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Gender and Students' Attitude toward Code-Switching: A Correlational Study with Reference to Saudi Arabian Medical Students at Northern Border University

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, the language contact phenomena including bilingualism and code switching have received much attention. In this respect, this study aimed to investigate correlation between gender of learner and his/her attitude toward code-switching between English and Arabic used in medical courses at Northern Border University in Saudi Arabia. To this end, quantitative (questionnaire) research design was used to collect the related data. The total 189 Saudi Arabian ESP students at Northern Border University (111 males and 78 females) formed the participants of the study. The results of data analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in the students' attitudes toward code-switching because of gender. Both the female and the male students agreed that code switching was more desirable and believed that it made the course easy to understand.

Keywords: Code-Switching, Medical Courses, Saudi Arabia, Correlational Study, Gender and Attitudes, Bilingual Classrooms

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1. Introduction

English language has served as the medium of instruction in universities all over the world. Choosing the medium of instruction in teaching and learning is an important decision for educational institutions as well as for learners. However, the policy covering this facet of education is generally controlled by a governing entity which is either one of the following - the ministry, the educational board, or other governing institutions. Decisions concerning the medium of teaching affect the performance of students

in the overall subjects including the science subjects and the main recipient of this action comprises the teachers and learners. Learner's feedback is often overlooked while deciding on this pertinent educational detail.

The decision to use English as a medium of instruction in countries where it is not the main language can sometimes be problematic for both teachers and students. It has been noted that in bilingual classrooms all over the world, code switching is often used. Thus, in the last decade, the language contact phenomena

including bilingualism and code switching have received much attention. As a matter of fact, the term, 'language contact phenomena', was developed to show the various kinds of language contact phenomena including code-switching, code-mixing as well as borrowings. The term also even encompasses phenomena that are not counted as code-switching such as loan words and interference (Blanc & Hamers, 2000).

In-depth and extensive research has been conducted concerning code switching and its uses in the classroom in the form of contextualization cues. According to Martin-Jones (2000), this type of contextualization cue varies from phonological, lexical and syntactic options to various kinds of both code switching and style shifting. In addition, Amin (2009) stated that in the Arab region, science education is being disseminated even though it lacks the necessary research-based policies and suggested ideal practices. He added that only a small body of knowledge has been dedicated to the study of code-switching in relation with learning and teaching of science subjects.

Language contact studies generally concentrate on different kinds of language contact scenarios and different categories of bilingualism. The main issue in bilingualism research is code-switching, where bilingual speakers use two or more languages in a single conversation alternatively (Lesley and Muysken (eds.), 1995). In addition, code-switching can be referred to as a natural result of the bilinguals' interaction in two or more than two languages in communities characterized as multilingual or multicultural. The present study looked at the language position and attitudes of Saudi students at the medical college of Northern Boarder University toward code switching

in classroom teaching involving both Arabic and English focusing on gender variation. That is, it aimed to investigate whether gender difference had an effect on students' attitudes towards code-switching between English and Arabic.

The following research question guided the study-

Does gender difference have an effect on students' attitude towards code-switching between English and Arabic used in the medical courses at Northern Boarder University, Saudi Arabia?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Code-Switching

Code-switching is a term widely used in reference to language contact. It is the alternate use of two or more than two languages in the same utterance which may be formed of one word, phrase or sentence (Grosjean, 1982). It is also defined as the situation which occurs when bilinguals alternate between two common languages they are proficient in a conversation and the switch occurs in the middle of sentences that includes phrases, words or even parts of words (Grosjean, 1982). Similarly, Skiba (1997) defines code-switching as the alternation between two languages or dialects in a conversation between two individuals sharing the same dialects or languages. He adds that it has various forms such as single word switches, phrase switches, and clause switches. On the other hand, Gumperz (1982: 59) defines code-switching as the positioning of two languages belonging to two diverse grammatical systems or sub-systems within the same conversation. In the present study, code-switching is defined as the phenomenon in which bilinguals alternate between words, phrases and sentences of two or more common languages.

2.2 Code-Mixing



Bokamba (1989: 278) defines code-mixing as the integration of various linguistic units like affixes – bound morphemes, words – unbound morphemes, phrases and clauses of two grammatical systems or sub-systems in the same conversation, i.e. code-mixing arises at the intra-sentential level while code-switching arises at the inter-sentential level (Bokamba, 1989: 278) which makes them two distinct concepts. This rationale is reinforced by many researchers (e.g. Sridhar and Sridhar, 1980; Tay 1989; and Kamwangamalu and Lee, 1991).

2.3 Code-switching and Code-mixing

The difference between code-switching and code-mixing has been under controversy. While McClure (1978), Bokamba (1988), Kachru (1982), Wentz (1977) and Clyne (1987) as well as others acknowledge the distinction between the two terms, they differ in their sources of distinction. According to McClure (1978), “code changing is the changing of language alternately at the level of the main constituent (e.g. NP, VP, S). In other words, it is a complete shift to another system of language” (p. 6). He provided the examples below as depicting code-change:

1. “I put the forks en las mesas.”
(I put the forks of the tables.)
2. “Let’s see que hay en el dos.”
(Let’s see what there is on two.) (p. 6)

Code-mixing is defined by McClure (1978) as:

“The individual’s use of opposite language elements which cannot be considered to be borrowed by the community. It occurs when a person is momentarily unable to access a term for a concept in the language which he is using but access it in another code or when he lacks a term in the code he is using which exactly expresses the concept he wishes to convey” (p. 7).

On the other hand, Gumperz (1982: 59) defines it as, “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems”. Myers-Scotton’s (1993) definition is a much structured one compared to Gumperz which is, “the use of two or more languages in the same conversation, usually within the same conversational turn, or even within the same sentence of that turn”. Similar to this definition is Hoffman’s which states that code-switching is “the alternate use of two languages or linguistic varieties within the same utterance or during the same conversation” (Hoffman, 1991, 110).

As for code-mixing, according to Bokamba (1989: 278), it is “the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from two distinct grammatical systems or sub systems within the same sentence and speech event”, which implies that code-mixing arises in the intra-sentential level as opposed to code-switching which arises in the inter-sentential level. Based on this rationale, code mixing and code switching are two distinct concepts with the former arising intra-sentential and the latter arising inter-sentential. This explanation is supported by majority of the scholars (e.g. Shridar & Shridar, 1980; Tay, 1989; and Kamwangamalu & Lee, 1991).

The above definitions present a confusion of terminology use in the field. While some scholars such as Bokamba (1989), Kamwangamalu (1992), and Sridhar & Sridhar (1980) contend that code-switching and code-mixing are two distinct occurrences. The former occurring at the inter-sentential level and the latter occurring at the intra-sentential level, other scholars such as Gumperz (1982), and Myers-Scotton (1993) consider code-

switching as a general term that encompasses the linguistic alternations at both levels.

Moreover, even with the efforts expended by the scholars in distinguishing between the two terms, some state that these efforts have ended in failure (Blanc and Hamers, 2000). Based on Hamers and Blanc's research, the attempts to differentiate between the two resulted in failure owing to their similarities and to the fact that they are both used to relay similar linguistic and social functions. As such, Hill & Hill (1980) consider the terms interchangeable and use it as such. They stated that, "there is no satisfactory way to draw a neat boundary between the two phenomena [code switching and code-changing]" (p. 122).

2.4 Bilingualism

Bilingualism is a concept that refers to the situation of a linguistic community whereby two languages are in contact with each other resulting in two codes utilized in one interaction by the bilinguals (Blanc and Hammers, 2000: 6). Mohanty (1994: 13) defines a bilingual person as one who is able to satisfy the communicative challenge of the society through his/her interaction with other individuals in the society in two or more than two languages. In the definition of bilingualism, the proficiency/competence is generally the main topic of debate. Linguists are of the opinion that a bilingual person is one who is really proficient in both languages. For instance, Bloomfield (1935: 56 cited in Martin-Jones, 2000) defined bilingualism as the almost native proficiency in both languages. On the other hand, McNamara (1967 cited in Blanc and Hammers, 2000) stated that a bilingual person is one who commands the proficiency in one of the four language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing in a language aside

from his native language. Haugen (1953) provided a broader definition by stating that it is sufficient that the speaker is able to produce complete and meaningful utterance in another language to be referred to as bilingual (cited in Martin-Jones, 2000).

2.5 Bilingualism in Saudi Arabia

Linguists have acknowledged that languages in contact impact one another. For instance, Haugen (1953) stated that languages in contact interlink in three distinct stages; code-switching, interference and integration. When considering a bilingual specimen as the core of bilingualism, Weinreich (1953) states that "the psychology study of the bilingual individual is therefore, of central importance in the study of bilingualism". The occurrence of bilingualism takes place in a specific type of setting so that the potential impact it has on the individual may differ according to the social significance as well as the two languages' function. According to the linguists' viewpoint, bilingualism has a significant impact on the determination of historical transformations in the language systems. In other words, as a result of language contact for long durations between speakers of varying languages, monumental changes in one language system or both will eventually manifest.

In Saudi Arabia, several factors are attributable to bilingualism with the top among them as prestige. In other words, the upper class makes use of English vocabulary and expressions in their daily interaction and they prefer to use English in every nuance of their lives. From doctors to professors at universities; all these professionals consider it prestigious to use English in their interaction with people to show other people that they are fluent in the language. In majority of cases, bilingual Saudis speak in English to interact with



each other so as not to be understood by the people around them.

Another reason for the proliferation of bilingualism in Saudi Arabia is to meet the need of the situation. Many Saudis are bilingual owing to their need to fill their conversation gaps in Arabic with English words. For instance, English words like vitamins, cholesterol, check and master are commonly used because Saudi Arabic do not have alternative words for them Alenezi (2010).

2.6 Language Education Policy and Code Switching

The language educational policy is defined as a tool utilized in creating de facto language practices in educational institutions particularly those with centralized educational systems (Shohamy, 2006). These policies reflect language manipulation of the type of language or languages that should be utilized as a medium of instruction in the classrooms and to what level this usage is acceptable. In majority of cases, educational staff of a learning institution work as agents who implement these policies blindly without regard to its quality, suitability and importance to the student's successful learning (Shohamy, 2006).

This rationale of implementing language policies with no consideration to its effectiveness and relation to the student's preference is a reflection of Lin's (2005) statement that the bilingual talk is generally more normative based as opposed to research based. Following the presentation of her findings which reveal code switching as an effective method of learning, Simon (2001) urged both teachers and students to reevaluate the role of code-switching in the classroom interaction and to break through the imposed methodological code constraints in order to make use of code-switching in meeting pedagogical goals.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, the language policy which is laid down as a guideline in some departments in Saudi Universities emphasizes on the use of the English Language as the medium of teaching and learning. This is evident from the language policy at the Northern Border University, Arar, Saudi Arabia (University Handbook, 2009).

2.7 Motivation for Code-Switching

In second language acquisition, code-switching is considered as a strategy of avoidance of language limitation, as some researchers like Tarone, Cohen and Thomas (1983) believe that code-switching is motivated by linguistic deficiencies and considered as a strategy to avoid these deficiencies. According to researchers, code switching has dual motivations – firstly, a linguistic motivation assisting the compensation of language deficiency and secondly, a social motivation to fit in with friends.

Nevertheless, several linguists are not in favor of the argument that deficiency in language is code-switching's main reason. For instance, Stringer (1997) states that code switching is not always a consequence of a deficiency in language. Heredia and Altarriba (2001) are of similar view and disagree with the argument that code-switching is due to language proficiency in three ways:

This rationale is too confined and does not permit the possibility of the interpretation of code-switching as the inability to retrieve the right word. They stated that switching to the English Language leads to an effective and efficient way to retrieve the word. Therefore, code-switching may be an issue of word retrieval impact by a mixture of interlinked factors like language use and frequency.

The rationale also fails to explain the grammatical structure's role in

facilitating code-switching. Another issue of this interpretation is that the rationale's lack of language proficiency is unclear and unstructured.

2.8 Code-switching in the Classroom

In classroom context, arguments have been made in favor of against the use of code switching as pedagogy of bilingualism. Those who consider code-switching as a common behavior of communication in a bilingual classroom vouch for its usefulness as a teaching tool. For instance, Rollnick and Rutherford (1996) claim that it assists learners in exploring their ideas. In the context of science classroom, they consider code-switching as a tool whereby learners are enabled to reveal their alternate thoughts on the subject matter being taught. Similarly, Amin (2009) is of the same contention – he states that code-switching to the students' mother-tongue enables them to make use of sense-making resources. Another similar contention comes from Hornberger (2005) who suggested that bilingual or multilingual learning is enhanced when students are permitted to use their resources in their existing language skills in one or two languages as opposed to being confined to a monolingual instructional behavior and practices.

Moreover, Lin (2005) states that code-switching or code mixing is a local, practical coping method and reaction to the socioeconomic dominance of English in Hong Kong, whereby majority of the students hail from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds having meager access to English resources and living in a society attempting to establish an English-medium education for the purpose of its socioeconomic development. A related similar study by Arthur and Martin (2006) supports this finding. Their study involves the interactional patterns in CLIL in Brunei

and the findings of the study reveal that code-switching is normally utilized to enable student's comprehension and to support bilingualism. Teachers involved in the study consider the use of code-switching as hearer-oriented that takes into account the students' competence in the language to be learnt. Another support coming from the same authors (Arthur & Martin, 2006) contends the students' increased inclusion, participation and comprehension of the learning process and the development of relations between the participants through the effective and easy conveyance of ideas during lessons (Lin & Martin, 2005; and Arthur & Martin, 2006).

Although the pedagogical validity of code-switching has been proven, a problem arises among teachers of whether it is perpetuating "access to meaning or access to English" (Setati, et al., 2002, p. 140). This is attributed to the fact that despite the teachers' reformulation of the concepts in the student's local language, the student still needs to receive and reproduce the same concepts in English as it is the target language. Hence, code-switching in classrooms may disrupt the student's skills in answering questions in the examination in pure English.

Furthermore, code-switching in the classroom has also been criticized by bilinguals. Shin (2005) for instance, observes that bilinguals may be embarrassed about their code-switching and relate it to negative language habits. Also, in the context of Malaysia, Martin (2005) stated that the use of local language along with the official language in teaching is a common enough occurrence but it is, more often than not, either criticized or considered as bad practice that is attributable to the teacher's lack of competence in the English language or just plainly ignored.



2.9 Code-Switching and Gender

In recent years, a shift has taken place within language and gender studies from essentialist to constructionist views of gender (Winter & Pauwels, 2000; Coates & Cameron, 1991). Therefore while, along with many others, we are continuing to explore links between gender and speech, we do so in full awareness that gender is a complex, culturally and socially constructed category, and we are wary of any suggestion that there is a one-to-one correspondence between gender and linguistic behaviour, including Code-Switching.

The rigid and essentialist approach to language and gender was given an early blow by Milroy (1980), who, in Belfast, found the usual gender differences in the use of vernacular forms to be *reversed* in cases where women were connected by dense multiplex *networks*, traditionally more typical of men.

The *cultural* relativity of Western findings on language and gender has been highlighted by studies carried out in Muslim societies, where men have been found to use more the standard variants than women of the same social class (Bakir, 1986; Khan, 1991) - the opposite of the pattern of sex differentiation normally found in the West.

It can be seen clearly that each community has its own gender patterns when it comes to language choice, by looking at different ethnic groups within the same overall social structure, as in the case of *domain-based surveys* carried out in Australia (described in Winter & Pauwels, 2000). Here it was found that different communities manifest different patterns: in the Vietnamese community, the “neighbourhood” domain was more associated with the use of Vietnamese for men and boys than for women and girls

whereas in the ‘transaction’ domain (i.e. market places), women used the minority language more (Pauwels, 1995). However, in the Greek community, this pattern was found to be reversed (Tsokolidou, 1994).

Moreover, there are, in fact, counterexamples to the consistent pattern of gender linguistic differentiation. In Muslim communities such as Amman and Cairo, men have been found to tend towards the use of standard forms of speech (i.e. Classical Arabic) significant more than women (Haeri 2000). The gender pattern in these societies has been argued to be due to women’s lack of access to the standard variety of language in these communities (Abdel-Jawad 1981; Labov 1990). However, Haeri (2000) pointed out that educated women do have access to Arabic Classical, yet they still use Classical Arabic less than men. He suggests that more understanding about Muslim society and culture is needed for the interpretation for the gender differences in these communities. In addition, some other studies have shown that women and men may not always differ in their use of language. Cheshire and Gardner-Chloros (1998), equating code switching behavior with the use of nonstandard forms, found that no significant gender differences in the code switching pattern in Greek-Cypriot communities in Britain.

Research concerning code-switching and gender can be seen in Gal’s classic study (1979) of the speech of men and women in the Austrian village of Oberwart, showed that women were spearheading the shift from Hungarian, the traditional language with peasant connotations, to German, the national language and the language of economic and social advancement. Gal did not, however, generalize the finding so as to make a general comment about gender differences.

She presented the finding as linked to conditions in this specific community, where Hungarian represented a traditional mode of life, which did not favour women. They therefore preferred to use German, which for them represented a more urban and modern lifestyle.

Evidence from Swigart's (1991) study in Dakar shows that even within the same "community", women do not behave as a monolithic group. Whereas women were, on the whole, thought to act as champions of the traditional language, Wolof, Swigartv found that young mothers code-switched intensively between Wolof and French. On the other hand, a prominent group of younger, fashion-conscious girls ('les disquettes') distinguished themselves by conspicuous monolingual use of French, to the exclusion of Wolof. This shows that the linguistic varieties available within a society's linguistic repertoire may carry quite different social meanings for sub-groups within that society.

Cheshire & Gardner-Chloros (1998) tested whether apparently well-established findings on differences between men and women's speech were supported in bilingual contexts. In particular, they investigated whether the *sociolinguistic verity* (Chambers,1994) that men use more non-standard speech-forms than women was reinforced by a finding that men, overall, used CS –generally viewed as a non-standard form of speech– more than women as well. But no significant differences were found in the quantity *or* type of CS produced by women and men in the two communities studied, namely the Greek Cypriot community in London and the Punjabi community in Birmingham. Instead, there were highly significant differences in type and quantity of CS *between* the two communities, and a remarkable amount of variation, as well,

between individuals, regardless of gender. They concluded that CS, like other forms of "non-standardness", has different meanings in different communities and within sub-groups in the same community.

According to Brice (2000) code-switching facilitates the link between the two languages that a person is learning. He added that it could improve second language proficiency. In addition, Sert (2007) reinforces Brice's (2000) view and stated that code-switching links from the known language to the unknown one and can be viewed as a significant factor in language teaching when efficiently utilized.

It is without a doubt that the study of language alternation has been invaluable in the past decades. Most importantly, the identification of differing constraints has led to further studies in syntax, morphology and phonology. Similarly, this has also been invaluable in the development of a structural focus on production model and evidence for a grammatical theory. However, through the overlooking of questions of functions or meaning, the structural focus is still unclear of the reason for the language switching.

Code-switching are nevertheless, still the focus of most studies and the need for more research to its examination is evident. Accordingly, Auer (1998) stated that an examination to the code-switching functions is called for, to develop a clear sociolinguistic explanation.

As mentioned earlier, only a small body of literature has been dedicated to the university settings of Arab bilingual students in the Arab region; most particularly among medical students. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate code-switching among medical students studying in the Northern Border University.

[3. Methodology](#)



3.1 Research Design

The study utilised quantitative correlational research design to achieve the aims and objectives of the study. According to Brown, J and Rodgers, T (2014) 'quantitative research includes any research based on primary or original data. It is predominantly based on numerical data. Correlational Research includes studies that, in one way or other, examine correlations among variables. As the aim of this study was to investigate the correlation between the gender of a learner and his/her attitudes toward code-switching, this research design was chosen purposefully.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study were medical students of the Northern Border University in Saudi Arabia. The total number of the students who participated in the study was 230 students - 127 male and 103 female- whose age ranged from 18 to 23.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

For the quantitative aspect of the present study, the main instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. Questionnaires are an inexpensive way to gather data from a potentially large number of respondents. Cohen, Manion, Morrison & Morrison (2007) explain further that the questionnaire is a very useful instrument for the collection of information, and can be administered in the absence of the researcher. In this study, other than demographic questions, all the survey questions used the Likert scale format, in which a four-point scale is used as specified in Table 1.

Table 1: The research Likert-scale

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Item	1	2	3	4

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was administered to the students after a brief introductory talk in which the procedure was explained to the students. Moreover, the participants were encouraged to ask questions at any time during the administration of the questionnaire. The students took between 15- 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The students' particulars were kept confidential and it was optional for their names to be written on the questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered by the course instructors. The students' answers helped the researcher to understand their attitudes towards code-switching and their language preference in English language teaching. Completion of the questionnaire was administered under the supervision of the respective lecturer.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis concerns analyzing the data collected from participants through the instrument. The researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 to analyze the quantitative data, which were elicited from the instrument. Descriptive statistics were used to explore the data, and summarize and describe those data. Pallant (2007) states that descriptive statistic is aimed at depicting the different attributes of data, verifying any violation of the principal assumptions for the statistical methods to be used in the study, and addressing particular research questions. In this study, the descriptive statistics were undertaken using central tendency and variation statistics such as frequency, means, ranges, and standard deviation.

4. Findings

The followings findings about Students' attitude toward Code-Switching according were obtained from the analysis of data. Table: 2 briefs whether gender differences have significant differences on the students' attitude toward code-switching.

Table 2: Students' Attitude toward Code-Switching According to Gender: Independent Sample Test

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	SE	P
Attitude	Male	111	2.92	.334	.032	.742
	Female	78	2.93	.368	.042	
L1 & L2 Knowledge	Male	111	2.23	.353	.034	.730
	Female	78	2.25	.281	.032	
Teacher Image	Male	111	3.45	.431	.041	.291
	Female	78	3.52	.371	.042	
Academic Results	Male	111	3.50	.386	.037	.997
	Female	78	3.50	.458	.052	

Note: correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed). $p < .05$.

Table: 2 illustrates that the t-test for equality of means (sig.2-tailed) on the four variables. It can be seen that all the p values of the four variables are higher than $\alpha = .05$, thus there is no significant differences on students' attitude toward code-switching according to gender.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based upon the findings, it is clear that there was no significant difference in students' attitude toward code-switching because of gender. Both the female and the male students agreed that code-switching was more desirable and believed that it made the course easy to understand. This was reflected in the students' responses where in item 13, teaching the course in Arabic and English may increase the students' chances in passing the exams, had the highest percentage of agreement. The students, both female and male, who were taken as the respondents were adult students

therefore, they tended to think in a simple way and enjoyed lessons that did not need complex thoughts and analysis. They preferred to learn the course if it was connected to their first language and their second language.

Code-switching behaviour of women and men in Saudi Arabia is neither conservative nor innovative. It is a reflection of the history and social practices of women and men in the speech community. The traditional generalizations of gender-based linguistic pattern rely heavily on the notions of "standardness" or "nonstandardness" to interpret the linguistic behaviour of women and men. In fact, individuals may not use a form of language only because it is standard or nonstandard. Rather, they use a form of language to suit their needs for self-representation. Thus, it is not surprising to find that the third variable (knowledge of L1 and L2), where in item 5 - mixing of Arabic and English leads to the weakness of my Arabic – had the lowest of mean value. Both female and male students were disagreeing on this item. Since the respondents' first language was Arabic, therefore, the use of English in the class will not affect their Arabic in anyways.

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