Code Switching in Persian & English

HediehNajafi
Al-Khawarizmi International College
Al Ain
UAE

Abstract

The early 1980s mark the immigration of Iranians and Afghans, in large numbers, to the U.S. This phenomenon positioned the Persian language in juxtaposition with the English language creating a suitable environment for code switching between the two languages. In this paper, by collecting data from the Iranian media, I compare the code switching patterns of Persian-English to those of Spanish-English using Poplack"s (1981) code switching constraints. I will discuss the similarities as well as discrepancies and suggest the reasons for the discrepancies.

Keywords: Code switching; Persian; Complex predicates; Code switched verbs

Introduction

This paper intends to examine Persian (Farsi)1 English code switching with an emphasis on switched verbs. The paper consists of two sections; the first section of the paper examines the contact conditions of Persian and English in the U.S. The second section discusses the result of my data analysis of Persian English code switching while shedding some light on the occurrence of code switched verbs. This study is mainly based on Poplack"s (1981) code switching constraints that were the result of her data analysis of the New York Puerto-Rican community. This is in large due to the simplicity of her two proposed code switching constraints, and the fact that her proposed constraints have been universally used, applied, and discussed (Clyne 1987; Myers-Scotton 1993; Jacobson 1998). Although there have been extensive counter examples (Gardner-Choloros & Edwards, 2004), her two code switching constraints remain among the most popular and most used constraints on code switching between different languages. This paper is centralized around Persian and Iran since Iran is the most populated Persian speaking nation. Also, Tehran Standard Persian is the basis for the Persian spoken in other countries.

Persian Speaking Populations in the U.S

It is important to examine if the conditions meet for Persian and English to come in contact in the U.S. context or not. This can be done by looking at the Persian speaking populations in the U.S. Iranian families started to come to the U.S. in larger numbers in the early 1980s. The total number of Iranians in the U.S. has been reported by many sources quoting the U.S. Census Bureau as 537,777 between 1978 to 1986. (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh (1988); Lorenz and Wartime (1980); Bozorgmehr (1998); Modarres (1998); Modarresi (2001). Today the number of Iranians residing in the U.S. ranges from 338,266 (U.S. census bureau 2000, people with Iranian ancestry), 362,000 in 2011 (American Community Survey 2011) to 900,000 (Fata, S., and Rafii, R. 2003, National Iranian American Council quoting the Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Washington D.C.). 1980s were the same years that Afghans came to the U.S. in relatively large numbers. Today, the number of foreign born Afghan population is 45,000 according to the U.S. census bureau 2000 and 54,563 in 2010 reported by PEW Research Center.

Unfortunately, no data are available on the Tajik population as they are categorized under Russians in the U.S. census bureau data. Although the data on the Persian speaking populations in the U.S. are not complete, just by including the Iranian and Afghan populations, I come to the following conclusion. Considering that these two populations have lived in the U.S. for over a quarter of a century, and that 56% of all foreign born Iranians and 45.4% of all foreign born Afghans in the U.S. live in California (U.S. census bureau 2000), the conditions are there for Persian and English to come in contact.

Persian and English in Verbal Contact

In order to examine if the verbal contact of these two languages has resulted in code switching or not, I conducted a study of the Iranian media.

The Study of the Iranian Media in the U.S.

In the U.S. there are about twenty different Iranian channels that are broadcasted from California and New York. These channels are run by the Iranians residing in the U.S., and their Iranian audience has access to these channels through out the world. Their programs range from commercials, Persian rug and jewelry sales, programs on fashion, psychiatry, physical fitness to news and teaching Persian.

Methodology

I studied six different programs that were not captioned. All of these programs involved a professional as the host and different callers. Usually these professionals were psychiatrists, lawyers, doctors, and physical trainers. In all of these programs, the audience would call and either make a comment or ask a question. I studied these programs over the course of ten weeks for about ten hours. Sometimes the callers would reveal their age, education, and employment status as well as place of residency, and at times the only information on the caller would be the place of residency. Based on the incomplete data on all the callers, the ages of the callers of this study ranges between 19 to mid fifties. The level of education ranges from high school diploma to graduate level. Also, almost 60% of the callers had employment outside their houses. I purposefully excluded the data from callers outside the U.S. The hosts of these programs are highly bilingual since they either have studied or worked both in Iran and the U.S. or have studied in Iran and worked in the U.S. The data are from twenty two different people. In her Syntactic Structure and Social Function of Code switching, Poplack (1981) explains the constraints of code switching using her study of Lola. According to Poplack (1981), "she [Lola] appears to be the most skilled code switcher in the community." Using her definition of a code switch: "…definition of a switch as any L1 item which is unadapted phonologically, morphologically or syntactically into L2 discourse" (Poplack, 1981), I collected forty examples of code switches between Persian and English. Later, I used her model to analyze my data. Table 1 is the result of my data analysis.

Table 1

Switched Segment	**Percent**
At Major Constituent Boundaries	
Full sentence	0
Conjoined sentence	2.5
Interjection	0
Repetition	5
Between noun phrase & verb phrase	2.5
Between verb phrase & object noun phrase	2.5
Between verb phrase & prepositional phrase	0
Within Major Constituents	
Noun	47.5
Adjective	15
Adverb	0
Within verb	22.5

N = 40

According to Table 1, the upper part of the data analysis accounts for lower percentages of switches, and the lower part accounts for the higher percentages of switches. In other words, the higher the syntactic level of constituents, the smaller the probability of a switch. When comparing my data analysis with that of Poplack (1981) as well as Poplack (1980), Lipski (1985), and Zentella (1994), quoted in Zentella's (1997) The Grammar of Spanglish, I found some consistencies and some discrepancies.

Consistencies

Nouns and Adjectives

By comparing the data analysis of Poplack (1980), Lipski (1985), and Zentella (1994), Zentella (1997) concludes that there are distinct patterns in the hierarchy of code switching. For instance, nouns are among the most frequent switches, while prepositions and adjectives are among the most infrequent switches. As can be seen in Table 1, noun switches account for 47.5% of all switches that occur in my data corpus, and adjectives account for only 15% of all switches. The occurrence of a switch in these two categories is in consistency with the hierarchy of code switching that Zentella attests to. Furthermore, neither of the code switched nouns in my data are ethnic nouns. The reason being that first, the larger part of most sentences is in Persian, and second the code switchers are actually talking to in- group members. Therefore, it is assumed that they share common ethnic knowledge.
Considering the word order in English and Persian, as seen in Table 2, switching at the adjective level would result in what is considered unacceptable in much of the code switching literature. Quoting Timm (1975), Poplack (1981) confirms the same concept and adds that the data indicate a higher tendency for switches to occur at adjective predicate level. As seen in Table 3, predicate adjective formation exists in both English and Persian; interesting enough (except for one) all the examples in my data corpus at adjective level followed the predicate adjective formation.

Table 2: Word Order

English	(determiner) + adjective + noun	(a) nice person
Persian	noun + adjective	/adame/ /khoob/ person nice

Table 3: Predicate Adjective

English	different (predicate adjective)	Her hair has always been different.
Persian	/motefavet/ (predicate adjective) meaning different	/moohash//hamishe//motefavet//budeh/.

There was only one example of a code switch that occurred at the adjective level and defied the equivalence constraint. In this example, as seen in Table 4 the switch that contradicted the English word order was an attributive adjective.

Table 4

/be/ /in/ /migan/ /yek/ **/kare/ technical**.
Noun Adjective modifying the noun
They call this a **technical work**.
Adjective modifying the noun Noun

This is also in consistency with Zentella's (1997) findings that "43% of the switches that contradicted English word order were adjectives, "los cosasscary" (the scary things)".

 Discrepancies

Full Sentence and Conjoined Sentences

One of the discrepancies in my data corpus is that the switches at sentence level account for 0%, and the switches at conjoined sentence level account for 2.5% of all switches. Although honoring the syntactic hierarchy, this is in contrast with the findings of Poplack (1981). In Poplack's data corpus, switches at full sentence level account for 13%, and switches at conjoined sentence level account for 15%. After nouns with 34% of all switches, these two categories together account for more than one fourth of all switches (28%), making them the second most frequently switched categories. However, in my data corpus, only 2.5% of all the switches account for these two categories making them the first most infrequently switched categories. Looking at the literature and previous studies on Spanish-English code switching (Pfaff 1975; Poplack1981; Zentella 1997), there is a high tendency for switches to occur at sentential level when the style is casual.

Considering that my data were collected when the informants were most attentive to their speech, talking to the hosts on TV channels with Iranian audience across the world, their style is considered formal. Therefore, it is only predictable to have the lowest percentages of switches at the sentential level.

The difference of speech style, casual versus formal, in the data corpus of Poplack (1981) and mine accounts for the discrepancy in the occurrence of switches at the sentential level.

Within Verb

In the previous literature on code switching (Ex: Bolonyai 2005, Muysken 2000, and Myers-Scotton 2002) verbs have repeatedly been reported not to be readily the target of a switch. Although the reasons behind this are not really understood and known, switches continue not to occur at the within verb level. However, in the case of my data corpus 22.5%, i.e., almost one forth of all the switches in my data set occurred at within verb level. This is in sharp contrast with the data analysis of Poplack (1981) where only 1% of all the switches occurred at the within verb level. Before I explain the reason behind the occurrence of this kind of switch at such a high rate, I will look at what is usually not considered an accepted switch at the within verb level in the code switching literature.

Free Morpheme Constraint

The free morpheme constraint prevents the verb switches to occur in negative constructions as well as between a finite verb and infinitive complement. Quoting Timm (1975), Poplack (1981) states that a sentence such as "I don't quiero." is unacceptable because the negating elements and the verbs that are being negated should belong to the same language. Also, Poplack (1981) explains that "According to the free morpheme constraint, a switch could occur at any point in the sentence except after do, given that the contracted form of not is a bound morpheme." She contends that switching in negative constructions is usually avoided. In the same article, Poplack (1981) quotes Timm (1975) that a structure such as "(they) want a venire",is considered unacceptable since a switch between a finite verb and infinitive complement is considered unacceptable. Poplack (1981) explains this unacceptability by the free morpheme constraint that excludes switches at bound morphemes. In my data set, all of the examples follow the free morpheme constraint; hence no occurrence of switches at bound morphemes.

Code Switched Verbs

By comparing the verb structure in English and Persian, I explain why in my data corpus, the switches at within verb level account for such a high percentage of all switches. While verbs such as play account for the majority of verbs in English, there are some verbs that are made up of a verb component and a noun component. These are called complex predicates. Although simple verbs such as /raghsidan/ (to dance) exist in Persian, complex predicates account for the majority of verbs. (Table 5) As can be seen in Table 5, the verb component /kardan/ is the most common verb component in Persian.2 This is to the extent that in some complex predicates the /kardan/ component exists alongside another verb component as in Table 6. It is worth noting that in the case of some verbs with both a simple form and a complex predicate form, the preference is almost always for the complex predicate construction. The example is shown in Table 7. /baridan/ is almost exclusively used in the written form, and in the verbal usage of the language it is almost never used.

Table 5

English	**Persian**
to take advantage	/suestefadeh/ **/kardan/**
to commit suicide	khodkoshi/ **/kardan/**
to play	/bazi/ **/kardan/** game to do/make
to dance	/raghsidan/

Table 6

English	Persian
to telephone or to call	/telefon/ /zadan/ or /telefon/ /kardan/

Table 7

English	Persian
to rain	/baridan/ & /baran/ /amadan/ rain to come

Familiarity with the structure of verbs in Persian and their occurrence tendency will help to explain the reason behind such a high percentage of switches at within verb level in my data set. Table 8 shows an example from my data set.3 If we analyze the verb in the example, we see follow, /bo/ the present tense prefix, /kon/ the root for the verb /kardan/ meaning to do or make, and /eh/ which is the suffix for the third person singular. Comparing the code switch example with a Persian verb brings us to the exact same conjugation as seen in Table 8. Therefore, I suggest that the noun component of the complex predicates is responsible for the high percentages of switches at the within verb level in Persian English code switching.

Table 8

…/iran/ /modo/ **follow /bokoneh/.** … Iran follows the fashion.
follow /bo.kon.eh/ noun component + present tense prefix + **kon** + 3rd sing. suffix
/bazi/ /bo.kon.eh/ (s/he / it plays) noun component + present tense prefix + **kon** + 3rd sing. suffix

Equivalence Constraint

Poplack (1981) explains the equivalence constraint as "…codes will tend to be switched at points where juxtaposition of English and Spanish elements does not violate a syntactic rule of either language, i.e., at points where the surface structures of the languages map onto each other". Later, she contends that "Because of surface discrepancy, or nonequivalent word orders of Spanish and English, the probability of a switch between verb and object in either clause is lower…". In my data corpus of within verb level switches; however, the juxtaposition of English and Persian elements appears to violate a syntactic rule in English. As can be seen in Table 9, the word order in complex predicates in English and Persian are different. In English the verb component precedes the noun component, while in Persian the verb comes after the noun. In Persian English code switching at the within verb level, the code switched complex predicate follows the Persian noun component plus verb component word order. This word order, although in accordance with Persian word order, violates the word order in English. Therefore, in my data set, the majority4 of the code switched verbs do not comply with the equivalence constraint.

Table 9

English complex predicate		Persian complex predicate	
verb component	noun component	noun component + verb component	
(to) take	advantage	/suestefadeh/	/kardan/
		follow	/kardan/

A Null Theory of Code Switching and Persian Code Switched Verbs

Gardner-Chloros& Edwards (2004) quote Mahootian's (1993) null theory of code switching as "there should not be any code-switching-specific constraints on language mixture." In the same article, she also proposes that code switching constraints function at the phrase structure. Therefore, since Persian is an SOV language, and English is an SVO language, in Persian English code switching the language of the verb determines the location of the object in the sentence or utterance. Table 10 is the example that Mahootian (1996) uses based on her data set collected in naturalistic observations.

Table 10

"You'll buy xune-ye jaedid
You'll buy house-poss new
You'll buy a new house."

In my data corpus, I did not encounter any examples similar to that of Mahootian's (Table 10), i.e., only 2.5% of my data occurred with the English verb conjugated. However, the conjugated verb is a transitive verb with no object. Consequently, my data cannot defy or comply with Mahootian's code switching constraints. Nonetheless, complex predicates account for the rest (20%) of the code switches at the within verb level in my data corpus. As seen in Table 8, it is the verb component, the /kardan/ part that gets conjugated. Therefore, I suggest that the only way that my code switching data would comply with Mahootian's is to believe that /karadan/, the Persian verb component determines the place of the object, and hence the object precedes the verb. Table 11 shows the same example as in Table 8 with a word order analysis.

Table 11

Persian (SOV)	English (SVO)
…/iran/ /modo/ **follow /bokoneh/.**	… Iran follows the fashion.
S O V	S V O

Conclusion

The presented research delineated that while Persian English code switching adheres to most of the code switching popular constraints, the code switched verbs do not necessarily follow the same rule. I explained this discrepancy by highlighting the fact that the majority of verbs in Persian are complex predicates and therefore suggested that the noun part of the complex predicate is responsible for the high percentages of switches at the within verb level. Further research can be suggested on English Oceanic languages code switching as they are also loaded with complex predicates.

1. Throughout the paper I refer to the language of people of Iran as Persian exclusively, unless otherwise stated.
2. /kardan/ is also a verb that can be used independently to mean to do. Ex: /che/ /kardam/? (What did I do?) or /che/ /konam/? (What do I do?)
3. I wrote the example as it was exactly uttered. If the example were a written example, it would have been: …/iran/ /mod/ /ra/ follow /bokonad/. And the analysis would be /iran/:subject, /mod/: object, /ra/ direct object signifier, follow, /bo/ the present tense prefix, /kon/ the root for the verb /kardan/ meaning to do or make, and /ad/ suffix for the third person singular.
4. In my data set there was only one example where the verb was conjugated in English. This example complied with the equivalence constraint and neither syntactic rule was violated.

References

Academy of Persian Language and Literature.www.persianacademy.ir.

American Community Survey. http://www.census.gov

Bolonyai,A.(2005). English Verbs in Hungarian/English Codeswitching. ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism, ed. James

Cohen, Kara T. McAlister, Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan, 317-327. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Clyne, M. (1987) Constraints on code-switching: how universal are they?.Linguistics 25, 739–764.

Fata, S., and Rafii, R. (2003).Strength in Numbers.National Iranian American Council. www.niacouncil.org

Gardner-Choloros,P. and Edwards,M. (2004).Assumptions behind grammatical approaches to code-switching:when the blueprint is a red herring. Transactions of the Philological Society Volume 102:1 103–129 .

Hull,E.R. Parsis. Transcribed by Thomas M. Barett. New Advent.www.newadvent.org.

Jacobson, R. (1998) Codeswitching as a Worldwide Phenomenon. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Mahootian, S.(1993). A null theory of codeswitching, Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University.

Mahootian, S.(1996). Code-switching and universal constraints: evidence from Farsi/English. World Englishes, Vol.15.

Modarresi, A. (2000). Iranian Americans, Residents, Immigrants and Citizens. Goftegoo, Quarterly magazine.

Modarresi, Y. (2001). The Iranian Community in the United States and the Maintenance of Persian.Int'l. J. Soc. Lang. 148 (2001).

Myers-Scotton,C. (1993). Dueling Languages. Oxford: Clarendon Press (2nd edition 1997).

Muysken, P. (2000). Bilingual speech: a typology of code-mixing. Cambridge: CUP.

Najafi, H. (2009) Language maintenance and shift among Iranians residing in the U.S.,Ph.D. dissertation, Arizona State University.

Palsetia, J.S. (2001).TheParsis of India preservation of identity in Bombay City. PEW Research Center. http://www.pewresearch.org

Pfaff, C. (1979).Constraints on language-mixing: intrasentential code-switching and borrowing in Spanish-English. Language.

Poplack, S. (1980).Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPAN˜ OL: toward a typology of code-switching. Linguistics 18, 581–618.

Poplack,S. (1981). Syntactic structure and social function of codeswitching.Unicef. www.unicef.org retrieved 04/12/2007

US Census. http://quickfacts.cesus.gov

Wikipedia http:// en.wikipedia.org

Zentella, A.C. (1997). Growing up bilingual. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers.