

Code-switching as a token of emotional acculturation: the case of Arabic-English bilinguals in Manchester

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This paper reports on ethnographic data emerging from a project investigating the code-switching (CS) practice of a friendship group of five adult, female, non UK-born, Arabic-English bilinguals based in Manchester, UK. Bilingual speakers' linguistic choices were believed to portray a static, homogenous identity, creating binary associations between a code and its inherent social values that bilingual speakers may not necessarily consider to be relevant. Later, by incorporating 'stance' as an analytic approach, many studies of CS addressed how different CS acts are used to shift speakers' stances and (re)construct unique bilingual identities, creating what is called a 'new' space (Finnis, 2013). However, one particular communicative purpose for which CS is deployed has not been examined in many existing studies that relate CS to the topic of multi-faceted identities. The focus of this paper is on CS as a communicative speech act that is utilised for performing evaluative moves and expressing attitudes.

To examine these evaluative acts further, the current paper utilises the appraisal model (Martin & White, 2005) to explore the participants' temporary, individual/relational stances where speakers make evaluations (e.g. expressing feelings through 'affect'). Being members of a minority group in a postmodern society, not only do these bilingual speakers have overwhelming identity options to consider, but also a variety of channels for making evaluative statements and expressing attitudes. Considering attitudes and emotions as cultural products in this context, this paper argues that speakers can be thought of as adopting and exploiting certain ways of sense-making, or using particular emotional expressions that they associate very strongly with speakers' of the host culture - the British (English) society, in this case. The paper aims to demonstrate how the way in which CS is utilised by this group of (late) bilinguals can be regarded as an implicit sign of the process of emotional acculturation (De Leersnyder et al., 2011). A process where

bilingual speakers carry out evaluation through making use of expressions and attitudes they adopted due to the socialisation process they have gone through in the host society.

Through a moment-by-moment analysis of recordings of naturally occurring peer interactions and semi-structured interviews, I explore the participants' tendency toward switching to English to take up (positive) expressive stances. This pattern is particularly marked when it comes to compliments, politeness, shows of appreciation, expressions of excitement, and achieving an in-group bond. The paper will also discuss the way in which the absence of certain Arabic emotional expressions by the participants can be attributed to the mind-set of the majority of Arabic (Libyan) speakers; a stereotype that the participants are aware of and appear to draw on in their interactions. The paper argues that such a cultural stereotype cannot be simply dismissed altogether, as it proves indispensable to comprehending the sophisticated motivations behind the participants' process of evaluative CS through their consistent use of English emotional expressions. Overall, the findings of this paper develop crucial insight into the complexities of emotional acculturation and the role it could play in advancing the CS field.

References:

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