The deleterious impacts of code-switching and code-mixing among teenagers and secondary school students in the UAE

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Abstract

With the global prominence of the English language as the language of instruction and communication, Emirati and Arab secondary school students in the United Arab Emirates are increasingly focusing on switching and swapping between Arabic and English in their daily conversations and interactions. The current study highlights the effects of Arabic-English code-switching and the occurrence of language interference among secondary school students in the United Arab Emirates. It draws attention to the drawbacks of this language shift and how it results not only in restraining the skills of language acquisition but also affects life, culture, and identity. In this research, 100 Emirati and Arab students, 50 boys and 50 girls, were randomly selected as participants in this survey. In addition, the same group of students also participated in answering a questionnaire regarding code-switching and code-mixing. The data collected from this group illustrated that code-switching can play a negative role in stifling the process of language learning and eventually weakening academic performance.

Keywords: Code-mixing, code-switching, home language, language interference, language maintenance, subtractive bilingualism.

1. Introduction

Code Switching (CS), Code Mixing (CM), and language interference are sociolinguistic phenomena that exist in bilingual and multicultural communities. Despite being a controversial field of study, Code Switching and its counterpart, language interference, have gained popularity and prevalence since 1980 [1]. These terms are communicative methods of self-expression in which bilinguals alter, combine, and switch back and forth between two languages in the same conversation to convey meaning and to avoid any gaps in interactions. Such gaps occur in a variety of contexts and daily communication due to the communicators' language deficiencies and lack of linguistic knowledge during interactions [2-4]. In Code Switching, Code Mixing, and language interference, bilinguals tend to borrow and insert lexes, clauses, and sentences, either

across sentence boundaries or within sentence boundaries from L2 into their home language during daily conversations [5-8]. The coexistence of two or more languages and a variety of linguistic codes in a community compels communicators to regularly employ insertion and alteration. The process of insertion involves the communicator inserting words from L2 into L1, while alternation is the process of switching codes between linguistically different utterances.

In relation to Emirati and Arab teenagers and secondary school students in the United Arab Emirates (henceforth the UAE), code-switching occurs between both Arabic and English. It occurs among Arabic-speaking members like family, relatives, and friends or among non-Arabs like gatekeepers, drivers, and maids who cannot understand Arabic well. Out of 100 students, when asked in an open-ended questionnaire about the effect of mixing both languages, 90% of them were found to be mixing both languages. Only 6% of the students mentioned that they do not mix both languages. Upon asking these teenagers about the reason why they use code-switching, they responded by saying that the cohabitation of two languages or more in their daily conversation is due to their lack of vocabulary words in both involved languages in certain situations. They believe that code-switching and code-mixing help them to express their thoughts in a better and more comprehensive manner. At whatever point most respondents feel they should express something in one language, and they cannot find the words in the language they are speaking, they switch to the other language.

1.1. The Negative Impact of Code Switching

Code-switching, code-mixing, and language interference experienced by students in secondary schools have been connected in some studies to negative stigma due to the students' inadequate knowledge of both languages involved in a single conversation [9-11]. Furthermore, coupling two languages by borrowing some words, clauses, and sentences from one language and inserting them into the second language during conversation can elicit some problems in terms of linguistic appropriateness and relatedness. This new form of utterance, orchestrated from two different and diverse linguistic landscapes, has certain pedagogical implications, such as lacking pragmatic equivalents, ungrammatical language usage, as well as the social stigma attached to this kind of odd mixture of utterance that is deemed unacceptable in formal situations. As a result, this kind of utterance leads not only to meaning unrelatedness but also to negative effects on the process of learning a foreign language and long-term damage. Excessive code-switching and chaotic borrowing from one language to another can minimize the learner's experience of being in full contact with the target language [12-14]. Certainly, different languages have distinct and specific word orders, grammatical structures, cultural expressions, and idioms. This huge variation will not make code-switching quite applicable and meaningful very often. Even with proficient speakers of both languages involved in communication, avoiding and circumventing language distinctions and features will produce a certain level of unwillingness to communicate, and thus unclear and confusing interactions are produced [15].

Excessive code-switching among teenagers in their daily communication can be damaging or deleterious to their mental health due to the exhaustion and burnout caused by using code-switching. Additionally, too much use of code-switching can cause certain psychological implications, such as acting in an identity, disposition, and language that are not one's own [16]. This eventually leads to identity disturbance, in which individuals start to suffer from inconsistent identity and an unstable self-image. These are some symptoms that indicate a level of mental disorder. To sum up, the pressure undertaken by a person who employs excessive code-switching is difficult to handle and challenging to recover from burnout, anxiety, and mental toll.

The high value ascribed to English has made English influences cross far borders, making it the worldwide lingua franca. Several educational systems in the Arab world do not focus on teaching students L1 and L2 simultaneously and alternatively; rather, they have mandated and prioritized using English as the language of instruction and communication in their educational institutions. The case of the UAE is the most applicable representative of this growing trend and disposition. The UAE is a multicultural and diverse society that competes to catch up with global progress. A common and global language is required to accommodate the influx of many nationalities, tourists, and expatriates. Despite the UAE National Federal Council's call to make Arabic the language of instruction in public schools and universities, English has dominated and prevailed as a prerequisite language for university enrollment and the language of instruction in most private schools [17]. Furthermore, English has become the language of local and global economic success, trade, and acquiring critical thinking skills, as well as the language to achieve outstanding career opportunities [18, 19]. Young Emirati students and Arab expatriates studying at kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools in the UAE find themselves captured in this "anglicized" rampart in which education and communication are accessed by using a foreign language. They are impelled to be more fervent and ardent in producing and using English than Arabic.

Furthermore, students, especially those who started learning English before the age of five, as well as their parents, have developed a general belief that high standards of education and academic achievement are linked with competency and proficiency in English, which is perceived as a more prestigious, recognizable, and reputable language than any other language [20]. This belief has prompted the extensive use of the English language among school-going teenagers, who are slowly but steadily forfeiting their capacity and skills to think and communicate proficiently in Arabic, which has started to lose its lead over English [21]. Consequently, these young learners are losing command and fluency in their primary language. Moreover, students are surrounded by English not only in schools, which have started to teach subjects like science, math, and arts in English instead of Arabic, but also at home with their foreign maids, nannies, drivers, online markets, and social media. The imposition of the English language in such a pervasive way, while neglecting to provide students with adequate exposure to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), exacerbates students' feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness regarding their home language in comparison to English. This kind of cultural shock and mental confusion, caused by western encroachment, has led students to lose belief in their home language, identity, and local culture and values in favor of believing that English

is superior to every other language, including Arabic. Thus, young students are convinced that maintaining their L1 is worthless, and shifting from L1 to L2 has become the easiest, most effective, and rewarding option.

To avoid this linguistic confusion and disorientation, students are required to be immersed in a two-way bilingual program in which aspects of formal academic teaching and knowledge of L1 and L2 are synchronously applied, which is called additive bilingualism. Additive bilingualism is a kind of dual-immersion program of linguistic awareness in which students' home languages and cultures are preserved and valued to the same degree as acquiring the target or second language by using enhanced teaching techniques and approaches. The well-maintained home language can provide an inferable and deductive channel through which the required skills to acquire the second language are employed efficiently. In this program, the target language is acquired without conducting any pressure to relinquish and replace the home language in terms of text and context [22]. This cross-linguistic perspective and bidirectional relationship between L1 and L2 can provide students with linguistic consciousness and skills in relation to comprehension, phonology, word recognition, and linguistic decoding that are necessary to make the process of learning a second language more efficient and productive. Learning a second language should occur side by side with learning the first, in which both L1 and L2 are used synchronously and simultaneously. This relation of integration and correlation between L1 and L2 serves as a cognitive tool by which students can transfer linguistic skills from L1 to L2 [23-27]. Success and competence in a second language are determined by the level of linguistic proficiency in the first language or a "threshold level" that is promoted by early linguistic cognition [28].

2. Literature Review

Although code-switching as a linguistic practice is not a modern invention, further academic attention and focus have been given to this field in the 21st century [29]. During the first half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1950s, sociolinguist Einar Haugen used the term code-switching for the first time to describe a sociolinguistic phenomenon among bilinguals who toggle between two or more languages or dialects in their single interaction. In this interaction, communicators regularly use unassimilated words from one language in another in an overlapping form of expression to reflect certain concepts and identities [30]. However, such a micro-view concept of code-switching did not help researchers to further studies about code-switching. Since then, various definitions have been proposed for code-switching, code-mixing, and language shift. All of them revolve around the idea of shifting between languages during interactions. With Gumperz's "juxtapositions" as a form of utterance, bilinguals, according to Gumperz, conduct interactions that rely on a linguistic structure formed from two different grammatical rules [31].

Further theories about code-switching started to emerge in which real-life situations of bilingual people had been studied and examined. These theories had given further attention to code-switching to include different linguistic units, phrases, clauses, and affixes from different grammar systems in the same utterance [32]. Other studies argued that code-switching is a linguistic behavior in which bilinguals choose a certain linguistic form that consists of a model of a variety of utterances within the same conversation to suit the situation grammatically [33].

From a sociolinguistic perspective, some have shown that code-switching occurs depending on the communicators' age, race, linguistic background, and the degree of the role and influence the communicators want to exhibit in their conversation [5, 34-37]. The production of code-switching rather than the bilinguals' responses to recognize this linguistic behavior was the main concern of most studies in this regard. Auer discussed code-switching in reference to two types of alterations that occur during conversation. The first one is called intra-sentential, in which the bilingual alternates between two languages in terms of lexes and phrases within the same sentence. The second one is called inter-sentential, in which the bilingual alternates completely different sentences from different languages [5, 38, 39]. This type of switching is mainly determined and influenced by social and pragmatic aspects. However, both types revolve around language shifts and alterations that occur while communicating.

3. Discussion

The language of instruction in public schools in the UAE is Arabic, but English has been given more priority and importance; thus, students are exposed to English more regularly. More effective techniques are employed in teaching English in comparison to Arabic, which suffers from a severe shortage of qualified teachers, effective techniques, and resources in teaching Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Children and students are so immersed and integrated in English at the expense of Arabic to the extent that their linguistic culture becomes in danger of erosion and their home language is at risk of negative changes. This poses undeniable challenges not only in relation to weakening and waning the students' metalinguistic and metacognitive gains but also in relation to identity and culture.

Non-native children who start learning and using English as the medium of instruction since kindergarten are the heaviest price payers. On one hand, bilingualism at an early age (three or four years old) might have some pernicious effects due to the inability to differentiate between the two languages [40, 41]. This, of course, can cause a considerable level of grammatical, phonological, and lexical awkwardness. Furthermore, there is a highly correlated relationship between preschool children's exposure and social interaction with certain languages and their size of vocabulary known and used in these languages. The bulk of words in the two in-contact languages known by bilingual children who focus on the socially and instructionally dominated language is less than the bulk of words in the same languages known and used by monolingual children [42-44]. On the other hand, bilingual children's identity and culture might be at stake as they go through a process of home language loss and diminishing. However, other researchers believe that the learner's capacities in relation to cognitive ability, academic success, and achievement are enhanced in bilingual children [45]. They propose that children can achieve a high level of proficiency in both languages they are learning. The only complications or drawbacks that accompany the learning process are the circumstances in which one of these languages has been taught.

Furthermore, in relation to the problematic issue of the technical language in learning science, it has been concluded that students whose first language is not English lose 20% of their comprehension capacity when they are taught science using English [46]. Teaching science, mathematics, and other subjects in a less familiar language can elicit attainment that might be spurious and not cognitively efficient due to the discrepancy in word contexts between L1 and L2. The feelings of confusion, misapprehension, and agitation in students run parallel with the degree of unfamiliarity of the language used in teaching.

3.1. Age Factor

In order to find out whether age affects the use of the English language by teenagers and secondary school students, two groups, (10-12) years and (12-14) years, were created, and the results were compiled.

Table 1.
Students' responses on speaking English according to age.

I usually speak English	Ages (10-12)	Ages (12-14)
At home	17.2%	37.1%
At school	67.7%	79.9%
Outside school and home	21.4%	46.0%

Thus, the results revealed that the older students usually speak more English compared to the younger students at the secondary school level in the United Arab Emirates. As 37.1% of students who are 12-14 years old speak English when they are at home compared to the younger students aged 10-12 years, of whom only 17.2% speak English when they are at home. Similarly, at school, 79.9% of the age group 12-14 years speaks English, whereas 67.7% of the group aged 10-12 years speaks English at school.

In bilingual contexts, there is another persisting problem represented by code-switching and code-mixing Poplack [5] and Gumperz [47] are the first researchers who tackled this code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon. David et al. [48] define code-switching as the alternate use of two languages in communication by using words, clauses, or sentences from these two languages in the same conversation. According to some researchers, code-switching is different from code-mixing. Code-switching occurs with bilingual and multilingual speakers in which they switch from their native tongue (L1) to another language that is foreign (L2) in their communication. The reason for this switching is due to the speakers' linguistic insufficiency in one of the languages; thus, code-switching is conducted by the speaker to deliver a message more explicitly and to achieve some effects on the listener [49]. It is a process of movement from one language to another. Code-switching takes place chaotically due to lexical ignorance, which in turn might incur some cognitive costs. While mixing in code, speakers use some words and phrases from more than one language in the same sentence [33]. Code-mixing is a linguistic hybridization. Switching and mixing both Arabic and English languages is a widespread linguistic behavior among adults and young Arab bilingual speakers in the UAE. In the upcoming section, the author explores some data by asking the students about mixing both Arabic and English in their daily communication to collect the participants' opinions to evaluate this linguistic behavior.

The following table reflects some questions that were asked of a group of 100 secondary school students about the usage of only English, only Arabic, or mixing both languages.

Table 2.
Percentages of students' responses to Arabic, English or both languages.

Question	Only Arabic	Only English	Mixed
What language do you use when you are in school?	3%	47%	50%
What language do you use when you speak with your neighbours?	13%	26%	61%
What language do you use at home with your brothers and sisters?	15%	35%	50%
What language do you use when you meet friends?	10%	21%	69%
What language do you dream in?	60%	10%	30%
What language do you use most commonly when you are angry?	39%	19%	42%

3.1.1. Threat to the Arabic Language

The major role played by any language is not related only to defining one's own culture and identity but also in relation to contrast with others. A serious threat is being faced by the Arabic language due to the presence of a dominant language in the Arab world. This threat lies not only in language shifting, but there is a strong chance of acculturation, a shift in culture with the change in language. Al-Shehhi [50] points to this in an article in the Gulf News by stating: "There are socio-cultural and geopolitical dimensions to the presence of people from more than 200 different nationalities in the UAE. This poses a great risk to the identity of the country and its citizens." The major threat to the Arabic language is due to education policies that place much weight on teaching English in comparison to Arabic. A bulk of conducted studies and research has found that Arabic-speaking students in the Arab world are facing undeniable problems in relation to learning their first language. These studies have found that 67 percent of students in the UAE face difficulties with Arabic grammar and 59 percent among Jordanian students, while Egypt comes in with 54 percent [51].

Arabic-speaking students are required to be taught in kindergartens and primary schools in their first language. Providing children and young students with a well-established curriculum in teaching their first language in terms of vocabulary and

structure can help them participate in learning a second language more effectively at an older age. Arabic-speaking young students are required to communicate in English wherever they are inside the schools, and numerous students even communicate in English outside the schools. This is due to students who are from various nations and who speak different languages, and English has become particularly the most widely used language even among Arabic speakers. There is no indication that students have positive attitudes towards Arabic language learning. Frequently, many Arab students begin to communicate in English more often than in Arabic.

3.1.2. Implications

The outcomes of this exploration uncover that second-generation Arab youth have a limited capacity to comprehend, speak, read, write, and translate oral Arabic into English and vice versa. In examining their capability in learning L1 and L2, it is considered that they have a lower proficiency in Arabic than in English. Second-generation Arab youngsters primarily speak Arabic at home due to their families who address them in Arabic, yet teenagers can comprehend, speak, read, and write in English better than in Arabic. In a few situations, when an Arab student converses with his/her friend in the presence of a non-Arab, they use English instead of Arabic. Most Arabs choose English over Arabic when communicating with their siblings. This preference for English over Arabic is due to a limited vocabulary in Arabic compared to English. Furthermore, English is clearly the dominant language among high school students as they think and converse with others in English more frequently than in Arabic. This study reveals a relationship between Arabic and English language proficiency; Arabic is rarely used at home and in schools, while English is used more often as the language of instruction, the language of conversation in classrooms, and with teachers, and very often with parents. Students' identities, character, and culture are either built through the dominant language, which is not their home language, or they begin to establish a peculiar identity that is neither a home identity nor a foreign one.

The use of Arabic is apparently diminishing, and the use of English is expanding. Along these lines, there is confirmation from this review that second-generation Arab teenagers' capability is moving towards English as opposed to maintaining the local language. Literature details that once these teenagers and secondary school students are socially and environmentally captivated with a firm and constant perception that English is more prestigious and a success-pathway language, they continue to build that language even at home and prefer speaking English over L1, regardless of the possibility that their family might not know English so well. Therefore, it is essential to maintain Arabic with the goal that the students can learn both languages simultaneously and interchangeably to preserve their home language, local identity, and values to be able to comprehend their family and Arabic monolinguals [52].

4. Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate code-switching and code-mixing among teenagers and secondary school students in the United Arab Emirates. The paper was conducted to obtain valuable data to conclude this research in a useful manner. The author also interviewed a specific group of students to evaluate whether there is a prevalent switch in home language over time. In conclusion, this expanding approach towards English is producing significant changes in the Arab world. Private secondary schools that are producing English-speaking youngsters are progressing every day regarding teaching most, if not all, subjects in English, while the Arabic language is taught for a few purposes, if any, thus Arabic language teaching is reduced day by day, and this will create a generation with limited Arabic proficiency (LAP). To avoid this, adjusting instructional bilingual educational programs tailored to meet global demands, local conditions, and the national context is required. Programs that employ the mother tongue as the base for bilingual programs are necessary. The mother tongue should be the language of instruction in kindergartens and the first years of primary school.

Some of the critics who are concerned with the way the English and Arabic languages are taught doubt their loss of inheritance and note the changing perspective towards teaching the Arabic language. They criticize the basic issues of painted instructive frameworks of teaching and the imposition of the English language to create a subtractive bilingual generation of students who are wedged from their past and roots. This, of course, will move the students coercively in the opposite direction of their native language, posing a danger to Arab identity, personality, and culture. The complacent conviction that the entire world communicates in English prompts less investigation of foreign languages and less interest in whatever remains in the world. The English language is washing over the world; numerous nations fear the eradication of their culture and the loss of global status, and the Arab world is also in a state of losing its mother language and culture. If English is the language of the future, does that mean the Arabic language is now a part of the past?

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