دور آلية تغيير الشفرة اللغوية في تغير اللغة الارامية الحديثة: دراسة اجتماعية-لغوية

The Role of Code-Switching Mechanism in the Change of the Neo-Aramaic Language: *A Sociolinguistic Study*

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الية تغيير الشفرة اللغويـة– المـنهج اللغوي –الاجتمـاعي– اللغـة الاراميـة الحديثة، التغير اللغوي

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المخلص

تتبنى هذه الورقة البحثية المنهج اللغوي–الاجتماعي لدراسة التغير اللغوي في اللغة الارامية الحديثة عموما ودور تغيير الشفرة اللغوية خصوصا باعتباره الالية الاولى في التغير اللغوي. تتجلى اهمية هذه الدراسة في قلة البحوث في مجال اللغة الارامية الحديثة باعتبارها امتدادا للغة الارامية كواحدة من اقدم اللغات في العالم. وان هذه الدراسة هي ردة فعل ضد التغيير اللغوي المستمر في الارامية الحديثة والذي بدوره يجعل هذه اللغة تفقد هويتها. وتهدف الدراسة الى التحقق من دور التغيير في الشفرة اللغوية كعامل اساسي في التغير اللغوي والى تقييم حالة اللغة الارامية كلغة مهددة بالخطر. لذلك، تفترض الدراسة ان تغيير الشفرة هو الخطوة الاولى للاقتراض اللغوي وطرحت عدة اسئلة مثل "كيف يقوم تغيير الشفرة اللغوية بالمساهمة في التغير اللغوي؟" و"في اي من الفئات اللغوية يحدث تغيير الشفرة اللغوية وبالتالي تكون اكثر عرضة للتغير؟" لغرض تحقيق اهداف الدراسة.

تم جمع البيانات بواسطة مقابلات مسجلة مع ٣٠ متحدث باللغة الارامية الحديثة وبمجموع ١٠ ساعات من الحديث. وقد تم استخدام العمر كمتغير اجتماعي لتحديد مدى تغيير الشفرة اللغوية بتحليل عدد مرات الحدوث كميا بالاضافة لدراسة الحالة الاجتماعية–التاريخية للمنطقة المختارة في الدراسة. واستنتجت الدراسة ان تغيير الشفرة اللغوية هو عامل اساسي في التغير اللغوي وان الارامية الحديثة تتجه نحو ما يسمى "بالانتحار اللغوي".

Abstract

This research paper adopts a sociolinguistic approach to the language change in the Neo-Aramaic language, in general, and particularly the role of code-switching as the initial mechanism of change. The significance of this paper might be due to the lack of research about Neo-Aramaic as a descendent of Aramaic, which is one of the most ancient languages ever existed. This study is a reaction to the problem of the constant language change that is happening in the Neo-Aramaic language affecting its identity through the contact with other languages. The Aim, in this respect, is to investigate the role of code-switching as an agent of language change and evaluating the status of Neo-Aramaic as an endangered language. Therefore, it is hypothesized that code-switching is the first step to borrowing and questions such as "how does code-switching lead to language change?" and "which linguistic categories are being code-switched and hence more likely to be changed?" are used to achieve the research's aims.

Data collection is made by using recorded sociolinguistic interviews for 30 native speakers of Neo-Aramaic in a total of 10 hours of speech. Age is the social variable to determine the extent of change by analyzing code-switching occurrences qualitatively and linking them to the socio-historical profile of the chosen area. In a conclusion, code-switching appears to be a significant factor for language change and Neo-Aramaic is rapidly reaching what is called 'language suicide'.

1. Introduction:

The phenomenon of code-switching is an inevitable outcome of language contact and bilingualism. Code-switching is defined as the use of two or more languages or language varieties in the same conversation or sentence (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Many scholars view code-switching as the initial step of language change (e.g. Sankoff, 2001; Myers-scotton, 2002) and this claim opens the door for investigating the actual role of code-switching in the Neo-Aramaic speaking communities, where code-switching is viewed as a common practice.

Code-switching in the community of Qaraqosh (where the current study takes place) is noticed to be occurring for a variety of purposes, including the intentional and non-intentional ones, but the focus of this study is on the frequency of its occurrence, which can give a glimpse of its effect on the constant language change.

2. Research Problem:

The problem of this research stems from the recent great resemblance of Neo-Aramaic language to Arabic to the extent of losing its identity as the heir of the Aramaic language and as one of the most ancient languages ever existed.

3. Hypotheses

This study hypothesizes that:

1. Code-switching's frequency is an effective factor of language change since code-switching brings borrowing to the language.

2. Insertions are the most frequent type of switching.

4. Research questions:

1. How does code-switching lead to language change?

2. Do social factors play a role in the process of change?

3. Which linguistic elements are being more likely to change?

5. The significance of the study:

Since very few studies are conducted on the Neo-Aramaic language, this research paper might be of significance due to the fact that it is one of the first steps to reveal the change of Neo-Aramaic. This ambitious first step can pave the way for many other studies to find set of solutions to prevent the change of this language.

6. Research aim:

1. Investigating the role of code-switching as an agent of change.

2. Evaluating the condition of Neo-Aramaic as an endangered language.

7. Theoretical background:

7.1 Code-switching:

The phenomenon of Code-switching is tackled from various perspectives with different boundaries and limits. Broadly speaking code-switching refers to the usage of two languages within the same conversation. It is noteworthy that some scholars such as Stockwell (2002) and Nababan (1993) distinguish code-switching from code-mixing which is said to be used in informal settings and typically in a word level. However, Wardhaugh (2006) and the vast majority of researchers regard both terms identical. We follow the latter view since we are interested in the process of shifting languages in a conversation that leads to language change.

In fact, not only the shift of languages is considered as 'code-switching' since many scholars such as Hoffmann (1991), Richards et al. (1993), Mesthrie et al. (2000) Gardner-Chloros (2009) and Van Herk (2012) view the shift of dialects, speech styles and language varieties in general included under the umbrella of 'code-switching. For instance, Richards et al. (1993: 58) defines it as a "change by a speaker (or writer) from one language or language variety to another".

Although such a definition is appealing, the current study focuses merely on the shift of Neo-Aramaic language to Arabic (or possibly other languages) without paying attention to any dialectal shift.

7.2 Language change:

The phenomenon of change in language is inevitable. Even some of the most conservative languages, like Arabic, undergo some types of change (see Lucas and Manfredi, 2020 for a review of change in Arabic). Yule (2014) explains that creativity is a property of both the human mind and of language; therefore, a natural consequence is producing new words and replacing others. This however is not the only reason of change since the process is complicated with several factors and it is not restricted to words. McMahon (1994:6) acknowledges that language change is gradual, slow and continuous but not random at the same time.

Considering that language change is the problem that this research addresses, a brief review of language change aspects is presented in this section.

7.2.1   Types of language change:

Language change is generally divided into two types. The first type is the change that happens for the language without any outside linguistic interference which is called 'natural change', 'spontaneous change' or 'internally caused change' (Bickerton, 1980; Lightfoot, 1979; Kiparsky, 1968). The other type is the change that occurs due to connection of the language with other languages i.e. there is a donor language that provides the new forms. The latter type is termed 'contact-induced change' (Lucas, 2015).

Contact-induced change is by far the most common type of language change comparing to spontaneous change and it is noticed to be the case of the change of Neo-Aramaic. Guy (1989) classifies

contact-induced change into two categories. He calls the first 'borrowing' where forms from a foreign language are used in the native language. 'Imposition' on the other hand, is done when the native speakers use forms from their native language in the foreign language that they are learning or using. Van Coestem (1988) uses the terms 'recipient language agentivity' for borrowing and 'source language agentivity' for imposition according to direction of change. Contact-induced change is thus very dependent on social factors for its occurrence. A supporting idea for a socio-cognitive nature of change is proposed by Winford (2005) who acknowledges the social factors like power and prestige, but at the same time adds the notion of 'cognitive dominance' which means that a society has one of the languages as more primary than the other.

7.2.2 The effect of change on grammatical elements

It is conventionally thought that the change of language means the change of words; however, this view is far from being correct. Language change may occur at all the levels of grammar, namely phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and even pragmatic changes (McMahon, 1994).

On the phonetic and phonological levels, changes are various. Some allophones can evolve to be established phonemes, other phonemes disappear and some phonemes can be borrowed directly with the forms that hold them (Grant, 2019). McMahon (1994) goes further and says that there are suprasegmental changes as well ,such as the change of rhythm, intonation and stress. For example, Hellmuth (2020) investigates the change of intonation in the Arabic dialects which is triggered by language contact and bilingualism.

On the morphological level, Sankoff (2001) admits that bound morphemes are very resistant to change on the contrary to free morphemes which are the most borrowed. Another controversial level

that was thought to be unchangeable through contact is the structural (syntactic) level, but many studies like (Faarlund, 1990, Savic, 1995; Backus, 2005) show that language-induced change can affect the syntax as well such as the changes in word order. Concerning Semantic and pragmatic changes, McMahon (1994) states that these changes occur very frequently and readily comparing to other areas of language. This may be due to the unstable nature of meaning.

Since researchers admit that lexical change is more widespread and more effective in the process of language change, the current study is interested in code-switching that leads to lexical change rather than any phonological or syntactic changes. These latter kinds of change require a more diachronic depth while our study is a more synchronic one.

7.2.3 Causes of change

A variety of causes, whether direct or indirect, can result in language change. Aitchison (2001) highlights three causes of change. a) Fashion and random fluctuations. b) foreign influence. c) social need. The first cause is explained through a metaphor of clothes i.e. there is no real systematic cause for change just like a jacket has three buttons in a certain year but has four in the next so, it all depends on peoples' preferences. Aitchison herself doesn't regard this cause as a major one and refutes it through some arguments. The cause of foreign influence is more logical since it is the essence of contact-induced change where people borrow from other languages. The third cause "social need" is well documented in various sociolinguistic studies. People change language, mainly lexical items, for certain functions that will achieve their needs.

Mantiri (2010) identifies five specific causes of change. Starting with political factors like the effects of occupation and immigration. In addition, Social causes that depend on age, social networks, level of

education, gender, etc. Sankoff (2001) finds a collaboration between these two causes when he states:

"Language contacts have, historically, taken place in large part under conditions of social inequality resulting from wars, conquests, colonialism, slavery, and migrations – forced and otherwise. Relatively benign contacts involving urbanization or trade as a contact motivation are also documented, as are some situations of relative equality." P 640

The third cause for Mantiri is a cultural one like being exposed to some other group's language through their music and magazines. Fourth, technological causes are recently contributing immensely in language change through the new industrial products and the internet which results in a coinage of many words. Finally, moral causes of language change arise through concepts like anti-racism. Backus (2005) asserts that the sociocultural causes are the ultimate ones while the functional, attitudinal and all cognitive causes are also effective, but to a lesser degree.

7.2.4 Endangered languages and Language death

Austin and Sallabank (2011) show that there are over 7000 languages used worldwide; however, half of them are endangered - including Neo-Aramaic. The term 'endangered' according to Austin and Sallabank (ibid) refers to the languages that might disappear in more or less years than expected due to variety of reasons ranging from political, social to economic factors. The outcome of endangered languages, in many cases, is language death. Dressler (1988:184) states:

"Language death occurs in unstable bilingual or multilingual speech communities as a result of language shift from a regressive minority language to a dominant majority language."

Aitchison (2001) distinguishes between "language murder" and "language suicide". In the former, the speakers use the foreign

language instead of the native one until the foreign replaces the native i.e. the second language murders the first. While suicide happens through intensive borrowing i.e. the speakers replace words from the more prestigious language instead of their native language until the two cannot be distinguished. The latter case is akin to "relexification" which is a less degree of change in language than suicide. In relexification, the language maintains its general grammatical identity but borrows to a certain degree from the other language (Grant, 2019).

7.2.5 Code-switching as a mechanism of change

Sankoff (2001) states that code-switching should be regarded as the point of departure in the study of language contact and language change before discussing the issue of borrowing. In fact, Siemund and Pietsch (2008) claim that the situations of language change do not occur directly from one language to another, but should be carried by certain stable mechanisms.

Code-switching seems to be an agreed upon mechanism of change. For instance, Thomason (2001) identifies three mechanisms of change, namely code-switching, code alternation and familiarity with the source language. Similarly, Myers-Scotton (2002) says that code-switching is the initial mechanism of change and it is both a mechanism and an outcome of change. Johanson (2002) uses the term 'code-copying' as synonymous to code switching and identifies it as one of the processual mechanisms of change i.e. the type of mechanisms that regulate change in contrast to causal changes which include intentionality of use.

In Croft (2000), a speaker may either make a 'normal replication' or an 'altered replication'. The former indicates sticking to conventions in using utterances, that is, a speaker uses the regular words of his language. Altered replication, however, is using innovative utterances. A third process is 'propagation' where the speakers start using the new

forms rather than the old ones which results in language change. Through these stages, code-switching appears significantly because it can start as an altered replication then is chosen over the old forms through propagation.

All these explanations about code-switching as a mechanism of change oblige us to start investigating its effects synchronically in Neo-Aramaic or any language then try to link it diachronically to change in future studies.

8. Method:

The data collection for this research is done through recorded Sociolinguistic interviews for 30 speakers and 10 hours of Neo-Aramaic language speaking. 20 minutes for each interviewee to talk about general things and answering certain questions to elicit the Neo-Aramaic samples of speech. The selected participants all have previous knowledge with the researcher to avoid observer's paradox and hence maintain the data as natural as possible.

The participants are divided into two groups. The First group include 15 speakers under the age of 30 and the second group contains 15 speakers over the age of 75. This gap in age (a social variable) is intended to serve the research's aim in discovering language change between the generations.

The mutual characteristic about the participants is that they are all native speakers of Neo-Aramaic and that they all speak Arabic. However, some of these participants (mainly older females) are not fluent in Arabic. Furthermore, some of the participants speak other languages like English and Kurdish. The level of education varies among the participants.

The speech of each participant is quantitatively analyzed by the researcher into the insertional and alternational code-switches (Muysken, 2000). The frequency of code-switching is a significant

factor to measure the effect of code-switching on language change. then, the socio-historic profile of the Chosen Neo-Aramaic community is presented to make the links with the linguistic data.

9. Data Analysis:

9.1. Linguistic data:

From the first look, code-switching is noticed to be very heavily used in the Neo-Aramaic discourse. In total, 983 code-switches are made in 10 hours of speaking. Age is the social variable used in this study to demonstrate the language change in Neo-Aramaic. For the older 15 participants in 5 hours of speaking, the data show 246 code-switching occurrences. The younger 15 participants, on the other hand, made 737 code-switches in 5 hours of speaking. According to these statistics and as shown in figure 1, the younger speakers code-switch three times as much as the older ones and this finding reflects a decrease in using Neo-Aramaic lexical items.

the code-switching instances of older vs.younger participants

■ young participants   ■ old participants
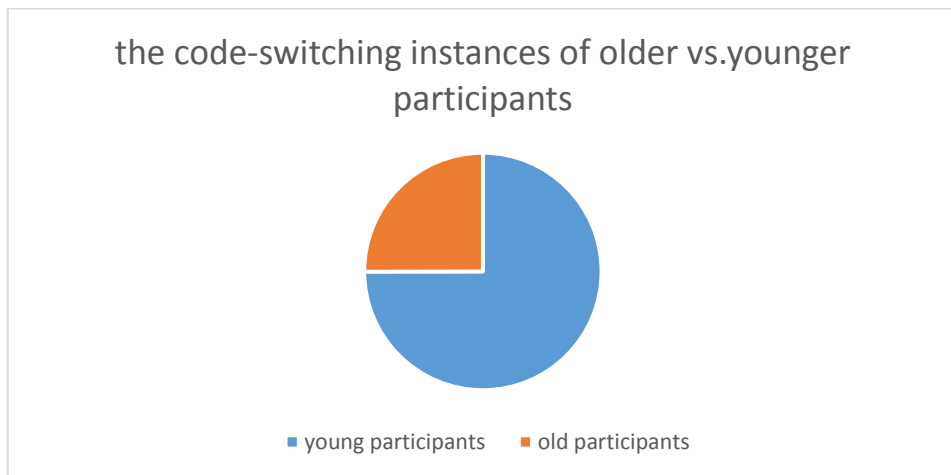
Figure (1)

frequency of code-switching between old and young speakers

According to Muysken's (2000) dichotomy of insertions and alternations, the data demonstrate that the use of insertions is way more common than alternations. From their 246 code-switches, the older

generation makes 241 insertions and only 5 alternations while the younger participants make 676 insertional code-switches and 61 alternations. Therefore, alternations are left aside and insertions are analyzed according to their parts of speech to answer one of the research's questions as which lexical categories are more code-switched. table 1 presents the lexical categories with their number of occurrences in 676 insertional code-switches:

Table (1)

the numbers of the code-switched lexical categories

LEXICAL CATEGORY	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES
NOUNS	363
VERBS	27
ADJECTIVES	201
ADVERBS	30
CONJUNCTIONS	44
PREPOSITIONS	3
INTERJECTIONS	6
PRONOUNS	2

As shown in table 1, all the lexical categories are affected by code-switching to a certain extent. However, nouns and adjectives are the most frequent and they can be more and more entrenched in the speakers' lexical storage (Backus, 2005) to the extent of replacing the Neo-Aramaic forms through a process of propagation.

While code-switching is found to be a dominant practice in the Neo-Aramaic discourse by the frequency of usage, its occurrence must be supported by social and historical factors in the next section.

9.2   The socio-historical profile:

Any linguistic or sociolinguistic analysis for the change of language is incomplete without an analysis for the social and historical aspects of the speakers. In the case of the Neo-Aramaic speaking community, two factors are the most effective in threatening the existence of Neo-Aramaic. The first factor is immigration and the second is Arabicization policy.

The Iraqi Neo-Aramaic speakers encountered many difficulties and suffered, as the whole country did, from many disasters that made them flee out of their homeland, such as the Iraqi war with Iran in the 1980s, the American invasion in 2003, many instances of murders and kidnapping after 2003 ending with 2014 ISIS displacing all the inhabitants of Nineveh plains from their lands which is, potentially, the most influential occasion on the immigration of Neo-Aramaic speakers. Due to the lack of statistics about the numbers of specifically Neo-Aramaic immigrants, a simple statistic provided by UN Human Rights Office shows that the population of Christians decreased from 1.500.000 before 2003 to ٢٥٠.٠٠٠ in 2022 (Rudaw, 2022). As a result, the new generation who grow up in diaspora start abandoning their native language gradually. Immigration in this sense is contributing more in abandoning the language.

Arabicization policy, on the other hand, is the actual driving force of change. Arabicization in Iraq can be traced back to several centuries, but its peak is considered to be in the 1970s to the extent of counting the Christians in Iraq as Arabs (Lewis, 2003). Coghill (2020:375) states:

During the twentieth century, with the founding of the states of Iraq and Syria, Arabic became the language of the states that most NENA-

speakers found themselves in. They came into contact with it through education, officialdom, military service, radio and trade.

Based on this fact, Neo-Aramaic speakers find themselves dealing with Arabic more and more, and the influence of Arabic started and continues to increase on the Neo-Aramaic speakers. This fact explains the linguistic findings of the current study since speakers find themselves code-switching to the Arabic forms that is caused by their constant use of Arabic in their daily lives, such as Education, work, trade and the official affairs.

10.   Conclusions:

After analyzing the data and linking the linguistic and social aspects, this study comes up with the following conclusions:

Code-switching is, indeed, the first step of language change in Neo-Aramaic; paving the way to borrowing. The findings show that code-switching frequency is very high and this assures that many of these code-switches are being more entrenched in the speakers' minds (Backus, 2005), and hence can be transformed into borrowed items and compete the original Neo-Aramaic forms through the process of propagation.

The change of Neo-Aramaic is caused by political, social and cultural reasons and cannot be put under the column of random fluctuations. Obviously, the study of the social and historical status of the Neo-Aramaic speakers proves that the change is not random, rather, it is a contact-induced changed with Arabic that is oriented through Arabicization, displacement and social needs.

Code-switching and, hence, the change of Neo-Aramaic is a lexical one since it affects all the lexical categories especially nouns and adjectives. By analyzing the most frequent linguistic levels being changed, the lexical level seems to have the lions share unlike the phonological and syntactic levels which are kept intact.

Neo-Aramaic is currently in an early relexification stage since many Arabic words are replacing the Neo-Aramaic words. While no solution is found to prevent this change, the Neo-Aramaic language is heading towards "language suicide".

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