



Research Paper

Linguistic Practices and Their Functions: Analyzing Code-Mixing and Code-Switching Among Iraqi Students

Raad Alaa Abd Alraouf Al-Safi¹, Ehsan Rezvani^{2*}, Oudah Kadhim Abed³, Mehdi Vaez Dalili⁴

¹Department of English Language, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

raadalsafi89@gmail.com

²Department of English Language, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

rezvani_ehsan_1982@yahoo.com

³Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, Al Muthanna University, Samawah, Iraq

http://mu.edu.iq

⁴Department of English Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

mvaezdalili@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the sociolinguistic phenomena of code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS) among Iraqi undergraduate students. Focusing on Research Questions 1, 2, and 3, the research investigates the types of CM and CS employed and their communicative functions. Drawing upon data collected from 20 episodes of Iraqi TV talk shows and prior empirical studies, the findings reveal patterns that highlight the strategic and social implications of these practices. The results contribute to understanding how bilingual students navigate multilingual contexts, offering insights for educational and sociolinguistic applications.

Keywords: *Code-Mixing, Code-Switching, Sociolinguistics, Iraqi Students, Multilingualism*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, since it serves as the primary channel by which people express their thoughts, emotions, and identities. In multilingual environments like Iraq, where there exists a dense tapestry of languages interwoven with cultural and historical narratives, communication often involves dynamic interactions among multiple languages. The presence of Arabic, Kurdish, and English in most domains creates a fertile ground for sociolinguistic phenomena such as code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS).

Code-mixing can be defined as the combination of elements from two or more languages in a single utterance or discourse, often resulting from unconscious mechanisms, whereas code-switching implies a somewhat conscious switching between languages, usually initiated by situational circumstances (Muysken, 2000; Auer, 1998). These behaviors not only function as linguistic strategies but also reveal unconscious social, cultural, and cognitive dimensions, pointing to the speakers' ability in handling diversified social situations as an attempt to reach communicative purposes.

Code-switching and code-mixing have been the subject of considerable research across diverse multilingual settings globally. Foundational frameworks for comprehending these phenomena have been established by scholars such as Poplack (1980), Myers-Scotton (1993), and Gumperz (1982), who highlight their structural, functional, and interactional dimensions. Recent investigations (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Bullock & Toribio, 2009; Wei, 2018) have built upon these theories, examining the extent to which linguistic selections are shaped by power relations, identity formation, and sociocultural connections. CM and CS are commonly regarded as indicators of linguistic competence and social agility in navigating complex cultural norms and negotiating meaning across different social settings. The terms have, however, not been much discussed within the Iraqi context, although the country enjoys a rich linguistic environment. In Iraq, this multilingualism has been shaped by historical and sociopolitical forces such as colonial histories, language policies, and globalization. Arabic is the official language, and Kurdish is recognized in the Kurdistan region; English also plays a vital role in the domains of education and professional life. This multilingual environment creates unique opportunities for code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS), particularly among young people, who tend to engage in multilingual practices across educational, social, and digital spaces (Hassan & Ali, 2020; Al-Ani, 2019).

Iraqi undergraduate students are an exciting group for the study of CM and CS. As people who grew up in a digital world and are active in both academic and social networks, their linguistic practices often reflect the intricate dynamics between language, identity, and power. Research conducted in similar multilingual settings, such as studies by Kharkhurin & Wei (2015) and Canagarajah (2013), reveals that code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS) among students go beyond being simple linguistic phenomena and, instead, involve identity negotiation and even cognitive development. In Iraq, the education system contributes to shaping these practices as it encourages bilingualism through English-medium instruction as well as sociopolitical factors that affect attitudes toward various languages (Mohammed 2021; Salih & Taha, 2022)

The cognitive and sociocultural levels of code-switching (CM) and code-mixing (CS) among Iraqi students merit further investigation. Evidence shows that CM and CS can improve cognitive flexibility and increase creativity (Bialystok, 2009; Green & Abutalebi, 2013), while at the same time they often mirror larger social dynamics of resistance to linguistic dominance or adoption of global



cultural practices (Crystal, 2003; Norton, 2013). In Iraq, where language often intersects with elements of ethnicity, religion, and politics, CM and CS could function as tools for bridging social gaps and fostering intercultural understanding (Al-Rawi, 2018; Yaseen, 2023).

Despite these promising avenues for exploration, academic literature on CM and CS in the Iraqi setting remains quite scant. Previous literature has generally focused on the descriptive analysis of linguistic features, whereas relatively little attention has been paid to the functional and sociocultural dimensions of such practices (Jameel & Kareem, 2020; Saeed & Ahmed, 2021). This study is an attempt to bridge a noticeable gap in sociolinguistic research by examining the strategic and functional roles of code-switching and code-mixing among undergraduates in Iraq. It has the objective of uncovering how linguistic choices inform identity construction, social negotiation, and academic performance and thus offers a more textured understanding of multilingualism in Iraq. The study also converges with recent global trends in sociolinguistic research, which emphasize the importance of context-sensitive approaches and the interaction between micro-level linguistic practices and macro-level sociopolitical factors (Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2010; Creese & Blackledge, 2015). Situating Iraqi students' linguistic practices within their specific sociocultural and educational contexts, this research enhances not only theoretical frameworks on CM and CS but also informs language education and policy in multilingual societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

Research on CM and CS has been in evolution through various disciplines such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics. CM is normally considered as a spontaneous linguistic process reflecting cognitive integration, whereas CS is considered as a deliberate choice influenced by situational and interactional contexts (Gumperz, 1982; Muysken, 2000). These all originate from broader, more general sociolinguistic theories that include Heller's 1988 conceptualization of bilingualism as a resource for social negotiation and Gumperz's 1982 interactional sociolinguistics on how language use constructs and maintains social meaning.

The theoretical perspectives on language alternation, such as Myers-Scotton's 1993 Markedness Model, also provide further insight into the motivations for both CM and CS. According to this model, speakers select linguistic codes based on normative expectations and desired social outcomes. Along similar lines, Auer's 1998 conversation analysis perspective focuses on the sequential and contextual causes of code alternation and maintains that code switching serves the functions of managing discourse coherence and interpersonal alignment. These two frameworks provide a sound basis for approaching both the cognitive and social aspects of CM and CS in Iraqi students.

Empirical Background

Most studies conducted on CM and CS have reported on bilingual and multilingual communities of Western and Asian countries. Research highlights their functions in achieving communicative efficiency, asserting identity, and negotiating power dynamics (Poplack, 2019; Li Wei, 2005). For instance, Poplack's (1980) analysis of Puerto Rican bilinguals in the U.S. demonstrated how CS serves as a marker



of group identity and a tool for managing conversational pragmatics. Similarly, work in South Asia has illustrated how CM and CS index cultural hybridity and linguistic creativity in multilingual societies as well (Romaine 1995; Bhatt 2008). In Arab contexts, work on CM and CS has remained confined to North Africa and the Levant, where French, English and Arabic co-operate. One such example is Al-Khatib and Sabbah (2008), who researched CS among Jordanian university students, arguing its case in both academic and informal exchange. However, the Iraqi context, with its distinct linguistic landscape and sociopolitical influences, remains underexamined. This paper opens up a window of opportunity to investigate how CM and CS function within Iraq's unique multilingual ecosystem, especially among undergraduate students who have to navigate through academic and social domains.

Gap in the Literature

While global research has amply documented CM and CS in various multilingual settings, limited attention has been given to Iraq. Most of the existing studies fail to take into account the interaction of Arabic, Kurdish, and English in academic settings and the sociolinguistic factors influencing such practices. Furthermore, the communicative functions of CM and CS in identity construction and social interaction have not been explored in the case of Iraqi students. This paper, therefore, tries to fill these gaps by comprehensively analyzing both CM and CS as contributions to larger discussions on bilingualism and multilingualism in the Arab world. Problem

Linguistic practices by Iraqi undergraduate students involve a complicated relationship between cultural, social, and academic influences. Belonging to a multilingual society, these students commonly use CM and CS to manage their linguistic and social ecologies. The dearth of focused research in Iraq's academic settings, however, limits our knowledge concerning the wider implications of such practices. There is a particular need to investigate:

The types of CM and CS used by Iraqi students.

The communicative functions these practices serve in academic and social contexts.

The sociolinguistic and educational factors influencing their use.

Addressing these issues is paramount in the development of inclusive language policies and educational strategies that recognize and support multilingual competencies. The present study, by investigating the linguistic behaviors of Iraqi students, aims at adding to our knowledge about the dynamics of bilingualism and multilingualism in a culturally diverse society.

Objectives of the Study

This research has focused on the actual linguistic patterns in their interaction in order to bring forth the types of code-mixing Iraqi undergraduate students employ. It could be the insertion of an item, phrase, or syntactic structure from one language into another, thus blending Arabic, Kurdish, and English. From this type of form, it tries to tease out the linguistic mechanism and cognitive processes involved which permit such integration to occur. This typology of code-mixing will also enable the analysis of how such practices reflect the bilingual or multilingual proficiency of students and their flexibility in different communicative contexts.

On the other hand, the types of code-switching that Iraqi students use have to be looked into. This means observing whether students switch codes between languages while speaking or in discourse. These



are sentence-boundary, clause-boundary, or even sentence-internals, with differences in levels of linguistic awareness and intentionality. The paper categorizes such instances and discusses how contextual variables, including audience, topic, or social setting, determine language choices. Such an analysis is enlightening with respect to code-switching as an effective strategy in managing interpersonal relationships, nuanced meanings, and even group membership.

The study, therefore, analyzed the communicative functions served by code-mixing and code-switching in their interactions, including such linguistic practices in facilitating effective communication and social negotiation. These often function simultaneously to convey meaning, emphasize key points, or to appeal to the linguistic preferences of interlocutors. Additionally, such practices can also become markers of identity through which the students align themselves within particular cultural or social groups. The study provides a fine-grained analysis of how individual agency and wider sociocultural influences interplay in shaping linguistic choices through an examination of these communicative functions.

Novelty of the Study

This research provides a novel contribution by focusing on the underexplored sociolinguistic landscape of Iraq, a region where linguistic practices are shaped by a rich interplay of cultural, historical, and political factors. By examining the strategic use of CM and CS among Iraqi undergraduate students, this study highlights their role not just as communicative tools but as mechanisms for identity construction, social negotiation, and cultural expression.

Unlike existing research that primarily centers on Western or Levantine contexts, this study delves into Iraq's unique multilingual environment, where Arabic, Kurdish, and English intersect in complex ways. It sheds light on how students navigate these linguistic intersections to achieve social cohesion, negotiate academic identities, and bridge cultural divides. Furthermore, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining statistical analysis with qualitative insights, to provide a comprehensive understanding of CM and CS. These methodological and contextual contributions position the study as a significant advancement in the field of sociolinguistics and multilingualism.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What types of code-mixing do Iraqi undergraduate students utilize in their communication?

RQ2: What types of code-switching do Iraqi undergraduate students utilize in their communication?

RQ3: What functions are served by code-switching and code-mixing for Iraqi undergraduate students?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are significant from a sociolinguistic and pedagogical perspective. By gaining an awareness of the linguistic techniques utilized by Iraqi undergraduate students, educators are able to develop language policies and teaching practices that are more culturally responsive and inclusive, hence providing assistance for their students who are learning several languages. For the purpose of fostering increased involvement and confidence among students, which ultimately leads to improved academic



achievements, recognizing CM and CS as important tools rather than linguistic weaknesses might be beneficial.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the findings make a contribution to the ongoing conversations about bilingualism, identity, and language policy in heterogeneous countries. This study sheds insight on the communicative and identity-related roles of CM and CS, which in turn offers implications for policymakers, linguists, and educators all over the world. It contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of multilingual encounters in Iraq by putting light on these functions.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

Building upon the foundational research design, this study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative analysis with qualitative discourse analysis to examine linguistic practices among Iraqi undergraduate students. This methodology combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex social settings in which language is used.

Corpus of the Study

The corpus comprised 20 episodes from two popular Iraqi TV talk shows aired between 2023 and 2024. These shows were selected for their balanced representation of male and female speakers and diverse topics, ensuring a rich linguistic dataset. The selection process involved a systematic review of available talk shows, focusing on those with high viewership and relevance to contemporary Iraqi society. This approach ensures that the data reflects current linguistic practices and social dynamics.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved transcribing the selected episodes, followed by coding for conversational features such as turn-taking, hedging, politeness strategies, and interruptions. Transcription was conducted verbatim to capture the nuances of spoken language, including pauses, intonations, and non-verbal cues. Coding was performed using established frameworks in discourse analysis to ensure reliability and validity. Supplementary data was obtained from semi-structured interviews with 15 participants to contextualize the findings. These participants were selected through purposive sampling to represent a diverse cross-section of Iraqi undergraduate students, considering factors such as gender, age, and field of study. The interviews aimed to elicit participants' perceptions and attitudes towards the linguistic features observed in the talk shows, providing deeper insights into the sociolinguistic context.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to identify patterns and frequencies of code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS) types. Descriptive statistics, such as mean frequencies and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and t-tests, were employed to examine the relationships between variables and determine the significance of observed patterns. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, focusing on the communicative functions and sociolinguistic implications of these practices. Thematic analysis involved coding the data for recurring



themes and patterns, followed by a detailed examination of how these themes relate to the research questions. This process was iterative, with themes refined and redefined as analysis progressed. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was achieved through triangulation, enhancing the robustness and credibility of the results. This mixed-methods approach allows for a nuanced understanding of linguistic practices among Iraqi undergraduate students, capturing both the prevalence of specific features and the underlying social meanings.

In summary, this study's research design, corpus selection, data collection, and analysis procedures were meticulously crafted to provide a perfect exploration of linguistic practices among Iraqi undergraduate students, combining quantitative rigor with qualitative depth.

RESULTS

This section presents the statistical and thematic results for the three research questions, supported by tables for clarity.

Statistical Results for Research Question 1

What are the most common types of code-mixing (CM) observed among Iraqi undergraduate students?

Descriptive Statistics:

Intra-sentential CM was the most common type (52%).

Inter-sentential CM accounted for 34%.

Tag CM comprised the remaining 14%.

Table 1

Frequency of Code-Mixing Types

CM Type	Frequency (%)	Example
Intra-sentential	52%	"I went to the suq to buy groceries."
Inter-sentential	34%	"This is important. لكن لا تنسى الموعد. "
Tag CM	14%	"That's great, ya'ni! "

The dominance of intra-sentential CM suggests a high level of bilingual proficiency, allowing participants to integrate elements from two languages fluidly. This reflects the participants' ability to navigate complex linguistic environments where both Arabic and English hold significant roles.

Statistical Results for Research Question 2

What are the most common types of code-switching (CS) observed, and what functions do they serve?

Descriptive Statistics

Inter-sentential CS accounted for 48% of occurrences.

Intra-sentential CS comprised 35%.

Extra-sentential CS made up the remaining 17%.



Table 2*Frequency of Code-Switching Types*

CS Type	Frequency (%)	Example
Inter-sentential	48%	"This is interesting. <i>شئو رأيك بهذا الموضوع؟</i> "
Intra-sentential	35%	"I need to finish this project <i>بأسرع وقت ممكن.</i> "
Extra-sentential	17%	"Okay, let's start, you know? "

The prevalence of inter-sentential CS highlights its role as a deliberate linguistic strategy, often used to emphasize points, clarify arguments, or adapt to audience expectations. Intra-sentential CS demonstrates participants' flexibility in switching within sentences, reflecting deeper bilingual integration.

Statistical Results for Research Question 3

What communicative functions do CM and CS serve in social interactions among Iraqi undergraduate students?

Thematic Analysis:

CM and CS were used to:

Manage turn-taking: Language switching indicated conversational shifts, ensuring smooth transitions between speakers.

Express solidarity: Participants switched languages to create a sense of shared identity or cultural connection.

Mitigate face-threatening acts: CM and CS softened criticism or criticism-like statements.

Table 7*Thematic Analysis of Communicative Functions*

Function	Description	Example
Turn-taking	Marking conversational shifts	"Let's move on. <i>شئو رأيكم؟</i> "
Solidarity	Fostering inclusivity or cultural identity	"I agree with you, wallah. "
Mitigation	Softening face-threatening acts	"I think you're right, <i>بس مو دانما.</i> "

The findings demonstrate that CM and CS serve as pragmatic tools in communication. They enable participants to **navigate social norms**, maintain politeness, and foster inclusivity in discussions. These linguistic strategies reflect the participants' ability to adapt their language use to various social and cultural contexts.

Integrated Insights

Bilingual Proficiency: The dominance of intra-sentential CM and the significant use of intra-sentential CS indicate a strong bilingual ability among participants.



Deliberate Linguistic Choices: The frequent use of inter-sentential CS for emphasis or clarification underscores its role as a conscious communicative choice.

Sociolinguistic Dynamics: Thematic analysis reveals that CM and CS are not random but are deeply tied to social functions like managing relationships, maintaining politeness, and expressing group identity. The above analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the linguistic practices of Iraqi undergraduate students, situating their use of CM and CS within broader sociolinguistic frameworks.

DISCUSSION

Discussion Related to Research Question 1

The argument posited by Muysken (2000) regarding the manifestation of high levels of bilingualism through intra-sentential mixing is notably supported by the data collected from Iraqi undergraduate students. This group exhibited distinct patterns of code-mixing (CM) compared to their peers in other Arab contexts, which aligns with findings from studies conducted in similar sociolinguistic environments (Al-Khatib & Sabbah, 2008; Poplack, 2019). The significant differences observed can be attributed to the unique sociolinguistic fabric of Iraq, characterized by a confluence of Arabic, Kurdish, and English languages, each contributing to the complexity of language use among students (Li Wei, 2005; Heller, 1988). The prevalence of intra-sentential CM among Iraqi students suggests a high degree of bilingual proficiency and cognitive flexibility. This finding resonates with previous research indicating that bilingual individuals often possess the ability to fluidly integrate elements from multiple languages within a single utterance (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Moreover, the sociolinguistic settings in which these students operate—marked by diverse linguistic influences and cultural interactions—further underscore the role of context in shaping language practices (Bhatt, 2008).

Discussion Related to Research Question 2

The high frequency of inter-sentential code-switching (CS) observed among Iraqi students warrants consideration through the lens of Auer's (1998) observations on discourse coherence. Inter-sentential CS serves not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a tool for maintaining coherence and facilitating understanding among speakers (Romaine, 1995). In the context of Iraqi talk shows, where audience diversity plays a crucial role, this practice becomes particularly strategic. The ability to switch languages based on audience composition reflects an acute awareness of social dynamics and communicative needs (Al-Khatib & Sabbah, 2008; Gumperz, 1982). Furthermore, contextual variables such as the format and content of talk shows contribute to the strategic application of CS. The interplay between language choice and audience engagement highlights how speakers navigate their linguistic repertoires to enhance interactional effectiveness (Auer, 1998; Li Wei, 2005). This dynamic reinforces the notion that language practices are deeply embedded within specific sociocultural frameworks.

Discussion Related to Research Question 3

The multifunctionality of both CM and CS underscores their roles in fulfilling various communicative functions during social interactions. As highlighted by Heller (1988), bilingualism can serve as a valuable resource for negotiating identities and social relationships. In this study, CM and CS were not merely



linguistic phenomena but were employed strategically to manage conversational dynamics and express solidarity among speakers (Poplack, 2019; Bhatt, 2008). The findings indicate that CM and CS facilitate turn-taking in conversations, allowing speakers to signal shifts in dialogue effectively. This aligns with Gumperz's (1982) assertion that language use is inherently tied to social interaction and meaning-making processes. Additionally, the ability to switch languages serves as a means of mitigating face-threatening acts and fostering inclusivity within discussions (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Auer, 1998). Such practices highlight the nuanced ways in which Iraqi students navigate their multilingual environments to achieve communicative goals.

CONCLUSION

This investigation into code-mixing and code-switching among Iraqi undergraduate students reveals significant insights into the strategic nature of these linguistic practices. The data indicates that CM and CS are not only prevalent but are also essential for negotiating linguistic diversity and promoting social inclusion within academic settings. The patterns identified contribute to a deeper understanding of how these practices function in achieving communicative aims while sustaining multilingual sociocultural relationships.

Potential Repercussions Arising from the Study

The implications of this study extend beyond academic discourse. For educators, it underscores the necessity of inclusive language policies that recognize the importance of bilingual and multilingual competencies in fostering effective learning environments. By integrating CM and CS into pedagogical frameworks, educators can create culturally relevant curricula that resonate with students' linguistic realities (Heller, 1988; Li Wei, 2005). For policymakers and language planners, these findings advocate for models that embrace linguistic diversity as a resource for effective communication across professional and social domains. Such models can facilitate better engagement among diverse populations while ensuring that communication remains effective and inclusive (Al-Khatib & Sabbah, 2008; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Discussing Limitations and Constraints

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The relatively small corpus comprising episodes from only a few talk shows may restrict the generalizability of findings across broader contexts or demographic groups. Additionally, focusing solely on undergraduate students limits insights into other age groups or sociolinguistic environments within Iraq. Future research should aim to expand upon these findings by incorporating a more diverse range of participants and settings. This could involve exploring CM and CS across different educational levels or examining their roles in online communication channels related to classroom management or computer science education. In summary, while this study provides valuable insights into the sociolinguistic behaviors surrounding CM and CS among Iraqi undergraduate students, further exploration is necessary to fully understand these phenomena within Iraq's complex linguistic landscape.



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Biodata

Raad Alaa teaches in the Department of English, The Open Educational College, and Imam Jafaar Al-sadiq University. Al Muthanna, Iraq. Raad Alaa is an assistant lecturer of Linguistics and has taught courses of variegated character, including linguistics and translation courses. His research interests include discourse analysis, translation, sociolinguistics, and critical discourse analysis.

E-mail: raadalsafi89@gmail.com

Ehsan Rezvani is an assistant professor of TEFL in the English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran. He received his B.A. in English Translation from Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, IAU (2006), and earned his M.A. (2008) and Ph.D. (2014) in TEFL from University



of Isfahan. His main research areas of interest are Issues in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Language Teaching Methodology, and Pragmatics. Ehsan Rezvani has been teaching EFL learners and TEFL student for the last 18 years. He has published several articles on language teaching and has presented papers in international conferences.

E-mail: rezvani_ehsan_1982@yahoo.com

Oudah Kadhim Abed is a faculty member of Al Muthanna University, Samawah. He received his M.A. degree in EFL Teaching from Jordan University in 2003 and his PhD from Egypt University, Egypt in 2016. He has been the Head of the English department at Al Muthanna University, Samawah since 2021 to 2024. Her research interests are language testing and research. Dr Oudah Kadhim Abed teaches in the Department of English, Al Muthanna, Samawah, Iraq. Oudah Kadhim Abed is a full Professor of Linguistics and has taught courses of variegated character, including linguistics and translation courses. He has published a good number of articles on discourse, pragmatics and translation in local and international journals. His research interests include EFL Testing, FLA, Critical Reading skills, and Oral Language Communication.

E-mail: <http://mu.edu.iq>

Mehdi Vaez-Dalili is an Assistant Professor of TEFL in the Department of English at Azad University of Isfahan (Khorasgan), Isfahan, Iran. His research interests include Second Language Acquisition, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and corpus linguistics. His books include *News & Media* (2004, a collaborative work), *News & Views* (2010), *Learn English News through Videos* (2011), and *English News Made Simple* (2013). He has also published papers in local and international journals.

E-mail: mvaezdalili@yahoo.com

