

التحول اللغوي بين العربية والإنكليزية من قبل متحدثين عراقيين مقيمين في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية

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Code-switching Between Arabic and English by Iraqi Speakers Living in the United States of America

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Abstract

As a bilingual doctoral student lived in the United States for more than four years, it was noticed that a particular shift between languages happens frequently. Such interchange in speech is known as code-switching (CS). CS from Arabic to English or from English to Arabic was occurring in conversations with Iraqi students, friends, and families.

The present study followed a qualitative method, utilizing data from interviews, and observations obtained from four bilingual Iraqi families who were living in the United States. The study presented an analysis of Arabic-English and English-Arabic CS existing in bilingual social surroundings. The reasons together with the factors of CS in this population are discussed. In addition, the study addressed the motivations, and values that impact the phenomenon of CS among these families. The findings of this study revealed that the main reasons behind CS are identity, emotion, and the absence of equivalence of specific words.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Arabic, English, Code-switching.

المستخلص

كوني طالبة دكتوراه ثنائية اللغة عشت اكثر من أربع سنوات في الولايات المتحدة، لاحظت أن هناك تحولاً معيناً يحدث بشكل متكرر بين اللغتين العربية و الإنكليزية. هذا التحول في الكلام يعرف باسم "التحول اللغوي". ان التحول اللغوي من العربية إلى الإنكليزية أو من الإنكليزية إلى العربية لوحظ في محادثات بين الطلاب العراقيين والأصدقاء وعوائلهم.

إتبعت الدراسة الحالية منهجاً وصفيّاً، عن طريق إجراء مقابلات مع عدد من الطلبة العراقيين، ومشاهدة عوائلهم المتحدثين باللغتين والمقيمين في الولايات المتحدة في وقت إجراء الدراسة. قدمت الدراسة تحليلاً لظاهرة التحول بين اللغتين لأربعة عوائل عراقية. تمت مناقشة أسباب وعوامل التحول اللغوي في هذه الفئة المحددة من السكان. كما تناولت الدراسة الدوافع والقيم التي تؤثر على هذه الظاهرة لدى هذه الأسر. بينت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الأسباب الرئيسية وراء هذه الظاهرة هي إبراز الهوية والعاطفة وغياب تكافؤ كلمات معينة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ثنائية اللغة، اللغة العربية، اللغة الإنكليزية، التحول اللغوي.

Introduction

Bilingualism is a common phenomenon that occurs as the opposite of the concept of the dearth of bilingualism (Grosjean, 2010). Bilingual speakers substitute words and sentences from one language to another inside the same speech occasion (Al-Rowais, 2012; Da Silva, 2014; Grosjean, 2010). CS between Arabic and English is generally seen among speakers, when they welcome each other, eat together and express thoughts that could be simpler to clarify in a particular language.

Gumperz (1982) was the first researcher who defined the “conversational function of CS” as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (p. 59). He clarified that CS is not only a feature of bilingualism, but face-to-face bilingual dialogue; this explains its category as “conversational CS”. In addition, conversational CS does not certainly signal a lack of competence of the syntactic systems. Furthermore, Aurima and Windyawati (2018) asserted that CS plays an indispensable role in communication. They added that CS influences the way people interact with languages because they found it on social media posts. Many researchers (Herot, 2002; Tannen, 1988; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1996) have previously sought to determine the natural conversations occurred at dinner time. According to Chung (2006), switching between Korean and American languages during dinner time is utilized to firm the family’s cultural unity and create connection among family members across generations. The purpose of this study is to examine the CS of spoken English during daily conversation of four Iraqi families living in the United States.

The current study investigated these questions, “1. Why do Iraqi speakers switch from Arabic to English language? 2. Why Iraqi speakers sometimes feel more comfortable switching to English even though Arabic is their native language? 3. How do social and cultural factors influence CS?” This study is noteworthy because there is presently no published research on CS among Iraqi students’ community lived in the United States.

Reasons of CS

Malik (1994) identified 10 reasons behind CS in conversation. These reasons are represented by figure 1.

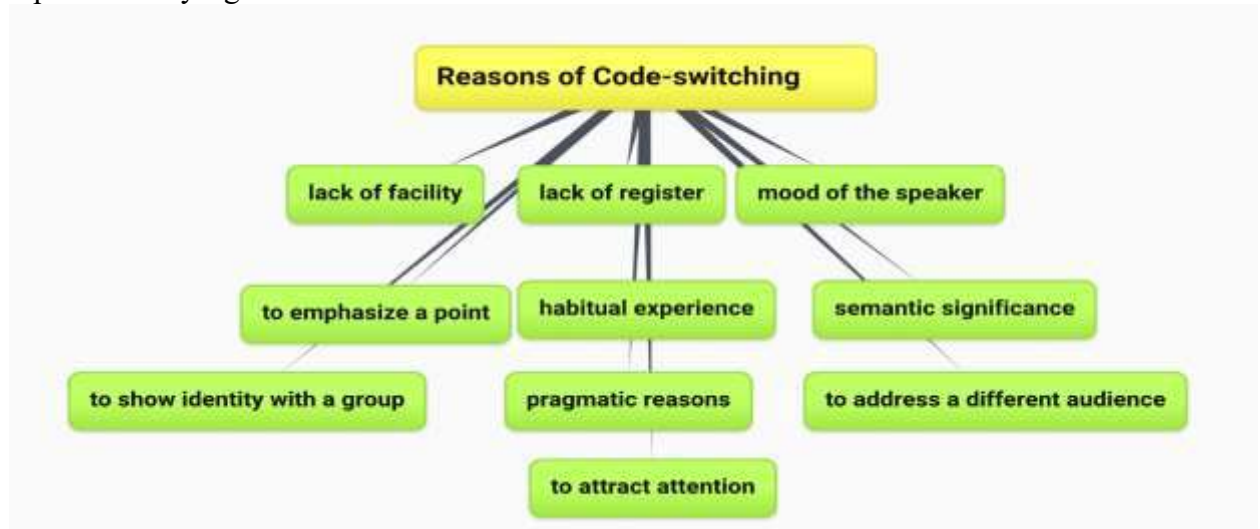


Figure 1. Reasons of CS

Literature Review

Gumperz is considered as the founder of CS research since he was the first researcher who investigated the linguistic features related to CS behavior. Gumperz (1982) concentrated on the cardinal concern of CS as one outcome of language contact. Three language groupings were employed: "Hindi and English, Spanish and English, and Slovenian and German". The aim of examining the three language pairs was to probe the communicative characteristics of CS and to show how the participants utilized CS unintentionally by adopted social knowledge in clarifying bilingual conversation.

Many studies have been conducted on the purposes, forms, and structure of CS. Although CS is not a contemporary topic, many bilingual researchers interested in studying this topic because additional facts are discovered with every new study. Schendl and Wright (2011) divided CS into three main types of study: "grammatical, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic". Regarding the grammatical study of CS, Alhazmi (2016) examined the linguistic descriptions of CS among Arabic speakers living in Australia. The purpose of his study was to categorize the patterns of CS in "Arabic-English discussions, discover the influence of typological distinction between Arabic and English in CS forms, and study the range to which grammatical restrictions limit switching from Arabic to English". The data were collected from two groups: "the first group was speakers who take part in Arabic radio station programs in Australia (radio conversation), such as the Muslim Community Radio; the second group was Facebook chat, such as the Arab Community in Australia". Alhazmi (2016) determined that CS occurred despite the distinctions in structure between English and Arabic languages. The main structures that can be affected during switching to English are "word-order system, sentence structure, definiteness, plurals, and rich morphology". Alhazmi's (2016) study showed an agreement with Abalhassan and Alshalawi's (2000) study which indicated the effect of the grammatical structures on CS. Abalhassan and Alshalawi (2000) illustrated that both the Asian language and the European language have been used together usually in sociolinguistic contexts.

Some studies concentrated on classifying the functions of CS. In her study, Koziol (2000) examined the functions of CS by categorizing the different situations and functions of CS. She presented most of the main points that CS can achieve in dialogue. Some of the functions Koziol discovered were "personalization, repetition, designation, replacement, emphasis, explanation, annoying messages, interruptions, digression, and topic shift". Al-Rowais (2012) examined the structure of CS forms and the social inspiration behind it. He assumed that CS from Arabic to English is an unmarked choice for speakers, while selecting to speak only one language is a marked choice. Rowais focused on the identification of the "Matrix Language Setting in the observations of CS patterns from Arabic to English". As a result, the study reinforced these two hypotheses.

Much research has investigated the features, factors, and purposes behind CS from Arabic to English. Bader (2003) revealed that education is the most effective factor that influences CS, while the other minor factors are "age, gender, and place". Hussein (1999) mentioned that Jordanian learners show both negative and positive viewpoints of CS between Arabic and English, and the central reason behind CS is the deficiency of equivalence of specific English words in Arabic. Al-Hourani and Afizah (2013) who conducted their study in Jordan, concluded that Jordanian students in Malaysia shift in their speech from Arabic to English if they recognize the addressees

personally. In their study, Abalhassan and Alshalawi (2000) indicated that all speakers living in America switched into English to a certain extent. They found that Saudi students in America used English words placed into Arabic conversations which revealed the influence of native structure on the CS words.

Turjoman (2016) dealt with the features that affect Arabic morphemes to English ones and vice versa. She concluded that identity and solidarity are the two main factors that impact CS that occurred among Saudi female students living in Saudi Arabia.

Many researchers have confirmed that CS is happened by a rule-based, systematic method. Weinreich (2010) established the claim that “bilingual speakers cannot switch to another language within a sentence and may not switch at all if there is no variation in topic”. Abdel Magid and Mugaddam’s (2013) controversy against Weinreich’s claim is “code switching can occur in a daily conversation if one speaker utilizes one language and the other responds in a different language”. Another potential case in which CS might happen is when a speaker starts using his first language and then shifts to a different one in the middle of the sentence and in the middle of the conversation.

While Al-Rowais (2012) utilized recordings of speakers’ spontaneous exchanges during social gatherings during meals. Turjoman (2016) used recording when she interviewed her participants during weekly meetings among Saudi female participants. All the preceding data-collection methods that the researchers utilized are not enough for this study as it is important for researcher to watch the nonverbal/ facial expressions used when the speakers switch to English. Despite the previous research in CS, most studies have been conducted in countries where English is not the primary language. Moreover, no study has truly addressed the CS of Iraqi speakers.

This study examined CS among Iraqi students’ families needed to collect qualitative data. Therefore, the researcher has conducted interviews, and spontaneous observations of four bilingual Iraqi families who were residing in the United States.

Methodology

Participants

Four Iraqi bilingual speakers were the participants in the interview of this research. All the participants were Ph.D. students at University of Central Florida (UCF). All participants had lived in the USA between 3–5 years. They are between the ages of 33 and 40. Participants’ names were replaced by sobriquets. The four participants in the study with their majors, and years spent at the USA are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *Participants of the interview questions*

Participants	Major	Years Spent at the USA
Salih	Mechatronics Engineering	More than 3 years
Mariam	Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages	More than 4 years
Nameer	Computer Engineering	More than 5 years
Ahmed	Computer Engineering	More than 3 years

The researcher preferred married students with children to enlarge the sample of the study. So, the rest of the sample are four spouses, grandmother, and seven children. So, 16 participants, as shown in Figure 2 below, were involved in this study

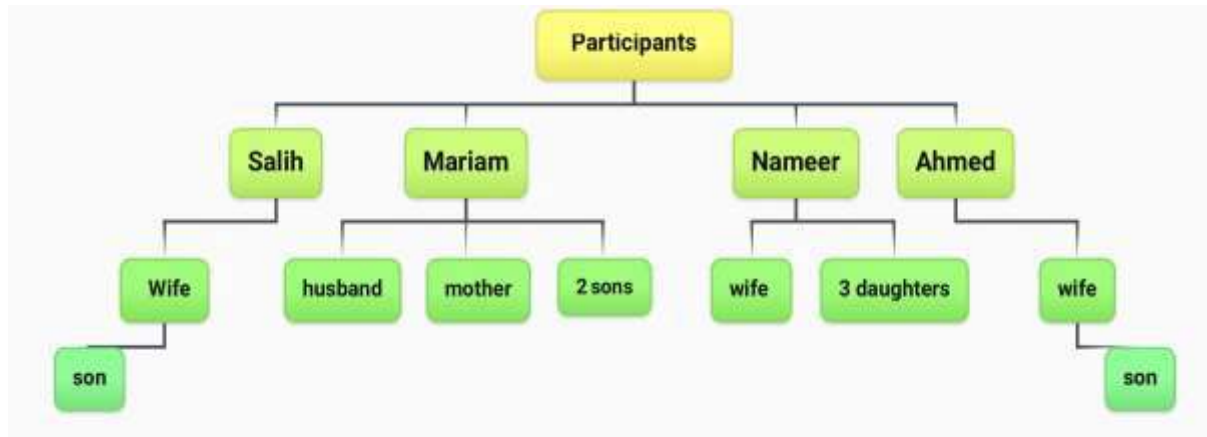


Figure 2. Participants of the study

Data Collection from Interview Questions

The interview consisted of four questions (Appendix 1). All the interviews were between 40-60 minutes took place in a quiet area.

1. What language do you prefer to use with your Iraqi friends?

All the participants have chosen Arabic except Salih. Mariam, Nameer and Ahmed mentioned that it is easier to use the native language. i.e., Arabic. Salih showed his desire to learn English. He said, “I think using some English became a fashion, so my aim is to continue speaking in English or at least use some words when I will return back to Iraq”. Mariam mentioned that “The group of Iraqi students at UCF consisted of 15 students. Most of them are male and their majors are engineering. Being a female among many males, I prefer to use Arabic with them”.

2. When you must speak English, do you also switch to Arabic words? Why?

Salih answered that, “I wish to say no, but honestly I cannot continue using English, I will definitely use Arabic words cause my vocabulary is limited”. Mariam replied, “I will say in class, I use English only. Sometimes I switch to Arabic when I talk with my Iraqi friend to discuss and clarify some points”. She added, “Also when I go to Masjid and Halal markets: our conversations are in English, but when I want to greet people, I say “Alsalam Alaikum” which means “peace be upon you”. Nameer stated that, “Even in the group discussion of our classes, I always switch to Arabic Language when I talk with my friend Ahmed. Sometimes I don’t understand some English words, so I ask Ahmed about them in Arabic”. Nameer listed many words that he used to use in Arabic like “Alsalam Alaikum”, Alhamdulillah meaning “praise be to God”. And “Allah Bil Khair” which means “May Allah makes your time full of good things”.

Ahmed said that “We are five Ph.D. Arab students in computer engineering, two Iraqi, two Saudi and one from Emirates, our conversation usually begins in English, however, unintentionally, we find ourselves switch to Arabic”. The researcher asked him about the reasons of this switching. Ahmed replied, “I think it is easier for five of us to use our native language and we all Arab students, so Arabic language reflects our identity”.

3. What language do you prefer to use when you try to encourage your children?

All the participants in this study have selected Arabic language to convey emotional words with their children.

4. When you speak Arabic, do you also use English words? Why? Can you mention some examples?

Salih said yes. He added, "I have called my family in Iraq yesterday, I have mentioned the word "closet", my mother asked me about the meaning of this word. I have explained what closet means but I could not find similar word in Arabic". In addition, my wife's major is English, so I feel free to use some English words". Mariam replied, "I always used English words with my sons when I couldn't find equivalent word in Arabic, for example, I will say "Orlando Science Center" in English because we do not have such a center in Iraq, and of course I will never translate "universal" and "sea world" in English". Sea world and Universal are theme parks in the city the participants lived in.

Nameer replied, "I always switch to English when I forget the words in Arabic." He added, "Believe me, sometimes I have faced difficulty remembering them in Arabic. Ahmed said, "I use many words in English like *hardware*, *modem*, and *reboot*". It seems that when bilingual speakers could not recall the technical name of the word in Arabic, they used the word in English.

Data Analysis of Interview Questions

Before proceeding the analysis of data, it is worth stating that the central difficulty in examining CS in functional terms is that many shifts may be either "multi-functional, or open to different functional interpretations" (Holmes, 2013). The interview session with Salih reflects that CS can be used as a trend of talking. Although there was one expected answer to the first question which is "I prefer using Arabic with my friends", I found only Salih's answer to be different from the others. While Mariam's English is perfect, for personal reasons, she prefers to use only the Arabic language with her Iraqi friends. Huang, Lyu, and Lin (2020) stated that males usually code-switch more than females. So, it can be claimed that gender is one of the factors that affects CS.

Ahmed's answer aligned with previous studies by Crystal (1987) who claimed that bilingual speakers use CS to reflect friendly relations and unity with a certain social group.

It can be concluded that bilingual speakers codeswitched to first language not only because it is easier but also it shows the fact that they belong to the same social group that share the same experiences and values.

All participants might shift to English because the absence of equivalence of specific words. Therefore 'lack of facility', which means there is no suitable or equivalent word in native language (Hadei, Kumar, and Jie, 2016) could be another factor of CS. It was found from Mariam's and Nameer answers, some of the CS involved greetings which are used as traditional greetings among Muslims. This kind of CS has a social function. Some of the participants mentioned that they do not have enough language proficiency in the English language. Therefore "lack of competence" in English language might be another reason for CS. The answers to question three align with previous study by Pavlenko (2004) who stated that bilingual speakers might

switch to their native language to show more emotions. Caldwell-Harris (2015) has illustrated the reason behind using the first language in emotional context. He said native language is typically acquired at home which is more emotional than school.

Another factor for CS that the researcher noticed from the interview is that all participants switch to English because they know the listener(s) can understand them. In an example of this, Salih told me that he prefers to use English with his wife because she is English teacher. Mariam also illustrated that she feels free to shift to English words because her sons speak English only and her husband who has Ph.D. in psychology has excellent English skills. Ahmed said that "I usually switch to English words in my speech because most of my Iraqi students are engineers and my son speaks English as well".

Observations

Students' dependents were the main participants in the observations of this research. All the observations were at a home domain. Observations are used to inspect the extent, if any, of CS between spoken Arabic and English during daily conversation recorded in two to three hours in the home domain of four Iraqi families living in the America. In order to collect the data, the researcher participated in the conversations with the participants. The researcher was observing Iraqi families to get more natural, unintentional CS. Yin (2003) suggested that on language socialization it is preferable to follow qualitative research method with a small number of participants from three or four families to focus on the analysis of each participant. Therefore, four Iraqi families were asked to participate in this study. The families were selected according to these criteria:

1. Iraqi students and their dependents spent at least three years in the USA.
2. They have preschool or school children.

The four families are from the same country, and have the same culture, belief, and traditions. Therefore, the participants are close friends, and they always meet from time to time in one of these families' houses. To analyze the data from the observations, each observation was separated into common themes and then distinguished the individual themes with different highlighted colors since they are the primary data. Then the unrelated themes that made no difference or influence the current study were removed. Instances of CS from English to Arabic, and vice versa were highlighted.

1. Salih's Family

Salih was in his third year of a Ph.D. journey. The son, AB, (five years old) was able to comprehend and speak English. The mother revealed that she became worried about Abbas's Arabic language, so she began to teach him Arabic using Iraqi curriculum. Abbas used the word "timan," which means rice. When his mother asked him if he wanted more, he answered "la" which means no.

The mother told Abbas to bring his drawing book. Then she asked him "what do you draw?" he replied "tree", the mother asked him to say it in Arabic, but he refused. The mother tried to teach her son that "tree" in Arabic means "shajara". However, the son kept saying "it is a tree". The researcher believes that Abbas preferred to use "tree" because it is easier in pronunciation.

2. Mariam's Family

The second extract is from Mariam's family. The mother, Mariam, was in her fourth year. Her husband has a Ph.D. degree in philosophy and came as a dependent to his wife. Mariam's mother, an English teacher, came to visit her daughter's family. The

children, Thamir (7 years) and Haidar (5.5 years) were able to comprehend and speak English and some Arabic.

One example of the effect of the physical environment on CS is that Haidar, who was only 5.5 years old, started to learn the English alphabet because all his games were about the English alphabet and words. His grandmother tried to teach him the Arabic alphabet, but unintentionally he switched to English especially when counting numbers. His grandmother started counting in Arabic and he completed the numbers in English. The grandmother tried to teach her grandsons Arabic; she said, "I feel sorry that the children cannot speak Arabic fluently, this means they cannot read Holy Quran and cannot not pray." Haidar used some Arabic words when he wanted to play.

Haidar asked her grandmother to tell him a story. The grandmother was used Arabic for narratives that were about her other grandsons in Iraq. The purpose of these stories as the grandmother said was to create connection with their relatives.

3. Nameer 's Family

The third extract is from Nameer's family. Nameer has three daughters, his daughters, Reem (8 years), Leen (7 years) and Zena (4 years) were actively involved in speech and conversations with each other in the backyard, so I went there to observe them interact naturally and spontaneously. The researcher noticed that children use English when they speak to each other, but they switched to Arabic language when they speak with their parents. Zena was holding a digital tablet, and she asked her sister Leen if she wanted to try the game she was playing. The little girl, Zena, used the word "blue" in Arabic. When the researcher asked her mother why she used Arabic only when she talked about colors. The mother replied, "I try to teach her Arabic, but she prefers English because she always plays with her sisters and watches English cartoons." She added that "I am trying to motivate her by buying her favorite game which is colored cubes. I do not give her this game unless she tries to say the colors in Arabic". The father, Nameer, was in the backyard prepared different kinds of meat for dinner. Reem was talking with her father in Arabic, but she used the word liver in English because she did not know the equivalent in Arabic. Some participants switched to other language due to the lack of vocabulary. Zena was welcoming her father in Arabic by saying, "ja baba ja baba," which means Daddy comes, Daddy comes. She hugged her father and greeted him in Arabic. She wanted to go outside with her father, but he told her he was tired, so she tried to convince him by saying please in Arabic. Zena established solidarity with her father in this conversation.

4. Ahmed's Family

Ahmed has one son, Ali, 6 years old, his wife hold a Ph.D. degree in philosophy, but her English level was intermediate. The researcher noticed that the mother encouraged her son to translate some words into Arabic language. She was holding flashcards that contained the following words: *apple, bee, car, dog, elephant, fish, gold, Hellen, ice, and John*. He was able to translate the first two words, and then he said the words *car* and *dog* in English. The mother told me "It is our responsibility to teach our children the Arabic language because of the Islamic prayer."

The son was playing a game in his iPad. When the son won the game, he said happily, "I did it, I got inside the circle." Then he switched to Arabic to say "I won" in Arabic. to confirm that he won the game. When he was upset and he did not want to eat, he used the word "no" in both languages.

In conclusion, the common reason of CS is that most of the participants' children use only English; therefore, parents mandatorily use English with them.

Children utilized English because they know their parents can comprehend them.

Discussion on the Findings of Observations

The son in Ahmed's family switched to Arabic to repeat what he already said in English. Therefore, CS can be utilized as repetitive to confirm and emphasize the importance of the words. Haidar used an Arabic word when he wanted something from his parents by saying "inteni", which means *give me*. He used Arabic words because he knew his parent would give him what he wants if he speaks Arabic. Switching to the native language is used to reflect more intense emotions. Therefore, some children used emotional words in Arabic to get what they wanted or to attract attention.

The finding of the study revealed that identity and unity is one of the reasons for inspiring Iraqi children to switch to Arabic. It seems that the grandmother in Mariam's family tried to reflect positive feelings about relatives. She told her grandsons, "You have to learn Arabic to call your relatives, you can talk and play games with them". In addition, both the grandmother and the mother in Ahmed's family want the children to learn Arabic for religious reasons.

From the ten reasons of CS specified by (Malik, 1994), it was recognized that there were five significant reasons of why Iraqi bilingual speakers, and their families codeswitch in their conversations. These reasons are identified from both interviews and observations. Figure 3 below shows the reasons for CS in this specific community.

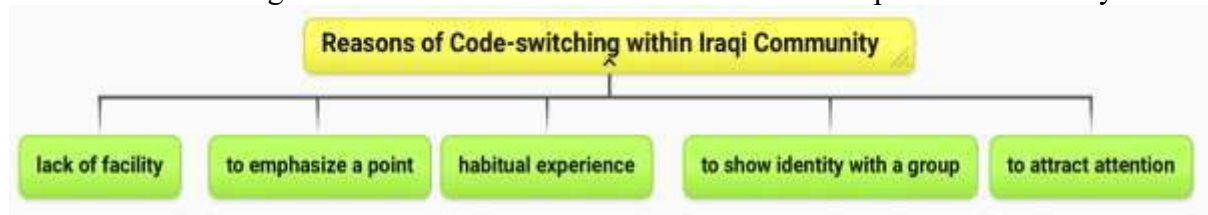


Figure 3. The reasons for CS in specific Iraqi community

Conclusion

Overall, the aim of the study, which was analyzing the phenomenon of CS in Iraqi conversation speech, was achieved. The findings can help provide insight on the phenomenon of CS among Iraqi Arabic-English bilingual students in conversation. The results revealed many reasons for CS. Most switches are due to the lack of the availability of certain concepts or due to the lack of facility in one of the languages. These findings suggest a greater socio-emotional role for CS. The study has also emphasized that identity, emphasizing or clarifying a point are the most frequent reasons for motivating the speakers to shift to another language.

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APPENDIX A

Student's Interview Questions

1. What language do you prefer to use with your Iraqi friends?
2. When you have to speak English, do you also switch to Arabic words? Why?
3. What language do you prefer to use when you try to encourage your children?
4. When you speak Arabic, do you also use English words? Why? Can you mention some examples?