The Social Aspects of Code-Switching in Online Interaction: The Case of Saudi Bilinguals

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the concept of code-switching (CS) between English, Arabic, and the CS practices of Saudi online users via a Translanguaging (TL) lens for more inclusive view towards the nature of the data from the study. It employs Digitally Mediated Communication (DMC), specifically the WhatsApp and Twitter platforms, in order to understand how the users employ online resources to communicate with others on a daily basis. This project looks beyond language and considers the multimodal affordances (visual and audio means) that interlocutors utilize in their online communicative practices to shape their online social existence. This exploratory study is based on a data-driven interpretivist epistemology as it aims to understand how meaning (reality) is created by individuals within different contexts. The participants were eight bilingual Saudi nationals (both men and women), aged between 20 and 50 years old. This study contributes to the DMC literature and bridges some of the existing gaps. The findings of this study indicates that online users' literacy lays in decoding multimodal communication, and that this multimodality contributes to the meaning. Either this is applicable to the online affordances used by monolinguals or multilinguals and perceived not only by specific generations but also by any online multi-literates, the study provides the linguistic features of CS utilized by Saudi bilinguals and it determines the relationship between these features and the contexts in which they appear.

Introduction

It is generally agreed, at least from a linguistic point of view, that Code-Switching (CS) occurs when a speaker changes or alternates, in the course of a single conversation, between two or more languages or language varieties. This is a noticeable practice all over the world in various contexts, cultures and language contact situations. However, it has been noticed that the dawn of the internet has led to it becoming a part of everyday life, significantly changing the way in which people communicate with each other. Digitally-mediated communication (DMC) platforms offer opportunities for what is now regarded as written scale on an "unprecedented scale" (Androutsopoulos, 2013: 667). Research on CS on DMC studies have isolated patterns in a wide spectrum of platforms, linguistic contexts and social settings. Nonetheless, investigating the occurrence of CS on electronic platforms is a largely under-researched area, especially in relation to other fields.

However, these linguistic practices are more than just alternating between languages or varieties, thus, researchers have switched the focus for a more recent and more inclusive theory which is called Translanguaging (henceforth TL) proposed by (Wei, 2011). In this regard, the digital code can be considered as a performance of online multilingualism. Androutsopoulos (2013: 4) described these practices as "everything language users do with the entire range of linguistic resources" for the purpose of online communication which is supported by TL.

It is important to distinguish between CS and TL in both their contexts and how they have been applied in this study. According to Garcia and Wei (as cited in Molina & Samuleson, 2016), TL is different from CS. In this context, CS is defined as a process of changing two languages in a specific communicative episode, while TL is seen as a phenomenon about "the speakers' construction that creates the complete language repertoire" (ibid, 2016: 3). More specifically, in TL, bilinguals are consciously aware and in control of their utterances in both languages. This so because TL is largely about meaning and sense-making (Wei, 2018). With regard to CS, the main feature is the purpose or motivation of the conversation. Ordinarily, CS is considered as a linguistically incompetent ability. All the same, the process is governed by grammatical, as well as interactional, rules. Both notions will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapters to highlight the positive aspects and limitations of each for the purpose of positioning the current study.

This research aims to investigate the concept of CS and TL between the English and Arabic practices of Saudi online users. It employs DMC, specifically the WhatsApp and Twitter platforms, in order to understand how the users, employ online resources to communicate with others. This project looks beyond language and considers the multimodal affordances (visual and audio means) that interlocutors utilise in their online communicative practices to shape their online social existence.

The Gap

Literature has mostly looked at types and purposes of language constructions/lexis that tend to be CS but without considering sociolinguistic aspects but never on the interconnection between the linguistic and social aspects in the online interaction which justifies why there is no one data analysis model to include this type of data as will be discussed in the next chapter. Also, most previous studies focused on oral CS or CS in academic contexts which forms the main gap this study is implemented to explore.

In addition, there is a need to study interactions on WhatsApp and Twitter from a communicative action perspective. For example, this study is an attempt to understand how people are "trying to be in public without always being public" (Marwick & Boyd, 2014: 2). Moreover, it aims to highlight the interrelation between linguistic choices and identity performance in social media. Identities, as Goffman (1990[1959]) puts it, are like masks that can be worn and taken off in different contexts. Thus, as DMCs are largely text based and support limited physical contextual cues, they represent an opportunity for people to perform different features of identities.

Furthermore, since the participants of this study are members of a specific society who share some sociocultural backgrounds and they are additionally members of an online speech community (bilinguals and users of WhatsApp and Twitter), studying their language use on social media becomes a sociolinguistic task especially with the rapid changes of the DMC. Thus, there is a need to document the up-to-date practices that occur in the online Saudi bilingual community and the communicative acts associated with these changes.

Based on the above-mentioned gaps and needs, this study aims to; first, provide a unique insight into the interactive sociolinguistic world of bilingual Saudis' DMC habits and motivations. Second, to build on existing knowledge by analysing the linguistic features (multimodal online affordances) and social behaviours of the participants. Third, to present Arabic data in a systematic way and explore what Arabic may add to or how it may challenge the current frameworks/knowledge of CS in online platforms to answer the following research questions:
- What CS practices emerge in online communication by Saudi bilinguals? For what reasons?
- How do the participants employ online interaction to fulfill their social purposes?

Thus, the significance of this research lies in how it will bridge the gap of the hidden aspects such as the motivations and sociocultural insights of bilingual Saudis and their online sociolinguistic presentation as a contribution to the online social interaction in the sociolinguistic realm. Therefore, this study fits in the connection between the linguistic repertoires and the social implications especially in a so-called conservative context like Saudi Arabia which has several cultural and religious considerations such as gender segregation.

Literature

It is fundamental to highlight that this study embraces both approaches, CS and TL for a more inclusive outcome because, as discussed in this chapter, each approach has both positive aspects and limitations for the purpose of this study. CS will be used via a TL lens to include all linguistic and non-linguistic practices with respect to the entities and boundaries of languages, varieties and multimodality because they present vehicles of communication and they are employed purposefully.

In addition, there is a need to pay increased attention to the language choices of non-native speakers in countries where the history of English is recent and English is largely used as a foreign language (EFL). It is worth noting that despite being used as a lingua franca on the Internet, the latter is mostly used by non-native English speakers (Danet & Herring, 2007a: abstract). On the contrary, English-based scholarly literature on CS in DMC does not truly reflect this diversity, and consequently, studies related to Saudi bilinguals are relatively

under-represented in the field. CS is a subject covering a wide range of interrelations between medium and situational factors. Androutsopoulos (2013: 667) shows the extent of its significance by stating explicitly that "CS in CMC is relevant not only because it is there (and not yet well understood) but also for the insights it can offer to pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and discourse studies".

Based on early CS studies but with a more focused shift towards CS in DMC amongst Saudi bilinguals, this study intends to fill a significant gap in scholarly knowledge about the online/written CS practices of Saudis in various contexts. Consequently, the study focuses on language choice, practices and emotions, among other CS usages. In addition, the context of the current study presents on a small scale a conservative society that is deeply rooted and interrelated with several cultural factors such as religion, taboos and traditions, which shape and influence the participants' interactions and cannot be isolated.

This study aims to provide a unique insight into the interactive sociolinguistic world of social networking. By capturing live, real-time interaction (posts of participants) on social media sites, specifically WhatsApp and Twitter, the study focuses on the interrelation between participants and language through a technological medium. It focuses on how individuals use the innovative linguistic features afforded by online platforms to communicate using a mixed-method approach. With social networking becoming an integral part of our communicative lives, it seems imperative that we understand the interaction that occurs on such mediums.

The analytical chapters examine code-switched passages in order to assess the mechanisms through which CS portrays meaning. In this regard, Gumperz (1982: 72) claims that "what we need are detailed investigations of speakers' use of CS strategies, in actual conversational exchanges, to show that they exhibit some form of linguistic patterning that they contribute to the interpretation of constituent messages". Consequently, for all the above-cited reasons, the study presents a first comprehensive and in-depth analysis of this nature on Saudi Arabic-English CS in DMC.

Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach with a mainly qualitative research strategy owing to the nature of the subject under study. It also uses a partial quantitative approach with regard to converting the findings into numbers and representing the percentages of some findings in charts. The chapter also discussed the ethics followed during the study.

This project is situated in the field of sociolinguistics and focuses on the interrelation between: first, CS between English and Arabic practices used by Saudi bilinguals in their online interaction and second, how these bilinguals employ online resources to communicate through a variety of online platforms specifically Twitter and WhatsApp. This project looks beyond language and considers multimodal affordances that interlocutors employ in their online interaction practices for the purpose of communication and self-presentation. This study investigates the people using online affordances and CS as tools to enhance their communication.

The methodology of this research has three phases (Crabtree, 2003). First, exploration. Second, a systematic collection and organization of posts, questionnaires, and interviews. Finally, linking that data with themes through data analysis.

There is a need to understand CS from a number of perspectives, which is one of the original contributions of the current study. This research surveys the chats of bilinguals when interacting on online platforms to explore possible linguistic and sociolinguistic practices of communication. Most studies on CS have focused on the linguistic features of CS, and even those that have examined the linguistic features have done so from a simple perspective that focused on the types of words that had been code-switched. Herring (2004) claims that the micro-discursive features and the interactive patterns are used by social actors to form communities. Moreover, these are used not only by individuals for self-development, but also online communities use different features to make their voices heard. Therefore, the data analysis model is based on three different models; Herring's CMDA (2004, 2007), Al-Wer's CS approach and TA.
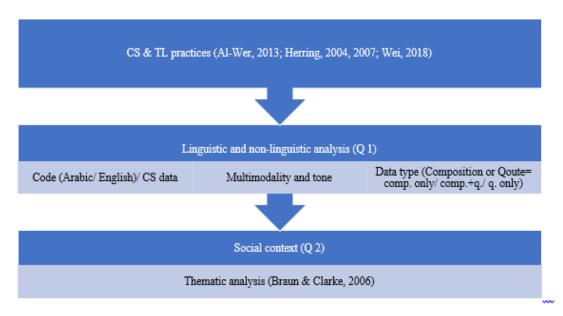
Figure 1: Data Analysis Framework

The aim is to provide a comprehensive approach to analysing the data, which is important to obtain an in-depth description for CSs and what they may mean for the study's objectives and research questions.

Findings

The data revealed that the participants in this study share five main CS practices which are presented in the table below in comparison to literature.

AlAbdulqader	Herring's CMDA (2004, 2007)	Al-Wer (2013)	Tagg (2015)
Arabization	Code No mention of reformation	Grounding the data	N/A
Nonce Borrowing	N/A	Linguistic data/ linguistic system	N/A
Multimodality	Channels of communication	N/A	N/A
Quoting	Quoting	N/A	Attribute
Prayers	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 1: A comparison between this study findings & literature

The steps analyse data in two stages:

Stage one is concerned with the actual structure of the data: choice of language, choice of multimodal tools, additional aspects such as quotes, prayers and nonce borrowing. When looking at CS distribution, this is in line with Al-Wer's approach for the CS data – "grounding the linguistic data" (2013: 256) has been implemented in two ways. The first is by linguistic analysis in order to understand how these words are originated. In other words, this involves reverting each word to its original form by taking off all prefixes and suffixes. The second way is by linking the words to the context in which they are used.

When applying some principles of CMDA (Herring, 2004, 2007), the linguistic practices are concerned with data type, i.e., whether the data are composed, quoted or a combination of both. In addition, CMDA considers the tone of the data based on the choice of words and the multimodality used, for example, whether it is formal or informal, playful or serious.

Stage two is concerned with the social context, which explores how the interlocutors deploy these linguistic and non-linguistic choices they exhibit in the first question for communication purposes. This will be tackled by TA for two reasons: triangulation and in order to investigate the data thoroughly.

Practice/ Participant	Rakan (M/49)	Faris (M/36)	Tariq (M/25)	Amal (F/28)	Rana (F/33)	Maya (F/35)	Noor (F/24)	Dina (F/25)
English words/No change	X	7	4	10	25	12	3	1
English words written in Arabic letters	X	6	11	4	2	22	2	1
Arabization	X	2	4	x	1	2	x	x
Intra-sentential CS between linguistic & multimodality patterns	27	8	7	25	36	12	30	26
Qur'an verses	3	x	x	1	x	X	1	x
Prayers (du'a')	1	x	x	2	x	X	3	2
Proverbs	X	x	x	x	2	X	4	3
Poetry	X	x	x	x	x	X	2	x
Song lyrics	x	x	x	x	3	x	3	1

Table 2: Findings for research first question

In this context, it can be seen that intra-sentential CS between linguistic and multimodality practices features highly. This is due mainly to the informality and closeness between the participants. This is followed by the use of English words/No change. There is also a

significant usage of the Arabization practice. Qur'an verses do not feature highly, probably owing to their sacred nature.

To sum up, the findings show that multimodality (audio and visual) excessive usage as seen in the above table is used by men and women for the purpose of filling the communicative social purposes. Furthermore, the participants reveal a high ability to manipulate these online affordances for expression purposes. Also, these findings highlight that multimodality is considered a basic communication tool in the written DMC where in some posts, the participants rely solely on these affordances without any actual written contexts which means that multimodality is an online comprehensive language that can substitute the traditional language in some cases.

Other CS findings such as nonce borrowing either written in English or Arabic reveal that these foreign words become common to the Saudi online community even for those with a limited English competence which manifests how bilingual Saudis affect and are affected by their online linguistic attitudes. To illustrate, these common words become familiar due to the fact that most online users get exposed to them. The written CS words become common which enable the users to use them linguistically and pragmatically for two reasons; first, to update their vocabulary and means of online communication. Secondly, to enhance the belonging feeling to the online community which relates this research question's findings to the next section.

There are several significant findings in the current study in attempting to answer the research questions, and several findings come to the fore. First, multimodality plays a fundamental role in the participants' online interactions – all the participants use it to varying degrees. In addition, the participants' main CS online behaviour is interchanging linguistic and non-linguistic resources employing both Arabic and English and the multimodal affordances.

This result may be due to many facts. Firstly, multimodal affordances fill the gap arising from the limited view of body language, and using these affordances is easier for the users than composing text-based posts, which for most participants may cause misunderstandings on the recipients' side. Some multimodal affordances change according to trends; it was noted that most posts consist of stickers instead of emojis to show that the users are updated and keen on following the norms of online interactions. Multimodal affordances tend to be basic in online interactions as they are one of the mostly highly used features, making online interaction unique. In addition, these multimodal affordances allow the users to re-explore some of their personas' characteristics, for example they can revise their replies before sending them and listen to their voice-notes to work on some weaknesses. Moreover, the multimodal affordances are employed by the users to reveal other characteristics they lack in offline interactions, such as a sense of humour and wisdom.

With regard to the first research question, which is about the linguistic practices used by bilingual Saudis online and their motivations, the study identified several practices and their uses. Firstly, the most-used practice among the participants is Arabicization. The participants' bilingual abilities enable them to manipulate the English words to fit their daily linguistic needs. Moreover, this linguistic competence seems to characterise specific generations or speech communities, which makes these Arabized words common and considered as a sign of social symbolism.

Secondly, a unique practice is reported in this study, that of prayers. This reflects the status of Classical Arabic and the Islamic teachings in some participants' posts. Also, the effect of the Qur'an can be detected in the rich and varied body of religious expressions, which creates a unique feature of the Arabic language. This practice can be found in many forms; i.e., the prayers quoted from the Qur'an, the prayers quoted from the Sunnah of the prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), and the prayers composed by the users.

Next, with regard to the motivations of CS, the study found that showing off is the most reported finding amongst the participants – one not previously documented in the literature. This finding emphasises that English has a prestigious status in Saudi society. It is worth mentioning that most participants indicated that they viewed some code-switchers as showing off, but this may also be the case for themselves, but they cannot admit it because it is self-reported data. Moreover, they added that some CS is not necessary because Arabic alternatives are available, but their posts revealed that they used CS in many cases where it was not necessary.

Fourth, one of the reported motivations for CS is language development. Online interaction helps the participants to enhance their English language use. Some of them shared that this supports their second language use and encourages them to CS more because it enables them to, for example, avoid typo errors and use more advanced vocabulary. It is crucial to mention that online interaction may also help its users to copy other peers' linguistic activities in order to follow the norm of the online interaction. It may also have the effect of enhancing/developing their own language skills.

Fifth, with regard to the second question, several themes emerged from the participants' common reported data such as CS is an indication of lack of confidence and identity loss. Another theme is that the participants are now interested or tempted by the option of online anonymity in Twitter because they indicate their full awareness of their social limits. In addition, emotions are discussed as associated with language, it was found that most participants prefer switching to English for swear words because they believe that switching the code makes the impact less aggressive and negative for the recipients. This debates the notion that a realization and expression of emotion as a communicative act is more challenging in the second language learned later in life than in first language. Also, Dewaele's (2007) research which indicated that swear words in the first language have more emotional force than swear words in the second language, this finding has not been reported in the literature. This may be due to the fact that Saudi society has a unique sociocultural nature, at least among specific social classes that consider swearing in Arabic inappropriate and serious. Interestingly, this has become a norm among most of the participants because most of them reported it, even though it was not one of the interview questions.

In addition, one of the remarkable findings in this study is the caution among the participants when interacting with the other gender, either linguistically (formal language) or non-linguistically (multimodality). This view may be due to the limited informal interaction between both genders in the Saudi society – the context of this study's sample – especially because they all explained that this caution is to avoid misunderstandings such as flirtation or disrespect, which can be created by such attitudes.

Finally, after discussing the difference between CS and TL, the study's results show that the findings of this study are CS in nature via a TL lens to fill CS approach gaps and most of the results (discussed in this chapter), if not all, support Wei's notion of TL (2018) which is that

multiliteracy is one's ability to decode multimodal communication, and that this multimodality contributes to meaning. This is applicable to the online affordances used by either monolinguals or multilinguals and perceived not only by specific generations but also by any online multiliterate. The relationship between this study and TL is that, in the absence of paralinguistic cues online, this study's findings argue that language is limitless and continuously developing through a process of "languaging" and demonstrate how bilinguals employ all textual and semiotic options purposefully to achieve their communicative goals and to create appropriate interactions.

Discussion

Most of the frameworks are mono-lingual biased, thus one of this study's strengths is that it points to the fact that standard sociolinguistic approaches are not adequate to cover data like those found in the current study. This is because it shows the differences between offline and online interaction, especially given the rapid changes of e-communication and the changes language is witnessing. There is nothing in the literature about this particular group in this technological context which allow for the evaluation of available models, their narrowness and lack of adequacy. This represents a significant contribution of this study. The major focus is the sociolinguistic approach and how it sheds light on the analysis of CS and TL. The data analysis model is based on Herring's CMDA framework (2004, 2007) to examine the social and technological factors of online platforms, on Al-Wer's (2013) approach of grounding the data to investigate the code-switched data, TL (Wei, 2018) to expand the view of CS and complete the missing components of this type of data, and on TA (Clarke & Braun, 2006) to identify the meanings from the data. This use of these mixed methods was adopted based on the complexity of the subject matter at hand.

The analysis, among other things, shows that the participants employ online platforms for the purpose of communication, facilitated by two factors. The first is the advantage of online affordances that act as a substitute for body language in offline interactions, and the second is the asynchronous nature of online communication, which supports readiness for communicating in a specific culture.

Socially wise, the specific conversational practices we select shape how we identify ourselves to our interlocutors which demonstrates that identity is not a fixed notion and that it is likely to change, especially when individuals are using online platforms, some of which provide leeway for anonymity or change of some personas' characteristics. CS is also found in multimodality, which represents an online interaction privilege from linguistic to non-linguistic practices and CS from English to Arabic or vice versa for the purpose of empowering their communication.

Relatedly, this study argues that for the participants, CS is more than a linguistic choice; it is rather a moment of making, taking a stance through 'footing', mirroring attitudes and making options and decisions 'positionality' which is why this project appreciates the work of Goffman (1974). This is because the participants act differently online according to the context, mood or topic from offline interaction, while in DMC more stances can be taken due to its multimodality and asynchrony. These enable the participants to reconstruct their online personas, to reveal or fake social characteristics that are missing in offline interactions, such as humour and wisdom.

Furthermore, this study indicates–with respect to non-generalisation–that the Saudi participants behave similarly to their offline communication because as they stated, they respect their social backgrounds and never try to use their Twitter accounts as masks to release their anger or aggression.

In this study, Saudi Arabic has been highlighted as many varieties not as one language. Standard vs non-standard varieties are used by the participants as many purposeful tools to achieve communicative goals. This study has shed light on the written Saudi Arabic which allowed this variety to be distinguished and recognized in a different way than face to face interaction.

Another point debated relates to the affections associated with each language. On the one hand, switching to English is considered by some participants as unnecessary and a way of show-off and yet still they are found CS. On the other hand, Arabic is viewed as a beautiful language and using it is a source of pride which may be due to their desire to show their feelings of belonging and their Arabic identity, even if the English competence of the interlocutors is good. The common perception of Saudis' CS as a way of showing off could be the motivation behind this view, which affects the credibility of this perception.

Conclusion

This exploratory study was conducted to investigate how Saudi bilinguals function on a daily basis in online interaction and employ their online linguistic and non-linguistic repertoires to achieve social communicative goals. It is about the interactional linguistic and social empowerment of online interaction to its users involving intellectual; cognitive, cultural and psychological understanding to explore how social media or online interaction is having an impact on its users and the way they interact with others in terms of achieving some interactive purposes such as expression and self-presentation.

This study has investigated the Arabic-English CS behaviour of eight Arabic-speaking Saudi bilingual participants living in Saudi Arabia. The data are based on 194 WhatsApp chats and 122 tweets that were collected by the researcher. The data were analysed and interpreted according to three aspects: conversational turn-taking and CS; the linguistic description of the data; and code-switching and identity.

This study contributes to the DMC literature and bridges some of the existing gaps. For example, much research has been conducted on offline CS, mostly on patterns and purposes in many contexts, yet much less has investigated online CS from a sociolinguistic perspective especially on that specific group of Saudi Arabia. Also, the study analyses the linguistic features of CS by Saudi bilinguals and determines the relationship between these features and the contexts in which they appear. The study also surveys the changes in CS according to the setting, situation and gender of the interlocutor(s).

Furthermore, this study examines the social aspects (virtual identity) that can be revealed by the Saudi bilinguals in their online communication. Through this virtual identity, they can do things they cannot do in real-life situations, such as using swear words in English, which they prefer not to do in Arabic due to their social values. There is evidence that these bilinguals' virtual sociolinguistic behaviours support the notion that identity is not fixed but negotiated. This study supports Thurlow et al.'s (2004) concept that the aspects of identities we present

online and offline are two sides of the same coin and the same constant progression, that of *"identification"*.

Therefore, it can be argued that CS is more than that theoretically defined at the beginning of this project as "the alternative use of two languages either within a sentence or between sentences" (Clyne, 1987: 40). However, this study has proven that this definition is not telling the whole story, it is rather a juxtaposition between languages, cultures and spaces that facilitates communication and expression. In addition, it is mirroring attitudes either in manipulating the linguistic choices or the non-linguistic resources purposefully not to fill lexical gaps but rather, to achieve communicative goals. One of the most significant theoretical implications in this study is to take that restricted segment of the Saudis so called 'conservative context' to the body of knowledge to investigate the development and empowerment of the means of communication which allowed to revisit the theory of CS.

In this study, online CS, which includes all linguistic and non-linguistic resources, is like owning several options for the delivery of your message. It is similar to Bourdieu's (1977b, 1991) two key concepts: habitus, and symbolic capitals. Habitus refers to an individual's own personality and motivations to behave in a specific way. This capital is formed by the person's childhood knowledge and controls one's attitudes and perceptions. It reveals the person's deeply rooted social background. On the other hand, symbolic capital refers to one's linguistic proficiency. These capitals represent a rich source of affordances when practised via DMC that assist interlocutors to either show unrevealed characteristics of their personas like humour and wisdom, or to communicate better due to the online interaction asynchrony and space. These virtual spaces are considered a third space between the interlocutors' offline realities and their capitals, where they can deploy many means for self-presentation and communication.

In addition, As an Arabic speaker, there was the standard vs non-standard dichotomy. However, this study has gone beyond this dichotomy to indicate that each of these Arabics has a function to play for the purpose of completing the big picture of interactive repertoires. The findings showed that participants employ these Arabics not as low varieties but as adapted and purposeful sources for effective and appropriate communication. For example, the participants are found to be Arabizing some English words instead of using the standard alternatives. This is fascinating because the interlocutors find those English words fit more in the interaction than their native language alternatives because they are more common in their communities. They also distinguish some younger generations from the older ones which encourages this linguistic practice to be expanded due to some contexts.

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