

The importance of differentiating between code-switches and borrowings: Evidence from lone other-origin nouns in Lebanese Arabic

In studies on code-switching, Arabic is too often commissioned for counterexamples to even the most influential of theories (Boumans 1998; Nortier 1989; Bentahila & Davies 1983, Davies et al. 2013). This disagreement is rooted in the contentious nature of lone other-language material in otherwise Arabic discourse. The status of lone other-language nouns in Arabic remains a basic, if unresolved issue, that has divided researchers in contact linguistics (Poplack & Dion 2012, Sankoff 2013, among others), and raises a number of questions, not least of which is whether they are bona fide borrowed items or single-word code switches. If a conceptual, methodological and analytical distinction between borrowing and code-switching is to be maintained, then it is of paramount importance that researchers elaborate replicable and empirically accountable procedures for differentiating lexical borrowing and code-switching (D. Sankoff et al 1990; S. Poplack & Dion 2012; Budzhak-Jones & Poplack 1997; Torres Cacoullos & Aaron 2003).

In this study, I address whether lone other-language nouns (LOLNs), English, in (1) or French in (2), in otherwise Lebanese Arabic (LA) behave like code-switches, deeming them liable to be commissioned to contest a theory on code-switching; or like borrowings, deeming their use as counterexamples to such a theory irrelevant. Applying the comparative variationist methodology, outline by Poplack and Meechan (1998), I make systematic comparison in the speech of Ottavian Lebanese-English-Arabic highly proficient trilinguals, extracted from the spontaneous speech of a 16 highly proficient trilingual Arabic-English-French speakers subsample of *Le Corpus Levantin d'Ottawa* (2012). I compare the behavior of the LOLNs in otherwise LA discourse (N=343) with the behavior of their counterparts in the two sets of benchmarks, the unmixed LA (N=500) and unmixed English (N=500); and unmixed LA and unmixed French (N=500) extracted from the same speakers in the subsample. Making use of *conflict sites*, defined by Poplack and Meechan (1998) as 'areas in the grammar where the languages differ', I determine the grammar operating on these LOLNs by assessing the coronal assimilation of the definite determiner, possessive marking and plural formation as diagnostics.

(1) shou ha d-**decision** (019/856)
what this DEF.decision
“What kind of decision is this?”

(2) ma fiki t.xalih.on bi l-**banque** (4/1020)
NEG can.2sg PROG.keep.3pl in DEF.bank
“you can't keep them in the bank”

What the analyses show, in the aggregate, is that speakers tend to treat other language nouns as borrowings by integrating them into the structural patterns of the recipient language, be that otherwise Arabic discourse. LOLNs mostly behave like their counterparts in LA by assimilating the definite determiner to the following coronal, and adopting Arabic possession and plurality. Notably for *all* these diagnostics, they behave *very* differently from their English or French counterparts highlighting their *borrowing* status into LA rather than a code-switching status. Crucially, this paper provides further evidence that LOLNs cannot be brought to bear on any analysis of code-switching, let alone be used as counterexamples to such theories, without an empirical accountable methodology.

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