Bilingual Code-Switching in a Swedish Context

A study of three Swedish-Arabic and three Swedish-English speakers

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Abstract

Code-Switching (CS) is a world-wide phenomenon, allowing bilinguals across the globe to alternate effortlessly between their languages. As interesting as it sounds, code-switching can be used for a number of reasons, and there are different linguistic contexts in which this phenomenon occurs. Umeå is a very multinational city in northern Sweden, and this paper will present the results from interviewing a group of three (a) Arabic-Swedish speakers and a group of three (b) English-Swedish speakers on their use of language and code-switching. The results show that group a and group b both use CS as a tool to express themselves better, and also to feel a sense of belonging in their different surroundings. Being a bilingual usually comes with two cultures, and this includes many different situations in which these bilinguals use CS.

Keywords: Code-Switching, Language use, Umeå, Bilingualism, Swedish Language
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1. Introduction

Growing up, I was taught two languages simultaneously and I did not feel like I understood either of them to the fullest. This feeling of uncertainty, or not being fully confident in my languages, drove me to a “creation” of my own: a language I found both my identities in, and it was a mixture of the languages I had learnt. I later discovered, after being introduced to the subject of sociolinguistics, that this phenomenon, or the “creation” I thought was only in my head, is a very common one for bilingual people. This creation suddenly had a name, and I was instantly interested in learning more about it. Code-switching (hereafter CS) is a subject that bilinguals across the globe can relate to, including myself.

I have chosen to look deeper into how other bilinguals in the city of Umeå, in the north of Sweden, tend to CS, what drives them to do so, and why they think they do so. More specifically, I will be looking into how Arabic-Swedish and English-Swedish speakers CS, and compare the two groups’ views on the subject, and see if they CS differently. In her study A Linguistic Phenomena: Code-Switching in Media and Advertisement, Becca Tuck (2015) writes:

Most common among bilinguals, code-switching is something we all do, whether it is to fit in, stand out, be understood, emphasize a point, or deliver a message. (Tuck, 2015:1)

This quote explains how we all code-switch for different reasons, and seeing if there is a common reason between two groups of people will be interesting since that perhaps might help us understand ourselves better. Although there is already a fair deal of research done on code-switching, one can always look into something specific within the area, conducting a new case study.

1.1. Aim and research questions

As previously mentioned, there is already a lot of research on this subject, and it has been debated and discussed on different levels. In this paper, I have chosen to look into how six bilinguals in Sweden tend to code-switch, when and in what linguistic context they do so and what drives them to switch between their mother tongue and Swedish.

The aim of this study is to get a picture of the reasons behind, when and in what
context these bilinguals in Sweden code-switch, and also to gain some insight into an interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon. The research questions and subquestions of my study are:

• In what contexts do three Swedish-English and three Swedish-Arabic bilinguals resident in Sweden say they code-switch? How often do they CS and what motivates them to do so?
• What do these bilinguals believe they tend to switch between the most? (Phrases, sentences, single words?)
• Which differences with respect to code-switching between these two groups of bilinguals can be observed?
2. Background

2.1 What is Code-Switching?

According to Bullock, “code-switching is the ability on the part of bilinguals to alternate effortlessly between their two languages”. (Bullock, 2009:1) This is a very short yet broad definition to the term, but it does explain the phenomenon in a simple way. Being a subject that is not completely agreed on, there is no specific definition to the term, but there are many different ones. Bullock says:

many controversies exist in the study of CS, in large part because the phenomenon has been approached from different disciplinary perspectives, and as a consequence has evaded a uniform definition and explanation. (Bullock, 2009:2)

I have chosen to use Bullock’s definitions and perspective because it is inclusive of other perspectives as well. Bilinguals are found across the globe, so there are many languages that CS can be connected to. These bilinguals are able to alternate between their languages and dialects in a communicative setting, and what is being code-switched can vary from single words, expressions and sounds to phrases and sentences. What differentiates CS from mixing two languages, or code-mixing, is that “the term CS can be reserved for studies where the focus is on internally generated switches, i.e. switches produced spontaneously by a multilingual speaker.” (Bullock, 2009:21) This limits the concept of CS to the switches that are effortless and not planned ahead, the switches that come naturally, and this “limitation” is what makes it interesting because it drives one to want to understand the psychology behind it, and why CS occurs in the everyday life of a bilingual, specifically in today’s increasingly connected global environment.

Another term not to be confused with CS is translanguageing. Translanguageing is “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011:401). The act of “shuttle between languages” is common between the different terms, but the way this shuttling is looked at is what creates the difference between the two terms. Translanguageing would rather
refer to the speakers’ construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of language, but that make up the speakers’ complete language repertoire. (García & Wei, 2014:22)

One can say that CS is about using languages as resources to convey further meaning, to specify or to be able to explain something better. We find a sense of comfort in speaking a language we are good at, one that we comprehend and can easily speak without having to think or plan the speech ahead. The complications that come with being a bilingual, such as feeling that one language is not enough for the meaning to be expressed the way one strives to, can lead to phenomena like CS, which opens up possibilities for a speaker, and also finds a common trait with other bilinguals. According to Bullock, CS can be used for a number of reasons: filling linguistic gaps, expressing ethnic identity, and achieving particular discursive aims, among others. (Bullock, 2009:2) Language is a big part of our identity, and the way we speak and choose to express ourselves gives others an impression of our personalities and backgrounds.

2.2 Code-switching in every day life

Every day, we use language for many different reasons, for instance to express feelings, needs, impressions or simply greetings. Code-switching might seem casual and easy to an outside observer, whilst there are unconscious and hidden factors to CS that might not be clear to everyone.

CS provides a variety of clues as to the social identity of the speaker - the groups which, to paraphrase Le Page, she or he wished to resemble. (Gardner, 2009:42)

I think this is a very important factor in CS as it is something most bilinguals signal through their speech. Having different cultures and backgrounds is common in an area that has a range of different bilinguals, and it is not uncommon for this group of people to want to feel included but at the same time to identify with a particular social group. To understand this, one can consider the way they speak to their co-workers or their boss, and then think of the way they speak to friends and family in less formal situations. Wanting to sound professional, and be taken seriously in a work place, makes us stick to using
formal language. Whilst talking to family or visiting the home country, would trigger a more comfortable, less sophisticated use of language, and also in some cases would put emphasis on the dialect of the region as an unconscious way to fit in.

The way we CS in our every day life varies depending on what social group we are trying to communicate with. For example, in an article by African-American writer Eric Deggans, he explains how using the word *guys* growing up was viewed as an insulting term to his social group. Deggans was sent to a white-dominated school as a child, and had learned that

“that word — "guys" — might earn smiles and nods of understanding in that world, but it brought the ultimate insult in my neighborhood.” (Deggans, 2013:1)

Those around him made it clear to him that his use of that word was “white” and did not belong in his society. He explains how CS is a switch between cultures as well, and not only languages, and you learn that through going through conversations with different people from different backgrounds and how “choosing your communication style is based on the people you're dealing with.” (Deggans, 2013:1). CS can also be used as a psychological tool, because we learn when and how to CS depending on our social group. Choosing to use a dialect or accent with a particular social group in order to reach out to them is an example of how it can be used as a psychological tool. For example, politicians tend to do this in order for people to relate to them, and for them to understand better. This strategy has been criticised as manipulative by some people, but also praised as inclusive by others, but the common ground is that this way of CS is natural, reacting to being around different social groups.
3. Methods

The data collected for this essay was obtained by interviews with two different groups of people, based on a questionnaire that will be presented in this section. This section will cover a description of the type of questions used, who the informants are, and how they were selected. This section will also present the ethical considerations that were presented to each informant before the interviews.

3.2 Informants

For this study, I had to reach out to two specific groups of people, three people who spoke Arabic and Swedish, and three people who had English and Swedish as their mother tongues. My options were limited due to this requirement. I chose to reach out to people on social media, as it is an easy way to find people of specific backgrounds. I eventually got hold of the six people I needed for my interviews. The only two requirements for participating were that they had to live in Umeå and have two mother tongues. Age, sex or occupation were not critical factors.

The informants were divided into two groups: Group A, consisting of the Arabic-Swedish speakers, and Group B, consisting of the English-Swedish speakers. In each group, I have given every informant a code-name, in order to anonymise them. Group A consists of informants SA1, SA2, and SA3. Group B consists of informants SE1, SE2 and SE3.

In group A, informant SA1 and SA2 are male, and SA3 is a female, whilst in group B, all informants are female. Their ages range from youngest being twenty-one (21), to the oldest being thirty-nine (39). Their residency in Umeå ranges from two and a half years (2.5) to twenty-four (24) years.

3.2 Questionnaire

In order to create a questionnaire for my interviews, I had to consider the aims of this study, and try to compose questions that would cover the type of information needed to be able to draw conclusions from the interviews, and later compare the data collected from Group A to the data collected from Group B. The questions I chose to ask mainly revolved around the informants’ daily use of their languages, what language they are most
comfortable with, and why they think they CS. The questionnaire also includes a question about the informants’ familiarity with CS. I provided a definition - which will later be presented - to the ones who were not familiar with the term (See APPENDIX).

The majority of the questions were of a reasoning character in order to get more insight to what the informants think of their use of language, and about CS in general. The questionnaire was written in both Swedish and English, and had nine questions.

3.3 Interviews

Before the interviews, every participant was informed about the aims of this study and about the research questions. The participants got to pick the time and date of the interview, and also preferred location. All interviews were held during a period of two weeks, and they were all held in Umeå. The participants were informed that I speak Arabic, Swedish and English and they got to choose what language they wanted to use during the interviews. Group A chose to use Swedish, while group B chose to use English.

In order to save these interviews, I chose to record them using a recorder on my cellphone and all informants consented to this. An interview typically lasted around 12 minutes, with some discussion before and after as well. Discussions not recorded will not be used in this study. All recordings were later transcribed and relevant quotes in this essay were translated to English. The original quotes can be found in footnotes.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations presented prior to the interviews are based on The Swedish Research Council’s ethical considerations for research in humanities and social science (1990).

The aims and purpose of this study were explained to all the informants, the terms and conditions that were relevant were mentioned, and it was stressed that their participation was voluntary and that they were allowed to cancel their participation at any time (Vetenskapsrådet, 1990:9). All the informants were also guaranteed anonymity, and assured that any information collected about them is not to be used in non-research context (Vetenskapsrådet, 1990:12).
4. Analysis and Results

In this section, the observations and the comparisons made in this study will be presented. The sections will deliver every group’s thoughts and ideas about the different questions, it will show the reasoning behind their use of CS, and also present any similarities or differences between the two groups. The research questions presented earlier will be brought up and connected to the analysis of the interviews.

4.1 Three Arabic-Swedish (A) speakers’ use of language

Group A consists of three informants: SA1, SA2 and SA3. SA1 is a 25 year-old male born in Sweden, with Egyptian background. He lived in Egypt as a child and went to school there. When asked about his mother tongue, his first reaction was to say English, but he corrected himself and instead said Arabic and Swedish. When asked about his preferred language, or what language he is most comfortable using, he answered “English”. SA2 is also a male, 24 years old, born in Sweden but with Lebanese background. SA2 also went to school in his home country, Lebanon, as a kid. When asked about his mother tongue, SA2 was fast to reply “Swedish and Arabic”. His answer to what language he prefers was English. SA3 is a female, 39, who has Palestinian background but had lived in Sweden since she was 16, said that her mother tongue is Arabic and she is most comfortable using both Swedish and Arabic. Out of three, two informants answered that Swedish and Arabic were their mother tongues, while one said only Arabic. The younger males in the group preferred English over both Swedish and Arabic, which is an interesting choice considering it was neither of their mother tongues.

The group had different answers when it came to in which situation they always use Swedish. SA1 stated that he always uses Swedish in formal and professional situations, like work and at the university. SA2 explained that he does not always use Swedish, perhaps when he was a kid and Swedish was the only language he was comfortable using and did not know other languages. For SA3, she stated that she always uses Swedish in the morning when her children have not woken up completely. She explained that it takes a while for her kids to fully wake up in order to understand Arabic, so waking them up requires Swedish.
I proceeded to ask the informants in what situations they always use Arabic, and their answers were relatively similar. SA1 said that he always uses Arabic when he is at home with his family. SA2 also said that he always uses Arabic around his parents mostly. SA3, on the other hand, explained that she does not always only use Arabic, but her conversations with her parents tend to always begin in Arabic.

Yes, I start speaking in Arabic, but the word *annars* [otherwise] does not exist, not in the way I want it to. Specifically the word *annars* becomes my trigger, if I say *annars* I then switch over to Swedish. I eventually come back to Arabic, so it does get mixed up a little. ¹(SA3)

The following questions were of a similar nature, asking the informants about the situations in which they normally and never use Arabic and Swedish, respectively. SA1 said that he would normally use Swedish during work or at the university, similarly to when he would always use Swedish. As to Arabic, he normally uses it around people who wouldn’t understand Swedish. SA2 would use Swedish at work and the university, and Arabic is normal when he is around his parents, at home. SA3 said that she normally uses Arabic and Swedish both at work and with her family. She works as a translator at the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. She often meets people who do not speak Swedish, and therefore normally uses Arabic instead.

When asked about the situations in which they never use Swedish and Arabic, all three informants took a moment to think a little bit more about their answers. I asked SA3 if she is ever in situations in which she never uses Swedish, and she said:

No, not what I can think of, in my conscious self, because it feels just as natural. I was sixteen (16) years old when I came to Sweden, so I have lived the majority of my life in Sweden, and that is why it is just as natural to me with both languages. Depending

on the situation, if the person does not speak Swedish I use Arabic. Which is not a problem. What comes out of my mouth first, is what I end up using.² (SA3)

SA1 said he never uses Swedish when he is outside of Sweden. In Egypt he would abstain from using Swedish. As for SA2, he never uses Swedish around his parents and younger siblings, because his parents had stressed the importance of his younger siblings learning Arabic. “‘You know too much Swedish but too little Arabic’, that one you get to hear often. So mostly at home.”³ (SA2)

When it comes to Arabic, informant SA1 said he does not feel like he never uses Arabic, perhaps when he was younger and did not want to speak to his relatives over the phone, he would just not speak the language and eventually get away.

4.2 Three English-Swedish (B) speakers’ use of language

Group B consists of informants SE1, SE2 and SE3.

All informants stated in the interviews that their mother tongues were English and Swedish, stating both languages as their first reaction answer. The participants in group B are all female, SE1 being twenty-two (22) years old, SE2 is twenty-seven (27) with American background, and SE3 is twenty-one (21) years old from Canada.

I asked the informants if there are any situations in which they always use Swedish, and SE1 said that whenever she is in class, she would formulate her answers in Swedish in order to show the class and the teacher that she is capable of giving an answer in Swedish. She also said that a typical situation in which she always uses Swedish is when she is around elderly Swedish people, in that situation she would speak slowly, in order to find the correct words. SE2 said that when she visits her family in the south of Sweden, she would only use Swedish.


It’s because my grandfather speaks zero English, and one of my uncles does not know any, or pretends to not know any English. But yes, down there I speak only in Swedish, and when I lose a word I try to think of synonyms in Swedish to describe it because I cannot switch into English at all. Unless my mother is around and she can translate it. (SE2)

SE2 uses pure Swedish in situations like these, when she is not in her comfort zone, being around her mother who usually helps her out with the translations of words. SE3 said that she always uses Swedish in formal situations, if she is at work or speaking to her Swedish family.

[because] When I’m in Umeå it is the unmarked choice, people are expecting that. And in the family I feel like I communicate better with them because Swedish is their first language and I can tell that when I speak English that they are not able to express themselves as quickly or in the same way they would in Swedish. (SE3)

I proceeded to ask the informants in what situations they always use English, and SE1 said that she uses English all the time. When she is cooking or looking up information online, it is all in English. She even mentioned that when talking to her cats she speaks English. SE2 said that most of her friends have international backgrounds, so their common language is English. She said that at the university, where she meets most her friends, she always uses English. To SE3, the situations in which she would always use English would be in those when people do not understand what she is trying to say in Swedish, and in informal situations.

Following up, the questions asked revolved around when they normally and never use their mother tongues. SE1 said that she normally uses Swedish when she senses that she needs to prove that she knows Swedish, or in situations in which it is required for her to use Swedish, otherwise she would normally just speak English. She mentioned that whenever she learns that the person speaks English, and that they too are more comfortable using English, she then never uses Swedish.

SE2, when asked when she normally uses English, she said that it depends on the context:
Some of my Swedish friends, I met them while speaking English, so we kind get stuck in this one language. but then I have other Swedish friends, when I see them I immediately go into Swedish, and it has happened several times that my Swedish friends didn’t even know I spoke Swedish and I didn’t know they were Swedish because we met speaking English. (SE2)

SE2 said that it often happens that she meets someone speaking one language, and that determines what they end up communicating with. SE2 said that she never uses English when she is travelling, because she has an American accent which clearly indicates to other people where she comes from, and the stereotypes which come along with that. She said that she is not ashamed of being an American, but the reason is:

[just] the stereotypes that go along with being an American in those type of situations. There are always questions, especially with the political scene, everybody wants to hear what the American has to deal with, and their perspective. (SE2)

I asked SE3 in what situations she normally speaks English, and she replied that she normally uses English in her everyday life. She grew up speaking English, and it’s the lingua franca, she even thinks to herself in English. When asked about situations in which she never speaks Swedish, SE3 said that she never uses Swedish in situations in which she does not want others to know that she is Swedish. “I want to understand what they’re saying in case they talk about me” (SE3)

When asked if there are ever situations in which she never uses English, SE3 was quick to answer that she does not think there are any such situations, since English is the more dominant language. Of course, she tries sometimes, like in the above-mentioned situations, to not use a certain language, but that rarely rules out her use of English completely.

**4.3 Both groups’ views on Code-Switching**

In the interviews, I asked all informants about their use of CS, and if they knew what it meant. Both groups came with interesting answers, and some had a better idea as to what CS actually is. The definition given to all informants is the following:
“Code-switching is the ability on the part of bilinguals to alternate effortlessly between their two languages” (Bullock, 2009:1). I also added that “the term CS can be reserved for studies where the focus is on internally generated switches, i.e. switches produced spontaneously by a multilingual speaker” (Bullock, 21).

I proceeded to explain that CS has different definitions due to the many perspectives it has been studied from. The intention of giving the informants a definition was to ensure that they had the “correct” idea in order to answer accordingly.

In group A, SA1 said that CS “is when you use words from other language to complement your vocabulary”. SA2 said that CS is when you “switch different languages and dialects.” SA3 said that she has a slight idea about what CS could mean, but was not too certain.

In group B, SE1 described CS as simply as “Throwing words in” (SE1). SE2 said that she knows the basics of CS, and SE3 said that “CS is when you switch from one language to another, and it can be inter-sentential and intra-sentential CS” (SE3).

Out of six, four participants had an answer which was in line with the definition used in this study. This means that the majority of the informants already knew of this phenomenon.

I asked each group what their thoughts were when they heard of this phenomenon, and their answers are the following:

In group A, SA1’s answer was “[I think of] My mother, she cannot say och [Eng. and] so she said wa [Arabic], all the time! So it is probably that, I do not know. Languages are not enough! You need to express yourself in different languages, that’s what I’m thinking.” SA2 said that he thinks of himself, since he does it all the time without thinking about it. As for SA3, she gave an elaborate answer, leading:

Well, it feels like that is what I do during the day. My children do not speak a lot of Arabic, and my mother speaks good Swedish but it feels more natural to speak Arabic

4 [Original] Min mamma, hon kan inte säga och, hon säger wa, hela tiden! Så det är typ det, jag vet inte. Språk är inte tillräckliga! Man behöver uttrycka sig på olika språk, that’s what I’m thinking.” (SA1)
to her. After a while, the word *annars*, for example, comes up and I switch over to Swedish, but then think “why are we speaking Swedish to each other?” We do not usually feel the transition.\(^5\)(SA3)

In group B, the answers seem to share some similarities to group A’s answers. SE1 said that what she thinks of hearing about this phenomenon is herself, and her life up to this point. She said that a big part of her communication is CS, and she sees that as a positive thing.

SE2 said that code-switching between English and Swedish is very interesting to her, and she continued:

There’s a lot of cases where certain words in Swedish match better to the situation or the sentence I’m in. Or something I’m explaining in English. There’s sometimes a better word in Swedish than in English and vice versa. (SE2)

SE3 also found the phenomenon interesting:

I do wonder myself why we CS between languages, and why some people do it more often than others, and why people prefer one language to another, and in what circumstances these people change these preferences. (SE3)

### 4.3.1 How Often and Why Group A Code-Switches

I asked the informants in Group A if they think that they code-switch often, and I asked them to think of a situation in which they would say they code-switch the most. SA1 said that he code-switches often when it comes to English. In Sweden and in Egypt, he would code-switch between English and Swedish or English and Arabic. A situation in which he CS the most, SA1 said “In Egypt with my American friends. We speak ‘fifty-

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\(^5\) [Original] Ja, det känns som att det är det jag håller på med, på dagarna. Mina barn pratar inte så mycket Arabiska, och min mamma pratar bra svenska, men känns mer naturligt att prata Arabiska med henne. Sen efter ett tag då kommer ordet “annars” t.ex. och då växlar jag över till Svenska, och tänker “varför pratar vi svenska med varann?” Vi känner inte av den övergången. (SA3)
fifty’, to talk faster, give out information faster and get no judgements from others”\(^6\) (SA1)

SA2 said that he definitely thinks that he code-switches often, adding that a typical situation in which he CS the most is in Lebanon. “Hi! Kifak? Ca va?” He said this phrase is very often used in Lebanon, and in most situations one would CS between English, French and Arabic.

Other situations are perhaps when I want to explain something. When you cannot find the word, so you usually spontaneously pick words from other languages to save yourself in such situations.\(^7\) (SA2)

SA3 said that she believes that she CS quite often, saying that it is not something she had thought of before on a daily basis. A typical situation for her to CS often is:

It is mostly during follow-ups that I have with people I work with. I know that they speak Arabic, and when I notice that they are struggling I finish my sentence in Arabic, they reply in Arabic, and then I switch back to Swedish. But I would do this consciously because I want them to use what they learn.\(^8\) (SA3)

I asked the group why they believe they CS, and these are their answers. SA1 said that it is mostly because “if you think too long, you can be perceived as obtuse.”\(^9\) (SA1) He said that CS helps you give out information faster and more efficiently.

As to SA2, he believes that it is related to:

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\(^6\) [Original] Egypten med mina Amerikanska kompisar. Då prata vi fifty-fifty, för att prata snabbare, få ut information snabbt och det finns inga judgments från andra. (SA1)

\(^7\) [Original] Andra situationer är kanske när jag vill.. explain something. När man inte hittar ordet, oftast, då blir det att plocka dem spontant från olika språk, för att rädda mig i situationer. (SA2)

\(^8\) [Original] Det är nog mest i uppföljningar jag gör med dem jag jobbar med. Jag vet att de pratar arabiska, och när jag märker att de hakar upp sig då pratar jag meningen på arabiska, dom svarar på arabiska, och sen blir det svenska igen. Men då gör jag det medvetet för jag vill att de ska använda det som dom lärt sig. (SA3)

\(^9\) [Original] om man tänker för länge, så kanske man uppfattas som trög…(SA1)
Overflow of information, or the lack of it. It happens fast and it is a little bit difficult to explain why. Sometimes it is to fit in, make it easier for the listener, depending on who it is.10 (SA2)

Thinking back to her time in Lebanon, SA3 explained how back in her home country, people would CS between Arabic and English/French because “it expresses your social status, knowing another language.”11 (SA3) She adds:

But here, I think it is because it is so forgiving, multicultural and multinational in Umeå, it becomes a way of communication, mixing languages. I do not believe it is something we do knowingly, but rather it is a form of communication.12 (SA3)

### 4.3.2 How often and Why group B Code-Switches

The informants in group B were also asked if they think that they CS often, and if they could think of a situation in which they would say they CS the most. Their answers were the following:

SE1 said that she does CS often, and “I think it’s because I’m starting to feel more comfortable with my Swedish, hence why I CS a lot.” A typical situation for SE1 to CS is when she is with a friend who also knows both languages, but they both use CS in order to express themselves better.

SE2 answered:

> When I CS the most is when I am in a academic situation. Because, doing my Bachelor’s in the US and doing my Masters here, I have learned specific words in one language that I have just gotten used to saying, so it kind of comes out naturally. So when people ask me what I study or what my focus is, I have to describe it in English, because in Swedish these words just don’t flow in the same kind of sense. It happens all the time,

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10 [Original] Överflöde av information, eller för lite information som man har. Det händer snabbt och det är lite svårt att förklara varför. Ibland för att passa in, göra det enklare för lyssnaren, beroende på vem det är. (SA2)

11 [Original] För att det uttrycker din status, att kunna ett annat språk. ”(SA3)

I would be speaking with my professor in Swedish and go over things in Swedish, suddenly I would blank at something and completely switch to English. I do that a lot, and quite a bit at work as well. These would be the situations I code-switch the most. (SE2)

I asked SE3 if she thinks that she CS often, and if she could think of a situation in which she CS the most. SE3 said that she does not think that she CS that often, only when she is around her Swedish friends whom she normally speaks English to. She does also CS often when she is around her father.
The informants in group B provided various reasons for code-switching relating to their background and speech situation.
SE1 said:

I don’t know, I think it depends on how comfortable you are. Other languages can sometimes express you better. For example I express myself better when I swear in Swedish. It really just depends on how comfortable you are and how much you feel like the certain language expresses your thoughts. (SE1)

To SE2, the reason she CS has to do with her background and her childhood.

I would say one thing to my mother, then turn to my father and speak to him in English… it was just constant CS at that point, so it is a thing I have done since I was a little kid. (SE2)

To her, CS is something she had been doing her whole life. After getting familiar with the subject of sociolinguistics from her own studies, SE3 said that the reason behind CS is something she has also been thinking about, and said:

I think I CS just to express myself better. Or it is to conform with the situation, at times when I can not formulate what I actually need to say. So, I think I CS depending on the best way to express my language, or the best way to communicate. But why I CS talking to my parents is just a mixture of helping my mother understand and also wanting to talk to my dad in his mother tongue. (SE3)
### 4.4 Comparison between Group A and Group B

When I had interviewed the informants, I did not directly recognise any major difference in their answers and attitudes towards the questions asked. In this section, I will view each group’s attitudes and answers on when and why they CS, and later compare the two groups and see if there are any similarities or differences. This is a summary of the answers presented above:

**Group A:**

How often do you CS and in what situation do you CS the most?

1. SA1: Often (when it comes to English) In Egypt, with international friends
2. SA2: Often (when it comes to English and Swedish) In Lebanon, in situations in which he can not explain something in solemnly one language.

Why do you think you CS?

1. SA1: Code-switching helps you give out information faster and more efficiently.
2. SA2: CS is due to lack or over-flow of information. Also to make it easier for the listener to understand, and sometimes to fit in.
3. SA3: CS varies depending on where you are, but in Umeå it is a natural form of communication.

**Group B:**

How often do you CS and in what situation do you CS the most?

1. SE1: CS often. Around people who know both languages.
2. SE2: CS “all the time”. Academic situations and work.
3. SE3: Does not CS often. Around a few Swedish friends.

Why do you think you CS?

1. SE1: Other languages sometimes express what you have to say better. Depending on what you are comfortable with.
2. SE2: CS is a childhood habit.
3. SE3: CS is a way to express yourself better. Also to help her mother understand and speak to her father in his mother tongue.
Comparing the two groups, the reasons given to why they CS are somewhat similar. Two out of three informants in group A said that it was because of information, how fast and efficiently you can use your language, and according to one informant it was because CS is a natural form of communication in Umeå. In group B, two out of three informants related CS to expression and comfort, saying that you code-switch when you need to express something more specific, using languages that you are most comfortable with. The last informant said she CS because she had done it all her life, since childhood to this day.

In both groups, the majority had related CS to personal reasons, having to do with their comfort around people and to their languages, and how they are able to express themselves, which explains why they CS. Another similarity is that in each group there was one informant who believes that their use of code-switching is due to CS being part of their culture, one calling it a form of communication, and the other informant relating it to her childhood.

One difference to notice between the two groups is that in group A, SA1 and SA2 both had a preference of using English over both their mother tongues, whilst no one in group B had a preferred language that is not their mother tongue. Everyone in group A said that they CS often, while two out of three in group B said they CS often. Both groups mentioned work as a situation in which they CS the most.
5. Discussion

The aims of this study were to look deeper into how six bilinguals in Sweden tend to code-switch, when and in what linguistic context they do so and what drives them to switch between their mother tongues. I had three main research questions, and in this section I will discuss the answers I have found for them.

Out of the six informants I interviewed, no one had a negative attitude toward the phenomenon, and no one found it in any way controversial or problematic. All informants said that language is important to them in a way or another. They find some expressions and words from a certain language to be so unique that they cannot be replaced, and when they do that they end up code-switching.

My first question was

- In what context do three Swedish-English and three Swedish-Arabic bilinguals resident in Sweden code-switch? How often and what motivates them to do so?

Interviewing both groups of bilinguals, I collected a lot of different answers to this question.

In group A, we can conclude that these Arabic-Swedish bilinguals tend to CS often, and usually in situations outside of Sweden. In Sweden, all three of the informants CS during work and university related situations. Similarly, in group B, one informant said that she CS in work and university situations, one informant said that she does not believe she CS often, and the last informant stated that she CS often when she feels like she is comfortable enough to do so.

To conclude, these bilinguals code-switch in the context of both formal situations and personal convenience. They CS often, and some of them speak three languages. Their motivations to code-switch were:

- to fit in
- make sure the listener understands
- to apply emphasis on a certain word, for example the word *annars* for SA3. (see page 13)
Interestingly enough, two of the informants in group A said that they are most comfortable using English, a language which was not their mother tongue. The reason for this can depend on the fact that they both said that they grew up in English schools and this left them using English daily. The same two informants used Arabic with their parents, as it was required to only use Arabic in their households. None of the informants in the other groups had similar requirements, which gave them a wider range of CS situations.

My second research question was:
• What do these bilinguals tend to switch between the most? (Phrases, sentences, single words?)

What is being switched depends on the setting, and also on what the motivation for the switch is. In their book *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Code Switching*, Isurin, Winford and De Bot (2009) explain that “in some settings minimal CS, such as pronouncing a word using the sounds on the other language, is enough to signal group adherence, in other settings longer stretches of speech are switched.” (Isurin, Winford & De Bot, 2009:86)

Asking the informants about their use of language, we discussed situations in which they would CS, and what usually gets switched out. In both groups, informants said that they would CS when they cannot find the word that they need to express. In some situations, like in SE1’s case, swear words in Swedish are preferred as she believes they convey her sentiment better than in English. So for the majority of the informants, they CS words, in order to emphasise meaning. There were also situations in which the informant had CS entire sentences back and forth between the two languages.

My last research question was:
• Which differences with respect to code-switching between these two groups of bilinguals can be observed?

The differences found in this study in respect to CS between two groups of bilinguals were very few. One difference observed was that in group A, two informants, SE1 and SE2, both preferred English over Swedish and Arabic, and both had to use Arabic around their parents as it was a requirement. Such a requirement or condition was not present in any other informant’s answers.
Group B provided answers focusing on comfort and personal upbringing when it came to their use of code-switching, while group A’s answers had a more structural and normative character.
6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to get a picture of the reasons behind, when and in what context three Swedish-Arabic (A) and three Swedish-English (B) speakers living in Umeå code-switch, and to gain more insight into this particular phenomenon. It was also to see if any differences could be found between the two groups of bilinguals. After interviewing these two groups and analysing their answers, the results show that the differences between the two groups are quite few:

- In the group of Swedish-Arabic speakers (A) two out of three of the informants preferred a foreign language over their mother tongues.
- The same informants both used Arabic around their family, especially their parents, as it was a requirement.
- When asked about their reason for CS, group A’s answers revolved around norms and their structural use of language, while group B’s motivations revolved around their childhoods and upbringing, and also a lot more about convenience.

The context in which Group A CS the most is when they are abroad, or in work related situations as well as academic situations, similarly to group B, who said that they usually CS in work and university situations, and one informant said that she does not believe that she CS very often at all. The rest of the informants believed that they CS very often, as they are often around people from different backgrounds.

The two groups’ motivation to code-switch differed a little bit, in the sense that group A mentioned situations in which they are required to CS, for example around family. But all informants said that fitting in is a reason to CS, their answers being different but providing the same motivation. The informants agreed that CS can be a tool for them to express themselves in an easier way.

The code-switched elements for most of the informants seemed to be single words, usually in situations in which they are stuck and cannot express a specific meaning in the language used, resulting in a CS to express that one specific idea. Some single words, like wa and annars in previously mentioned examples, can be a triggers to CS.
To not find a word in a language can seem very simple to many, as people would usually just rephrase the sentence and try to find a synonym to the word in question. However, for many bilinguals, it seems like CS is an easier way to convey that meaning, substituting a word with another one from a different language.

It is possible that many bilinguals can relate to a lot of the things said by the informants in this study. The ideas and answers expressed can be relatable to many aspects of a bilingual’s life, especially in the north of Sweden.

To conclude, this study adds to our knowledge about CS in a multinational society, and why this phenomenon is used and why it carries the importance that it does. Being able to express yourself in more than one language adds more elaboration to speech and even thinking, as it usually comes with two different cultures. I believe that CS is a very broad subject and not enough research can be done as there are endless combinations between languages and every different group of bilinguals comes with different views and tendencies.
References


Vetenskapsrådet *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning* (1990)
Appendix

Questionnaire used for interviews

- Name
- Age
- If relevant, residency how long?

1. What are your mother tongues?
2. Which of your languages are you most comfortable using?
3. Do you know what CS is? (Give definition)/ What do you think of when you hear about this phenomenon?
4. Do you believe CS affects the way you communicate? If so, in what ways?
5. Are there times and situations when you always use Swedish? When and why? What about English/Arabic?
6. When and in what situations do you normally use Arabic/English? What about Swedish?
7. Do you ever find yourself in situations when you never speak Swedish, or try not to? When and why? What about Arabic/English?
8. Do you find yourself code-switching often? Can you think of one or a couple of situations when you would say you CS the most?
9. Why do you think you CS?