A Sociolinguistic Study of Language Choice Among Kurdish Students at Mosul University

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Abstract: *This study attempts to find out some extra-linguistic variables governing the use of Arabic (A) or Kurdish (K) or a blend of both (A-K) in terms of the phenomenon of 'code-switching', (CS), by the Kurds in the city of Mosul. Following Fishman's formula 'Who speaks what language to whom, where and when', it is expected that language choice by Kurdish bilinguals is not an arbitrary phenomenon but is a function of various socio-economic and psychological factors such as 'topic', 'participants', 'situation', 'mood' and 'purpose'.*

1. Data-Collection

This empirical study is based on data collected from 100 Kurdish informants who are bilingual Kurds born in Mosul. The informants speak the Badinani dialect spoken in the North-West of Iraq and their ages ranged between 18 and 24 years. At the time of administering the study they were enrolled as full-time students at Mosul University.

The data of this study was collected through the use of a variety of techniques which included: (1) personal observation; (ii) interviews; (iii) questionnaires; and (iv) tape-recording of natural conversations .The informants were also asked to present weekly language diaries to record their actual use of language. Questionnaires, on the other hand, involved detailed description of some situations for which the respondents were asked to identify what language or language mix they would use.

The results of this study are reported under different socio-economic parameters, which identify the constraints governing the informants' language choice (1) topic ; (2) interlocutors; (3) setting; (4) purpose; and (5) mood (cf. Hymes, 1972:58-65. The informants' responses (together with the author's observations) were tabulated under these headings of which the first three seem to be most crucial in the choice of Arabic ,

Kurdish , or a mixture of both (A-K). The analysis is based on the techniques and procedures proposed by Bentahilla (1983).

2. Analysis and Description

In this section we will present and comment on the findings of this study. As pointed out above, the informants' responses will be tabulated under the headings listed above.

2.1. Topic

Different topics were given to the informants for the purpose of comparing language use. The topics ranged from personal and domestic domains, on the one hand, to religious and technical/scientific domains, on the other hand. The following table shows the frequency of language use according to the topic of conversation.

Table (I): Frequency of Language Use According to Topic

Topic	Arabic	Kurdish	A-K
Religious	28%	2%	70%
Sports	37%	3%	60%
Personal	4%	92%	4%
Domestic	2%	90%	8%
Scientific & Technical	69%	4%	27%

The above table indicates that Arabic is more frequently used than Kurdish in the following fields/areas: "religion", "sports" and "science and technology" scoring the following percentages respectively: 28%; 37% and 69% in contrast to Kurdish (2%; 3% and 4% respectively). The frequent use of Arabic in discussing these topics can be accounted for as follows:
1. Religious Topics: The frequent use of Arabic in discussing/talking about religious matters/topics reflects the strong link between Arabic and Islam.
2. Sports: The frequent use of Arabic in this domain is due to the domination of Arabic mass media (TV, radio and newspapers) as well as to the schooling system in Iraq.

3. Science and Technology: This reflects the supremacy of Arabic in the educational domain since the medium of instruction in the Iraqi educational system is Arabic. Furthermore, this comes as an immediate result of the influence of the Arabicization of university education in Iraq.

However, in contradistinction to Arabic, Kurdish is remarkably dominant when informants discuss personal and domestic matters (i.e. 92% and 90% respectively). This is due to the availability of relevant Kurdish vocabulary items, and most probably to the factor of chronology (i.e. things learnt first have priority over things learnt at a later stage).

Code-switching (CS) from Kurdish to Arabic depends on the topic of the conversation since certain subject matters are learned in one language rather than another In other words, the use of Arabic lexical items in certain Kurdish contexts is attributed to the fact that some aspects of speakers' experience are more quickly recalled in Arabic than in Kurdish. This accounts for the insertion of Arabic items within Kurdish in the domain of education. This type of CS is common in communities where the medium of instruction is not the native language of the switchers. So, CS in such contexts is 'obligatory'.

2.2 Interlocutors

The following table shows how language choice is linked to some socio-economic parameters: the speaker-listener relationship, age, sex, language mastery, occupation, education, socioeconomic status, etc.

Table (2): Language Use Frequency According to Interlocutors

Interlocutors	Arabic	Kurdish	A-K
Parents	4%	93%	3%
Sisters & Brothers	5%	33%	62%
Relatives	5%	62%	33%
Strangers	8%	82%	10%
Teachers	12%	45%	43%
Doctors	13%	48%	39%
Employers	20%	44%	36%
Mechanics	7%	78%	15%

It can be seen from the above table that Kurdish is more remarkably used than Arabic in all of the contexts identified above, particularly with family members and relatives. This phenomenon may be due to the following considerations:

1. People, sensitive to criticism, usually prefer the mother tongue in which they can best express themselves to another language in which they are not fluent (Sallo, 1983:123).

2. Some old generation Kurds do not master Arabic and are accustomed to using Kurdish, particularly at home and thus their children have to use Kurdish in talking to them.

The high frequency of the use of Kurdish with "strangers" (i.e. 82%), on the other hand, is most probably a "politeness" gesture. The speakers try to avoid embarrassing their addressees if they think that their fluency in Arabic is not perfect. However, this seems to be the case when a Kurd talks to another Kurd.

The high frequencies of the use of Kurdish with teachers, doctors, and employers (45%, 48%, and 44% respectively) indicate that the informants disregard the 'power' and use Kurdish to:
(i)   maintain 'solidarity' relationship,
(ii)   eliminate the impersonality and social distance, and
(iii)   feel psychologically at ease.

It should be pointed out, however, that the results in Table (2) above are not in agreement with the findings of Brown and Gilman (1968) and Bentahilla (1983) , who noticed that their informants preferred to be on 'power' terms rather than 'solidarity' terms with teachers, doctors, employers and other professional men who use the same language. In Iraq, this occurs because of enthusiastic and national reasons which stand behind the use of the mother tongue (i.e. Kurdish).

Personal interviews with some Kurdish medical doctors and patients indicate that the purpose and influence of shifting from Kurdish to Arabic and vice versa is as follows:

1. The doctors claim that they very often switch from Kurdish to Arabic or English for esoteric reasons as when they intend to keep something secret lest they should be understood by their patients or by those present at the time of speaking.

2. As for patients, they claim they feel at ease when the doctors switch to Kurdish. CS is used as a psychological incentive in this case.

3. Switching to Arabic, on the other hand, is very common among children who avoid being understood by their parents who do not master Arabic.

Finally, the frequent use of Kurdish with mechanics reflects friendly relationships,

3.3 Setting

The following table shows the frequencies of language use according to various settings:

Table (3): Frequency of Language Use According to Setting

Setting	Arabic	Kurdish	A-K
At University	32%	7%	61%
At Grocer's	8%	75%	17%
At Café	14%	58%	28%
At Restaurant	%21	52%	27%
At Mosque	92%	----	8%

Table (3) above shows the following:
1. University: Arabic is more frequently used than Kurdish university campus. This reflects the fact that, as pointed out above, Arabic is more dominant in the domain of higher education .This is due partly to the fact that Arabic is the medium of instruction in Iraq.
2. Shops, Cafés and Restaurants: Kurdish is more frequently used in these places (75%, 58%, and 52% respectively). These results explain the tendency amongst Kurds to be on friendly terms with the addressees (i.e., solidarity relationship)
3. Mosque: Arabic is much more frequently used in mosques (92%). This is only logical as Quranic recitations and prayers must be in Arabic.

3.4 Purpose

A set of purposes was given to the respondents, for which the respondents were asked to choose the language(s) they would use. The following table shows the frequency of language use according to the different purposes listed in that table.

Table (4): Frequency of Language Use According to Purpose

Purpose	Arabic	Kurdish	A-K
To tell Jokes	23%	47%	30%
To insult	13%	52%	35%
To greet	32%	33%	35%
To flatter	22%	66%	12%
To be intimate	5%	92%	3%
To be serious	10%	68%	22%
To show off	51%	24%	25%
To court (flirt)	15%	60%	25%
To brag	67%	28%	5%

Table (4) above indicates that:

1. Joking and Insulting: The respondents use Kurdish more than Arabic or A-K Cs in telling jokes and in insulting or using taboo expressions since such communicative functions are culturally oriented and are best expressed in the mother tongue than in the learned language (Herman, 1968: 503; Rubin , 1972:524) It should be noted, however, that our findings with regard to the communicative functions of joke-telling and insulting indicate that that switching from Arabic to Kurdish occurs when the speakers intend their insults to be understood by the addressee whereas switching from Kurdish to Arabic is resorted to in order to avoid using Kurdish taboo expressions because the speaker feels more at ease and less embarrassed when expressing socially unacceptable taboos in the second/foreign language. In this connection, Annamalai (1978: 242) points out that "the use of English words like *urine, intercourse, ...* instead of their native equivalents which are taboo gives certain amount of detachability to the speaker".

2. Greeting: There are no significant differences between the two languages.

3. Flattering, Expressing Intimacy and Expressing Seriousness: Kurdish scores the highest frequencies (66%, 92%, and 68% respectively). This phenomenon is most likely psychologically motivated in the sense that Kurdish speakers have more facility and intimacy with Kurdish than with Arabic.

4. Bragging and Showing off: Informants seem to resort to Arabic (as a symbol of elitism) to show off, to brag and to sound educated. This is a common sociolinguistic phenomenon; i.e. Speakers resort to the

majority language (Arabic in this case) 'as a marked badge of superior knowledge' (Sallo, 1983:117).

5. Flirting and Courting: Kurdish seems to be favoured in flirting with girls since speakers feel at ease when they flirt in the mother tongue. This observation is shared by Rubin's (1968) study of Paraguayan bilinguals. She states that her subjects favoured Guarani to Spanish in flirting with girls. Some informants argue, however, that some uneducated Kurdish girls cannot express themselves well in Arabic so they use Kurdish. On the other hand, informants who use Arabic in "flirting" (20%) claim they do so because they have more facility with Arabic specialized jargon due to the influence of TV, especially Arabic songs and Egyptian films.

3. Mood

There seems to be some general agreement among psycholinguists and sociolinguists that a person shifts to his mother tongue in the case of fatigue, excitement, anger, tiredness, astonishment, hunger, boredom, etc. because its use is more automatic (Sallo, 1983; Rubin, 1968; Herman, 1968). However, in order to validate this assumption, the researcher asked the informants to indicate which language they would use while experiencing the "moods" listed in Table (5) below.

Table (5): Frequency of Language Use According to Mood

Mood	Arabic	Kurdish	A-K
Angry	4%	93%	3%
Tired	2%	94%	4%
Hungry	3%	91%	6%

The figures in Table (5) demonstrate beyond any doubt the study subjects' use of Kurdish is overwhelming when they experience the moods identified above. This comes to confirm the findings of other linguists (cf. Sallo, 1983; Rubin, 1968; Herman, 1968).

4. Conclusion:

The conclusions that can be legitimately drawn from this study are the following:

1. Language choice is a systematic (not random) phenomenon.

2. Language choice is governed by socio-economic, psycholinguistic as well as sociolinguistic factors.

3. The following parameters seem to be the most influential factors in code-switching: topic, participants, and setting.

4. Kurdish is more favoured than Arabic when dealing with personal, intimate and casual matters as well as family matters and everyday routine activities. It is also more used when the speaker wants to express a sense of 'solidarity' or 'power' with other colleagues/friends or when he is tired or psychologically upset.

5. Arabic seems to be limited to the educational, scientific, technical, and religious fields/domains.

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