Language contact situation between Israeli Sign Language & Kufr Qassem Sign Language: A case of code-switching or borrowing?

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Introduction

- Code-switching - the use of more than one language within the same communicative episode - is common among bilingual linguists [1–4].
- One particular kind of code-switching, known as reiteration, is common in sign language contact situations [6], and it constitutes 30% of our dataset.
- Reiterative code-switching is when semantically equivalent signs are produced in both languages sequentially, e.g., WOMAN WOMAN (see Fig. 1).
- Some researchers claim that code-switching can lead to borrowing [8,10,11], the adoption of individual words or even large sets of vocabulary items from another language or dialect [9].

- Difficulty? Deciding whether a single-sign switch is an example of a code-switch or a borrowed sign is difficult in any language [13,19].
- Some criteria have been suggested in the spoken language literature, including: 
  - Integration changes to make borrowed words fit in recipient language [19].
  - Diffusion: recurrent use across signers [11,17].
  - Recurrence: recurrent use within individuals [11,17].

- In Kufr Qassem (see Fig. 2), younger deaf people are exposed to two sign languages, Kufr Qassem Sign Language (KQSL) and Israeli Sign Language (ISL).
- Participants were filmed in pairs with a matched signer and asked to retell a Charlie Chaplin clip.
- Lexical signs from each sign language were decided based on dictionary entries & consultation with native signers within each community.
- Switches were counted when the signer switched to their non-dominant language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Languages in contact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israeli Sign Language (ISL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger heterogeneous population (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Us ed by ~70,000 people (12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominant sign language used within media, education &amp; interpreting</td>
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<td>Population: Roughly 8 Million (16)</td>
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Research Question

- Is the use of reiteration an example of code-switching or borrowing in Kufr Qassem?

Results

Graph 1: Lexical Signs Division across groups

- The use of the ISL sign "WOMAN" is diffused across all 6 KQSL monolinguals, whether in reiteration (ISL-KQSL) or the ISL signs on its own.
- The ISL sign "WOMAN" recurs within individuals’ discourse.

Graph 2: Recurrence and Diffusion: Borrowing

- Drastic change in language use within Kufr Qassem deaf community appears in bilinguals dominant use of ISL.
- Surprisingly, KQSL monolinguals switch to ISL 15% of their sign production.

Discussion: The Case of the Married One

Table 3: defining feature of code-switching and borrowing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code-switching vs Borrowing</th>
<th>Our Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed words become integrated</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed words recur within individuals</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed words recur across individuals</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed words are used by monolinguals</td>
<td>✔</td>
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</table>

- When we look at the example below, we see that KQSL has a compound sign ‘MAN-WOMAN’ translated as ‘the married one’.
- Over time, the compound components have changed, ‘WOMAN-WOMAN’, ‘MAN-MAN’.
- Signs retain the compound template and, through increased-contact with ISL, borrow in the ISL form to fill each compound slot.
- Reiteration appears to be an example of borrowing of ISL into KQSL’s existing compound, rather than code-switching, unlike in other studies (6).

Evidence?
- Integration of the ISL form into the KQSL compound template serves as a good indicator of borrowing.
- Recurrence and diffusion of ISL sign for “WOMAN” across all KQSL monolinguals are another two pieces of evidence of borrowing.

Conclusions

- Sign languages offer a different perspective on code-switching.
- What appears to be an obvious code-switching instance, may in fact be something else because sign languages behave differently to spoken languages.
- In this study, the behaviours of monolinguals and the presence of integration are important indicators of whether a single-sign switch is code-switching or borrowing.

The Case of “The Married One” Sign** as an Example of ISL Borrowing into KQSL

- The use of ISL signs in KQSL monolinguals defines feature of code-switching.

**References**


Take-Home Message

- Reiterative “code-switching” is not always code-switching.