

12.5.2 Code-Switching and Diglossia

In multilingual communities, two common though distinct linguistic phenomena are code-switching and diglossia. **Code-switching** refers to the use of two or more languages or dialects within a single utterance or within a single conversation. Consider the example in (1) from an interview of a nurse in Nairobi (Myers-Scotton 1990: 65). The languages she uses are Swahili (in normal type), English (in italics), and Lwidakho (in bold). The translation is given in (2).

- (1) Interviewer: Unapenda kufanya kazi yako lini? Mchanaau usiku?
 Nurse: *As I told you, I like my job.* Sina ubaguzi wo wote kuhusu wakati ninapofanya kazi. *I enjoy working either during the day* au usiku yote ni sawa kwangu. Hata *family members* wangu wamezoea mtindo huu. *There is no quarrel at all.* **Obubi bubulaho.** Saa zengine kazi huwa nyingi sana na *there are other times when we just have light duty.* **Valwale vanji,** more work; **valwale vadi,** hazi kidogo.
- (2) Interviewer: When do you like to work? Days or nights?
 Nurse: *As I told you, I like my job.* I have no difficulty at all regarding when I do work. *I enjoy working either during the day* or at night, all is OK as far as I'm concerned. Even my *family members* have gotten used to this plan. *There is no quarrel at all.* **There is no badness.** Sometimes there is a lot of work and *there are other times when we just have light duty.* **More patients,** more work; **fewer patients,** little work.

The reason the nurse can code-switch extensively in the interview is that she knows that her interviewer also speaks Swahili, English, and Lwidakho. However, she could have chosen to just speak in one language with the interviewer. Such **language choices** are frequently politically, socially, or personally motivated. For example, multilinguals may be more comfortable with one of their languages or insist on speaking only one language to express their cultural identity. However, in the example above, the nurse leaves the language choice open.

Sometimes the choice of language is determined by the social setting. The situation where different languages or dialects are used for different functions is called **diglossia**. One type of diglossia is a situation where a standard or regional dialect is used in ordinary conversation, but a variety learned by formal education is used for most written communication. An example of this is the use of standard Arabic in literature and other writings and the use of local varieties of Arabic in ordinary conversation in the various countries where Arabic is spoken. Frequently, diglossic situations involve one language that is spoken at home or in informal situations and another language that is used for official purposes or in (higher) education. For example, in many African countries, the language of education and instruction is English or French. However, the languages spoken in everyday life, depending on the country and region, are various African languages.

Many of the examples above show that societal multilingualism frequently arises when speakers of different languages are in contact, as in the cases of immigration and colonization. Societal multilingualism is often an outcome of contact if a group of people retain their cultural and language heritage but also learn the language that is dominant in some area of society.