Code-switching across registers: Investigating the sociolinguistic functions of code-switching in bilingual Kurdish-Persian speech

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1   Introduction

language users vary their linguistic behavior according to the context and interlocutors. These intra-individual variations which are called register (Biber and Conrad, 2009) are to some extent functional in nature and speakers adapt their linguistic behavior in a way to achieve particular situation-specific goals (Biber, 1995; Levinson, 2006; Trudgill, 2011).

Bilingual speakers not only choose among linguistic variations of one language, but also may switch from one language to the other one. From a socio-functional perspective, the use of two languages in the same conversation serves specific interactional tasks for participants (Gumperz,1982; Auer,1984; Myers-Scotton ,1993). Code-switching as a conversational strategy can be explained as an instance of language variation triggered by communicative situation which serves some sociolinguistic functions. So, investigating patterns and situational functions of codeswitching across different registers can give us more insight about both code-switching and register knowledge.

Kurdish as a minority language spoken by large groups of people in Iran is understudied regarding both code-switching and register phenomena. This leads us to investigate Kurdish-Persian code-switching patterns and their sociolinguistic functions across different registers of Kurdish to see how language users choose among possible alternations to fulfil register purposes and also how these choices contribute to the structure of registers in this language.

This study is seeking to addresses three questions: what is the pattern of Kurdish/Persian code-switching across registers; what sociolinguistic factors drive code-switching between Kurdish and Persian; and if the choice among Kurdish, Persian or the "mix of both" can be considered as a register marker?

2   Method and Data Collection

This study was integrated as a fellow project into the A06 sub-project of CRC1412 register. A06 developed the Lang*Reg corpus of spoken language which includes spontaneous spoken and written text in 6 different registers in three languages of German, Persian, and Yucatec Mayan. We collected the Kurdish data in the same way as for these 3 languages. The Kurdish data contains the recorded speech of 20 bilingual Kurdish-Persian participants in 6 different situational contexts. We asked them to tell a story in the form of a monologue, to have a talk with a friend, with an unacquainted person, with two taxi drivers (a male and a female), with two professors (a male and a female), and to write a letter to a friend about the same story which was told in the monologue. Generally, 120 conversations of average 13 minutes each has been recorded. We also asked the participants to answer a questionnaire about the social contexts they are in, and also the social characteristics and linguistic background of themselves and people in contact with.

After transcribing the audio files in Elan 6.2, all the utterances will be annotated in 5 categories of "No switching", "Inter-sentential", "Intra-sentential", "Intra-sentential +LVC" and "Intra-sentential +intra-word". The presence or absence, the frequency and also the type of code-switching across all 6 registers will be analyzed.

3   Preliminary Results and Discussions

This study is a work in progress which has actually been started recently. The collected data are still in the stage of transcription and annotation and not a serious analysis has been done yet. But, our primary observations and the pilot study of the small number of data indicates that participants tend to switch from Kurdish to Persian more in situations with higher level of formality such as talks to Professors, Taxi drivers or unacquainted persons. The alternation is not random too. It follows some rules and happens more at specific parts of the turns. For example, in extremely formal situations of talking to a professor, participants tend to switch to Persian more at the beginning of the conversation and little by little as the conversation goes on, code-switching is less.

By adopting the idea of looking at different models of Code-switching as complementary rather than competitive ones from Gafaranga (Gafaranga,2008), we can explain this tendency in different models.

Based on "situational code-switching" in the "we code/they code model" (Gumperz, 1982) Kurdish as the minority language is regarded as the 'we code' and associated with in-group and informal activities, and Persian as the majority language serves as the 'they code 'and associated with more formal, and less personal out-group

relations. Participants lead the conversations from the situation of "doing being strangers" to "doing being members of the local team".

Considering Persian as the "high variety" and Kurdish as the "low variety" in Ferguson model leads us to the same analysis.

Based on the "preference-related switching" by Auer, participants deliberately decide to make a dispreferred choice of switching to Persian due to some social considerations. Signaling more power and prestige to the interlocutors can be among these social considerations. Persian as the majority language is associated with more prestige than Kurdish and gives speakers more confidence and social power in situations with higher levels of formality.

Our primary observation also indicates that code-switching correlates with the gender of interlocutors. Participants tend to switch to Persian more when they are talking to a person from different gender. However, we need further sociolinguistic analysis of the current data, including the social factors of age, gender and social status of both speaker and interlocutors to be able to sketch our pattern more precisely. This analysis is ongoing based on the information we have from the social survey questionnaires.

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