A Report on the Language Contact Situation in Israel- Presented in AAES 2023

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Introduction

The presentation discusses three different studies about the linguistic phenomena of borrowing and code switching between Arabic and Hebrew in the context of Palestine/Israel in spoken and digital media. It highlights the historical and contemporary relationship between these two Semitic languages, emphasizing the impact of social, political, and linguistic changes on their interaction.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the attitudes of Arabs in Israel towards Hebrew-Arabic codeswitching?

RQ2: Do the typed and spoken representations of the borrowed words reflect adjustment to Arabic phonology?

RQ3: When code switching, do the two languages keep their own phonologies distinct?

RQ4: What domains are most affected by Hebrew borrowings?

RQ5: What topics motivate more uses of code switching?

RQ6: To what extent does modality of communication affect the density of borrowing and code switching?

Summary of Background Information

1. Historical Context: The presentation provides insights into the historical interaction between Arabic and Hebrew, dating back to 600 A.D. It emphasizes the mutual borrowing of terms, and the dominance shifts between the languages in different historical periods.

2. Demographic Context: It delves into the demographic composition of the Palestinian Israeli population, throwing light on their linguistic dynamics, including the use of Arabic as their native language, Hebrew as their second language, and the influence of English as a foreign language.

3. Study of Borrowing and Code Switching: We outline the specific focus of the research on examining Hebrew borrowing and code switching by Palestinian Israelis, particularly in face-to-face and text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC).

4. Review of Borrowing and Code Switching: We provide an in-depth review of the theories and models related to borrowing and code switching in speech, highlighting the factors influencing these linguistic phenomena.

5. Digital Media Multilingualism: It discusses the influence of computer-mediated communication (CMC) on multilingualism, particularly focusing on the use of different writing systems for Arabic in the age of digital media and the impact of CMC on linguistic practices.

Study 1: Questionnaire

Methodology:

- Questionnaire developed in Arabic comprising three parts

- Distributed to 131 Palestinian Israeli bilinguals

- Data collected on language attitudes, code switching behavior, and language use according to types of interlocutors

Findings:

- Most subjects favored Classical Arabic as the most beautiful and useful language for studies, but Palestinian Arabic was deemed the easiest and most practical language for everyday use

- The majority of participants reported code switching behavior, with more acceptance among younger individuals

- Subjects were divided in their opinion about code switching, with a significant number against this linguistic phenomenon

Study 2: CMC Corpus

Methodology:

- Data collected from Viber and WhatsApp chat logs of 24 Arabic-Hebrew bilingual subjects

- Analysis of borrowings and code switches from the collected data

- Phonetic adaptation and reasons for borrowing were also addressed in the analysis

Findings:

- Majority of borrowings occurred in Viber chat logs

- Hebrew borrowings were primarily written in Arabic script

- The average frequency of Hebrew borrowings in CMC data was about 2.7% of all words

Study 3: Spoken Corpus

Methodology:

- Spoken data collected from 10 Arabic-Hebrew bilingual subjects

- Casual conversations recorded in natural settings

- Data analyzed for code switches, borrowing, and phonological adaptation

Findings:

- The spoken data revealed instances of borrowing and code switching

- Code switching behavior was observed to be limited to specific contexts and interlocutors

- Phonological adaptation of borrowed words was noted depending on the region and the speaker's background

General Key Findings

1. Language Attitudes: The questionnaire study revealed divergent views among the Palestinian Israeli population regarding the importance of different language varieties, including Classical Arabic and Palestinian Arabic. The study found distinctions in language attitudes based on factors such as religious background, level of education, and geographic location.

2. Hebrew Loanwords and Code Switching: The study highlighted the prevalence of Hebrew borrowings and code switching in both spoken and CMC contexts. The analysis of corpora revealed that Hebrew borrowings and code switching were more frequent in intimate and private communication settings, such as WhatsApp and Viber, as compared to public platforms like Facebook.

3. Frequency and Domains of Borrowings and Code Switching: The study identified specific domains where Hebrew borrowings and code switching were more prevalent, including education, technology, employment, and social relationships. Nouns and noun phrases were the most frequently switched elements, indicating their flexibility in code switching. Code switching and borrowing were more frequently used in the spoken corpus.

4. Phonological Adaptation: The analysis of the data revealed nuances in the phonological adaptation of Hebrew loanwords and code-switched elements in Palestinian Arabic (PA). The study found instances of phonological adaptation in line with historical Hebrew pronunciations and Mizrachi dialect, reflecting the diverse linguistic influences on PA.

5. Synchronicity and Formality: The study examined the impact of synchronicity and formality on code switching and borrowing patterns. It revealed that code switching and borrowing were more prevalent in synchronous and informal communication contexts, indicating the role of context in language choice and adaptation.

Conclusion

These studies' findings provide valuable insights into the language attitudes, code switching behaviour, and borrowing patterns among Arabic-Hebrew bilinguals in Israel. The research methods employed have enabled the collection and analysis of diverse linguistic data, shedding light on the complex interaction between Arabic and Hebrew in the context of Palestinian Israeli bilinguals.

Overall, the studies contribute to our understanding of the sociolinguistic dynamics and language use patterns within this community, offering important implications for language preservation, identity, and bilingualism in the region.

Implications

The findings of this research provide valued insights into the complex language dynamics within the Palestinian Israeli community. The study sheds light on the intersection of language attitudes, sociolinguistic factors, and language contact in shaping the linguistic practices of Palestinian Israeli Arabic speakers. The identification of specific domains and patterns of borrowings and code switching contributes to a deeper understanding of language use in multilingual communities.

Limitations and Future Research

While the study offers significant insights, it is important to acknowledge the limitations, including the need for a larger and more diverse sample size for a comprehensive analysis. Future research can further explore the impact of historical and sociopolitical factors on language attitudes and examine the long-term implications of language contact and borrowing in Palestinian Israeli Arabic.

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