

Close encounters of a different kind: Two types of insertion in Nigerian Arabic codeswitching

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Nigerian Arabs of Maiduguri generally use up to four other languages or varieties, besides their own native Arabic: Hausa, English, Kanuri and Standard Arabic (SA). As is probably typical of such complex linguistic environments, speakers frequently use the languages in a codeswitching mode. In this mode the languages are functionally differentiated in that native Nigerian Arabic (NA) and Hausa establish matrices while Standard Arabic and English largely provide lexical insertions (Kanuri plays a negligible role in the current corpus). Lexical insertions are numerous in the data, as they cover many domains which are absent in native Nigerian Arabic.

The present paper examines insertions into NA from the two lexical donor languages, English and SA. Insertions from the two languages are compared in four structural positions whose matrix is defined by NA: (1) possessive constructions, (2) descriptive adjective, (3) verbal predicates, (4) formal marking of definiteness on nouns. In each of these positions the English and SA insertions exhibit considerable differences. In general, whereas the SA insertions pattern identically or very closely with the comparable structures in a set of monolingual NA texts, the English insertions deviate sharply from them, either structurally, quantitatively, or usually, in both ways. For instance, whereas SA verbs will be inserted as predicates normally-inflected according to NA rules, instances of predicativized English verbs are vanishingly rare. In (1) the SA stem *intaxaba* has been taken over in full, but changed morphologically: (1) with NA pre-vowel *a-*, (2) NA 3MPL subject suffix *-o* and (3) NA expression of 3MSG object pronoun, shown here by final stress on *-o*. In all there are 65 SA verbs treated in this way.

1. antaxa^hb-o “they elected him” (501210) (cf. Standard Arabic *intaxab-uu-hu*)

Comparable meanings with English insertions (N = 145) use the verb *sawwa* “do, make” + English insertion as DO,

2. i-soww-u voot “they vote”(710882)
3-do-PL vote

The construction *sawwa* + DO is largely specialized as a frame for incorporating English lexical material. Comparable differences between English and SA are shown to exist in the other phenomena.

Relating the findings to language change, one could contrast the two outcomes of lexical insertion in terms of borrowing (the SA case) vs. new code formation (the English insertions). The SA case largely, though not completely, meets the conditions for borrowing, as understood by Poplack (1998 etc.) in that SA insertions mimic native NA categories. The English insertions, on the other hand, define grammatical domains which are over-proportionally occupied by English insertions. This could be related to the idea of a third mode grammar, as expounded by Auer (1998).

Rather than look at the findings in terms of outcomes of contact, however, I prefer to concentrate on real-time processing constraints which might lead multilinguals to treat the languages differently. Factors relevant include the structural proximity of SA to NA vs. the distance of English to NA, individual competence in the second languages, and pan-northern (-eastern) Nigerian norms as seen in the treatment of comparable phenomena in other sets of languages.

Data base: Two spoken corpora collected in Maiduguri, Nigeria and environs, all native speakers of Nigerian Arabic. One = ten texts (25 active participants, c. 85,000 words) with varying degrees and types of codeswitching; the other = six texts (c. 27,000 words) of what is termed monolingual Arabic, a variety free of any constituent codeswitching. Smaller corpus used as control against which codeswitching phenomena compared.

Place: Maiduguri, largest city in Borno (c. 500,000), NE Nigeria, c. 10% Arabs, main lingua francas Hausa, English, Kanuri

Abbreviations: SA = Standard Arabic, NA = Nigerian Arabic

Auer, Peter (ed.) 1998. *Code-Switching in Conversation*. London: Routledge.

Poplack, Shana and Marjorie Meecham. 1998. "How Languages Fit Together in Codemixing". *International Journal of Bilingualism*. 2: 127-38.