difference between kufr and shirk

from imaam abdul wahhab's *kashful shubuhaat*,

"from an islamic perspective, kufr is the opposite of islam. a person is either a muslim or not.

there are many types of kufr. one type is the kufr of denial, in which a person denies the truthfulness of the prophet and the authenticity of the quraan. another type is the kufr of arrogance, in which a person realises the truth but is too arrogant to follow it. such is the kufr of iblees and Firawn. another type of kufr is the kufr of doubt, where a person is not sure of the prophet's truthfulness or the authenticity of the quraan. this type of kufr can only exist in an ignorant non-muslim, for anyone who studies the life of the prophet or the quran cannot have any doubts regarding them. yet another type is the kufr of nifaaq, in which a person outwardly claims to be muslim but in his heart does not believe in islam. shirk is one type of kufr.

ibn taymiyyah writes: whoever does not submit to what the prophet came with is a kafir. it is irrelevant whether he believes that the prophet is a liar, or was simply too arrogant to believe in him, or turned away from him wanting to follow his desires instead, or was in doubt as to the authenticity of what he came with. so whoever denies what he has come with is a kafir. in fact, one might even be a kafir even if one does not deny him, that is if one does not believe in him"

thus, any person who rejects the total religion of the prophet is a kafir. and one of the ways in which a person rejects the message of the prophet is by committing an act of shirk.

therefore, every single act of major shirk is a type of kufr, but not every single act of kufr involves shirk. thus, kufr is the general name given to any act, statement, or belief that might expel a person from the fold of islam. shirk is merely one type of kufr, albeit the most common and evil form. it is possible for a person to reject islam without necessarily falling into shirk, as is the case with iblees, and some orthodox jews (since they worship only allah, and follow the torah, yet deny the prophethoods of jesus and muhammed, which is kufr). it is also possible to reject islam by falling into shirk and kufr simultaneously, such as the christians (since they claim that jesus is the son of god-which is kufr; and give him divine powers, and direct acts of worship to him- which is shirk).

may acts have elements of both kufr and shirk in them, even though each act might be more representative of one of these two matters. for example, athiesm is pure kufr, but can also be considered a type of shirk as well. and idolatry is pure shirk, but is also a manifestation of kufr.

so kufr is in fact more general than shirk. every shirk is kufr, but not every kufr is shirk."