. Reasons for Code Switching

Roman Jakobson believes that 'all experiences and its classification is conveyable in any existing language' (cited in Hermans, 2011). Therefore, when a speaker feels that it is probable to lose some parts of his message while using the first code, he may attempt conveying it through another code not because that code dose not satisfy the linguistic conditions but for some other reasons. There can be extralinguistic factors and personal tag of the communication which can be highlighted by using code switching. Linguistic competence plays a vital role in code switching. If the speaker does not know a certain word in one language, it is possible that he will switch to the language he knows better. For Salazar (2011) competency related code switching includes (a) hardship of expressing one's thoughts in L2 (b) difficulty in translating L1 to L2 (c) limited L2 lexicon/vocabulary. But, if both the speakers master the codes used in the switch (within the conversation), then there are other reasons for that switch. For a bilingual speaker, a word may sound better, sever or serious in one language and expresses the intended meaning, so he uses it as a switch in the other language (Nortier, 2011).

When it is a common practice to switch codes in a community, it becomes a cultural feature that characterizes the speech of that community. It becomes normal to everybody to practice code switching (Salazar, 2011). Thus, a person may code switch just to fit in his community. The switch becomes one way to use languages effectively to signal identity, reaffirm social bonds and even appeal to ethnic group obligations (Khan, 2009, p.378). On the contrary, some people use code, switching as an alienating strategy that makes them distinguished and eminent. In fact, code switching identification is a powerful tool for identification, as Nortier (2011) puts it. Khan (2009) supports L. Page and Tabouret-Keller's concept of acts of identity, which relates the linguistic and social psychological domains as the individual attempts to resemble members in a group or to be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished. LaBelle (2011) highlights the discriminating role of membership 'that membership will be a result of whether in-group or out-group members hold power' (p.176). As a result, code switching functions as a tool for alienating or integrating group members. A speaker may use code switching for the purpose of effective communication, better understanding, and whenever there is fear of misinterpreting of the message or insufficient emphasis of thoughts and arguments (Salazar, 2011). Thus, the switch is justified if the partners cannot get into the conversation and react to the message otherwise.

The ideas discussed in a topic may determine the preferred language to be used for certain terms and words. Nortier (2011) finds out that some bilingual speakers use code switching when they talk about religion, school or to curse. Whereas, Khan (2009) suggests that the speaker may switch due to the relationship with the other partner in the communication event not for a competency reason or the topic itself. Soden and Mooney (2011) sum up the extra linguistic reasons for code switching; 'There are variety of reasons why a speaker may switch codes, whether consciously or unconsciously. It may relate to the topic or it may occur if another person joins the conversation who only speaks a particular code or variety. A switch may therefore, also indicate solidarity and inclusion or, conversely, distance and exclusion' (p. 131) To interpret and judge the reasons stimulating the switch, analysing the linguistic levels alone will not be of a great help. There is a need for pursuing close study of the psychological and social influence on the conversation. This means, preference is to using discourse analysis principles not conversation structure analysis principles. Yager emphasises that discourse analysis has to be designed to agree with the objectives of the research and the content of the discourse (Alshoman, 2004). To achieve that, he suggests that discourse analysis has to include the background of the discourse, the verbal and the non-verbal context, and finally the message and the audience beside the ideological and social frame (Alshoman, 2004).

4. Code Switching and Translatability

The expectations of translating or interpreting L1 texts are not very high that is a text won't reach the level of full translatability into L2 (Hermansbak, 2011). Losing some of the source text's original message due to not translating each and every word is expected because of the nature of translation processes. Consequently, losing essential significant elements would reduce the quality of translation and the level of translatability of the source text. It becomes difficult and stressful to deal with expressions especially those that consciously exploit the idiomatic resources of a given tongue, or those that are encoded in multiple ways (Hermansbak, 2011). The translator renders ST message into TT equivalent message as possible as he can which is not easy in the presence of such expressions in the ST. This job becomes more difficult when he has to deal with two systems on the ST side. These expressions become more untranslatable when the purpose of their use is not inferred or decoded within the first code due to inviting them from another code. It is possible that the main purpose of switching the codes may not be achieved leading to a major loss in the vitality of the speech after translation.

Code switching indexes social values and attitudes, and it contains vital elements of the message of the speaker (Ho, 2007). Therefore, the switch has to be done skilfully as it carries part of the message which the receiver has to get in order to interact with the intended message. The code switch which is employed in a conversation need to be understood by the partners, that is, the social meaning of the switch has to be recognised by the receiver too. For Blom and Gumperz (2010), the speakers operate their differences in local values, background and social situations to affect their interpretation of the social meaning of the variables they employ in the switch. They state that 'the context in which one of a set of alternates is regularly used becomes part of its meaning, so that when this form is then employed in a context where it is not normal, it brings in some of the flavour of this original setting' (Blom and Gumperz, 2010, p.229). Consequently, the use of these fixed expressions, idioms and some phrases from another code within the ST carries its own flavour and meaning which adds to the original message something that has to be conveyed to the TT. This special flavour has to be perceived and conveyed by the interpreter or the mediator, otherwise, it gets lost and the original message loses an important component.

Although some translators consider the multilingual TT the ideal representation of multilingual ST, most of them have obstacles in working with texts which juxtapose speeches belonging to different systems code switching (Arcia, 2012). This presupposes that whatever represents multilingualism in the ST is represented and conveyed to the TT, and code switching is no exception. Arcia (2012) claims that translators 'betray their own instructions by responding to their own conventional perceptions'; in practice they are not loyal to their beliefs (p. 66). When code switching is ignored or filtered in the translation process, the result will be a flattened version of the original text. For him, this practice annihilates all possibilities of active participation of the TT receivers to discover the otherness in the ST which is evoked by the switch in the text. Besides, Hervey and other scholars present the concept of compromise in translation and define it as 'reconciling oneself to the fact that, while one would like to do full justice to the richness of the ST, one's final TT inevitably suffers from various losses' (cited in Arcia, 2012, p.70). Consequently, there arises a crucial need for a method to satisfy the speakers aims, convey his message and avoid flattening the TT or compromising. In fact, Arcia (2012) believes that it is possible to translate with purpose and still make visible the traits of the foreign language in the TT.

Applying this in practice suggests that code switching made can sustain its function in the TT as well as they did in the ST. The conversations in the media are not so different from that real day-to-day conversations regarding code switching. A personal touch may be present and the switch relates to the instantaneous effect of the interaction or to give special importance to the topic by adding a special social meaning of privateness and confidentiality to the conversation (Blom & Gumperz, 2010, p. 224).

5. Levels of Arabic Language

Modern Standard Arabic is not the same Arabic which was spoken centuries ago at the time of Quran revelation. There are some differences, yet it is considered the standard variety that stands for the ancient classical Arabic and other varieties are considered dialects. Ferguson suggests that there is a high codification and a low variety in languages like Greek, Arabic, Swiss-German and Haitian Creole (Tong, 2009). This identification relies mainly on the opposing domains in which these varieties are commonly used-formal/informal, educated/uneducated, etc. Badawi identifies five levels of Arabic as a result of variations in historical and religious traditions, and social and literacy factors:

1. Traditional Classical Arabic (TCIA) (used in Quran and by religious scholars)
2. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) (used for formal settings and publications)
3. Educated Colloquial Arabic (ECA) (used by educated speakers like doctors and lawyers)
4. Literate Colloquial Arabic (LCA) (used by those who can read and write)
5. Illiterate Colloquial Arabic (ICA) (used by those who cannot read or write) (Albirini, 2016).

These are not the only levels but they can be the closest to the real situation in the Arab world which can be identified and justified clearly. A speaker can move consciously or unconsciously within these levels, but Badawi finds it easy and more possible for those who master the higher levels (TCIA for instance) to switch using the lower levels and rather difficult for those using the lower levels (ICA for instance) to switch to the higher ones (Albirini, 2016). The differences between Modern Standard Arabic and the dialects (other levels) may be in pronunciation, inflections and derivations of words, synonym or syntactic structures. However, throughout the changes of the dialects, a lot of classical expressions and syntactic structures remained the same and exceptionally infiltrated into the dialects system. When people use such expressions or structure they are not aware of them being classical as they are part of their daily used language. Subsequently, judging them being code switching or merely of one variety may be difficult. Whether people aim at using the expressions as being code switching in the text or not can be asserted, only, by examining the context. An Arabic speaker may attempt code switching within the different levels due to several reasons; he may believe that the partners (from other regions) do not understand his spoken variety, he may want to change his identity usually to acquire an upper social level, or to resemble others. He may switch using languages other than the different varieties of Arabic according to the situation, community and purpose.

6. The Sample Data

The data collected here is from three different broadcasted TV programmes; one is local and two are international. Two of the programmes are interviews in Arabic and both the speaker and the interviewer are supposed to use modern standard Arabic (MSA) and the third is an Arabic report which is for an English news channel. Extracts of the conversations are transcribed and analysed to investigate the variables that may play role in code switching in the ST and how that affects the reception of the message in the TT. The three speakers are Yemeni ladies with different levels of education who practice different jobs and come from different regions of different cultural restrictions. The first speaker is Kadija Alsalami who is a famous director and a diplomat. She is interviewed in Aljazeera Arabic on a cultural programme. She pursued her higher education in the United States of America and, at the time of the interview, she was working for Yemen Embassy in France. The second speaker is Sumaya Almashjari who is an English department student in Aden University and works as a reporter in a local channel. She appeared on a BBC News political report. The third speaker is Sameeha Alattani, a religious vocalist who practices her profession without any academic certificates. She is interviewed on Azaal- a Yemeni family channel. Here are transcriptions of extracts from the original texts and their translations.

The first speaker:

'/ka:n hubbi ?inani ?asmal fai fi ilbalad fa ?astagid mif ?a:rfah hal humma bas ?aljamaniji:n willa al?ad?nas al?u,ra ?ihna ?aljamaniji:n lamman nu,rud? da:?iman dzu?urana da:?iman t?uddana ?ila albalad mahma ?ajnama kunna: wa ?ajnama ruhuna faha:da huwa ?alasbab/' (Aljazeera, 2016).

'It was my passion to do something in the country. I think, I don't know. Is it only the Yemeni people or other races too? We Yemeni people, when we go out, our roots always pull us back to our country. Whatever, wherever we are, wherever we go. These are the reasons.'

The second speaker:

'/fi *ḍil* alʔahdaθ alha:slah alʔa:n wa *alga:rjah wgu:d* alʔama:n sa:r muʔdam (...) jaʕni (...) *mif* mumkin *ʔahis ʔinani* law *ʔaragt taqri:ban wi ruht* alʔamakin ʔinani *ʔafakki rkaif bargaf* qad tihsal ʔiftiba:ka:t qad tihsal *hina* (...) jaʕni ʕadam *wgu:d* alʔama:n *ʔalliga:n afaʕbijah nihna nidʕamha* liʔannha *hi matʕakkilʕ* ʔaj *ʔatar ʕaleina*' (Assad, 2015).

'During the current incidents which are happening now, the presence of security became unavailable. (...) That's, we (...) I can't (...) I mean (...) feel that if I go out, nearly, and went to places, I think how I'll be back. There may be fights, may happen here. I mean, no presence of peace. The people committees, we support them because they do not form any danger for us'.

The third speaker:

'/ḍa:hi:n *ibsiri* maʕa *alʔurʔ ha:ḍeh walʔiga:ʕa:t ha:ḍeh matibsirʕ ʔannaʕa:dih ʔan tilgi ʔaj mha:ḍarah* [.....] ʔiḍa: *makanʕ* fi *ʔiga:ʕa:t ʕatgu:llif tifti mo:lid tifti tismaʕ* si:rat arrasu:l *salla allahu ʕalaihi wa sallam* lakin *ʕala:s* maʕa *ʔalʔiga:ʕa:t tgullif jalla nadʕizi ʔiʕtai ʕalafa:n jiʕa* *alwagt wi ʕala:s*' (Azzal, 2013).

'Now you see with the organ and these musical instruments, the vocalist cannot preach [.....] If there were no musical instruments, she would tell you she wants Moulid (religious poetry). She wants to listen about the prophet peace be upon him. But, no way, it's no more. With these instruments, she tells you come on finish quickly so that time passes.'

7. Discussion

It is observed that there are code switching instances of different types and with different rates in the conversations of the three ladies. The italicized transcriptions of the words represent these switches. One example of each code switching type used by the speakers is taken for analysis. The conversation of the first speaker is characterized by MSA words and structures with local tone. Most of her switches are in sounds specially those representing diacritics and the sound /g/ for /q/. Some insertions occur, for instance using /bas/ for /faqaʕ/ (only). Besides, she uses the colloquial grammatical agreement of demonstrators and pronouns with nouns in structures like /ha:ḍa huwa ʔalʔasba:b/ instead of /ha:ḍihi hija ʔalʔasba:b/ (these are the reasons). She stayed in foreign countries for a long time which may be reflecting on her use of her own version of Arabic. Moreover, the topic is personal and she is used to speak in public about her life, feelings and experience in ease, so she frequently switches to her colloquial variety. Translation of her speech does not show the intimacy of the topic and her expressive character which is clear in the source text.

The second speaker expresses her own points of view using MSA most of the time. When it comes to her feelings towards the civil war in her area, she gradually switches to her local variety. The switches include replacements of MSA words by colloquial word like the pronoun /nahnu/ by /ʔhna/ (we). The colloquial negative process is inserted within the MSA structure of sentences such as /matʕakkilʕ/ in replacement of /la: tuʕakkil/ (does not form) where the negative prefix /ma-/ replaces the word /la:/ and the suffix /-ʕ/ is added to the verb with vowel replacement in the verb. Pronunciation of some words are switched to the local code like /wgu:d/ for /wudʕu:d/ (presence). Pauses and hesitations occur just before she expresses her own feelings which indicate the beginning of most of the code switching in her speech. Her speech does not include lots of code switching compared to the other speakers may be because the sitting was an educational institute beside the influence of her profession. However, her opposition for some ideas makes her identity pride and belongingness to her region is visible in her code switching. The emphases of her ideas, feelings and distinguished identity can be traced in the source text but not reflected in the target text. The vocalist is interviewed on a local channel. Being in a local atmosphere, she tends to use her colloquial variety smoothly and in ease, though the interviewer uses MSA all the time. There are many insertions of colloquial words with their derivations and deviant uses. For instance, she uses the word /ibsiri/ for /ʔunḍuri/ (see) and /tibsir/ for /tastaʕi:ʕ/ (can). Colloquial negative structures are used as in /ma tibsir ʕ/ that is using /ma-/ for /la:/ (not) and adding the suffix /-ʕ/ in replacement of /la: tastaʕi:ʕ/ (she can't). switches between sounds varies from vowels representing Arabic diacritics to consonants such as /tilgi/ for /tulqi/ (recite).

Pronouns and functional particles constitute part of the switch like replacing the feminine objective pronoun /ki/ in /laki/ (you) by the suffix /-j/ and replacing the future marker /sa-/ (will) by /ʕa-/ accompanied with sound switching in the word /ʕatqu:llif/ for /sataqu:llulaki/ (she will tell you). She expresses how upset she is with some vocalists' practices and audience reactions, so she selects certain colloquial words such as /ʔi,ʕai/ which is used in negative mood for the neutral word /ʔasriʔi/ (hurry up). The local audience is expected to recognize her message out of code switching throughout her speech which is not feasible for the recipient of the TT. The interviews are open in the media for everybody to watch. They are mostly about life issues experienced by Yemeni ladies. Each lady has ideas and point of views to share with the audience. The language they used with code switching can be classified according to Badawi's levels of Arabic. The director used MSA and code switching was with ECA and rare LCA. The reporter used MSA and code switching was mostly of ECA. Whereas, the vocalist used little MSA and the rest of her speech was code switching of LCA and recurrently of ICA. Code switching observed here falls in the cultural and communicative related categories of insertion and alternation types. The variation between the levels and type of code switching among the speakers may be due to the difference in education, background, profession, social status, the topics discussed in addition to the open communication with the globe.

8. Conclusion

Code switching takes place for many reasons and in different forms. Each instance of code switching can be analyzed under a specific factor; varying from linguistic to cultural and psychological ones. There are different linguistic levels of code switching within words and sentences which come under insertion and alternation. It is observed that the more psychologically and emotionally the person involved the more alternation types appear. Usually, there is a message imbedded in code switching whether it happens consciously or unconsciously. It may be translated successfully as plain expressions; however, the translatability of the expression does not guaranty the transmission of the implicit message in the code switching made. Consequently, these embedded messages, which the source text recipients are likely to perceive, may continue to be hidden or not even noticed by the recipients of the target text. This adds to the stress that the interpreter undergoes as he is concerned with the topic and the message and finds himself mediating in special social meanings which he has to decide whether to interpret or not, and if he will, how to achieve that effectively. The aim of this paper is not to suggest a specific method to solve this problem; in fact, it highlights the problem and calls for serious work to save this message.

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