

LANGUAGE AT WORK: A CASE STUDY

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Cet article illustre quelques processus qui opèrent au niveau discursif en contexte algérien. Le corpus d'analyse sur lequel cette étude est basée se situe entre continuum et alternance codique en contexte urbain. Cette étude propose des pistes d'exploration sur le sujet parlant algérien et l'usage des variétés des langues en place dans leur dynamique. Des généralisations peuvent être déduites de cet article quant à la planification et/ou l'aménagement linguistiques, aussi bien que sur l'enseignement des langues arabe et étrangères en Algérie.

This article illustrates some processes that operate in the speech of students outside the classroom. Linguistically, the corpus is situated at the frontiers of a continuum and /or code switching / mixing in an Algerian urban context. This study proposes avenues of exploration in the Algerian speaker's use of the varieties of the languages in place. The results throw insights as to language planning and the teaching of Arabic and Foreign Languages in Algeria.

The issue stems out of two different but not necessarily contradictory standpoints: a look at the descriptive works on the Arabic spoken in Algeria and elsewhere, and a dynamic view of language at work. As to the first standpoint, we notice a general tendency to

tackle the processes of communication under the banner of a binary approach based essentially on a structural framework. Thus, as early as Bergsträsser (1915) for Syrian and Palestinian Arabic, Rossi (1939) for Yemeni Arabic, Gairdner (1935) for Egyptian Arabic, Pérès (1950) for Andalusi Arabic, and scholars like W. Marçais (1901), Brunot, (1950), Ph. Marçais (1957), M. Cohen (1947), G.S. Colin (1959), D. Cohen (1962) and Cantineau (1936), the descriptions were almost exclusively based on structural methods applied to the study of Arabic dialects. Cantineau was certainly the pioneer in trying to reconcile the orthodox Semiticists (whose works were based on Arab grammarians of the Middle Ages like Sibawayhi (8th c. AD), and Al Zamarkhshari (12th c. AD) and the Structural linguists of his time. The controversy centred around the issue of the description of Arabic. The Semiticists stressed the originality and descriptive logic behind earlier works of the Arab grammarians. The Structuralists emphasised the analytical description and scientific rigour of Structuralism. No doubt the structural framework fitted well the description of Indo-European languages for which it was designed. Yet, it failed somehow in describing Semitic languages like Arabic.

Subsequent studies on modern dialects of Arabic, mainly conducted by nationals, in the case of Algeria, and produced overseas under the form of thesis works, followed suit and described Arabic in the same vein as any other Indo-European language. Similarly, most post-

graduate works (Magister) in our universities base their approach to the study of Spoken Arabic or Berber quite heavily on a structural theoretical framework. To the best of our knowledge, none has tried the auto-segmental approach (Goldsmith, 1976) and just a few have counted on Functionalism or Glossematics. The result is this tendency to describe and explain the facts of Arabic as a language under the form of « compartments ». Thus, diglossic (sometimes triglossic or tetraglossic) patterns such as Classical Arabic / Dialect varieties, bilingual models such as Arabic - French, Arabic - Berber, Berber - French, etc. are often proposed in the descriptions of the Arabic language situation in Algeria. Such an approach implies inescapably that language and communication are described as if the speaker could "choose" between independent, stable and delimited codes that are available to him and over which he has full control. This is probably the case of individual rather than collective bilingualism or multilingualism.

The actual language situation in Algeria is characterised by a continuum of Arabic where the varieties of this language are sometimes difficult to delimit: Classical Arabic, Literary Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Educated Spoken Arabic, etc. Included in this continuum are dialect varieties with heavy doses of Arabic and Berber. French is clearly present at the lexical level in these varieties of Arabic, and there are also traces of Turkish, Spanish and Italian to a lesser degree. At the same time, the upward mobility of lower

social groups as well as a development in cross-regional and pan-Arabic communication have given rise to a phenomenon of dialect fusion that seems to take place within this continuum. This is commonly known as “*al lugha l wusta*” or “Intermediary Arabic”. Facing this continuum of Arabic, Berber and its regional varieties are attested, and finally French is also part of the linguistic environment in Algeria. It still keeps the status of a major language in Ferguson’s terminology¹. English is gaining dominance in the oil sector, computing, and in the scientific and technological documentation.

Observation of language use in Algeria clearly indicates that a binary analysis of the linguistic facts as they manifest themselves in speech does not actually represent these facts. On the other hand, a dynamic approach unveils complex intersections among the languages in contact, varying degrees and constraints on switching and borrowing ... which reflect the very nature of the current linguistic situation in Algeria in all its complexity and paradox. It is precisely this situation of communication and spontaneous expression that has to be explored so as to understand better the communicative competence of the Algerian speaker.

Descriptive works exist nowadays that portray types of bilingualism / multilingualism in Algeria where the cohabitation and use of at least three languages

¹ . Ch. Ferguson (1966: 311), National sociolinguistic profile formulas, Bright, W. ed., Sociolinguistics. The Hague : Mouton

(Arabic / French / Berber) are described, observed or analysed. The social status and function of each of these languages - or their varieties - are equally established and described. In this case, the choice of the language the speaker uses is dictated by social constraints that not only make him aware of what he is going to say but also exert pressure on his use of one language or another (Arabic / French / Berber). What seems to be missing in these descriptions, observations, or analyses are corpora on the daily linguistic tool of the speaker. This tool should be examined as a dynamic process of synchronic linguistic interaction. This bulk of language, used in everyday speech, is composed of forms and structures pertaining to the languages in contact in Algeria. It includes borrowings, interference, mixing, and neologisms and code-switching those have to be observed and examined as they appear in everyday speech. This bulk of language is based on linguistic systems and sub-systems that are simultaneously triggered – but regulated by syntactic constraints and lexical use – when a verbal interaction takes place in a free context in Algeria. This means of verbal communication which is essentially characterised by morpho-syntactic and lexical features of the co-existing and sometimes genetically different languages (Arabic / French), represents in fact the language resources of the Algerian speaker in a socially free environment.

We shall concentrate in this article on general morpho-syntactic patterns that are most productive in this

aspect of language in Algeria and observe general patterns of regularity. We shall briefly illustrate this type of language use on the basis of Myers-Scotton', (1993) model on Matrix and Embedded codes.

A sample that we consider as one aspect of language use in Algeria is given below in order to study the systems and sub-systems that are triggered during a conversation. The corpus is composed of free talks among students at university.

From a theoretical standpoint, we consider here a Matrix Language (ML) (or Code)² that which can be identified, within a given syntactic structure, as reflected by the main verb of the sentence in the first place. It may also be identified on the basis of its functional morphemes. The Embedded Language (EL) (or Code) will then be that which provides the lexical and content words to the sentence. Moreover, the assumption is that the social context is often the cue for what the ML and EL should be. Further research needs to be conducted in this vein to verify this assumption.

We shall also concentrate on longer strings from the corpus in order to see how the systems are released at discourse level. The whole corpus is transcribed and transliterated at the end of this article. The conventional sentence boundaries // allow to determine the constituents and to identify functional morphemes from content words.

² . See Myers-Scotton, 1993.

Consider the following examples:

Example 1:

Speaker A (Female): //(Fr.) bõ ʒur // (Good Morning)

Speaker B (Male)://(AA) ʒbæħ l ɣe:r // (lit. Morning Good)

In this straightforward example, speaker A who is a female uses the French code for «Good morning » while speaker B who is a male favours the Arabic counterpart. In this case, one can only decide that the ML in the utterance of speaker A is French with no EL whereas the ML for speaker B is Arabic with no EL as well.

Example 2:

Speaker A: //(Fr.) dapre (AA) mani nʃu:f tuma (Fr.) di itidiã (AA) hnæja fəl (Fr.) li ɛl lə//adv. that I see you(pl.)

Indef. N(pl.) here in def.(sg.) I.L.E.³

According to what I see, you are students here at the I.L.E.

Speaker B. //(Fr.) bjĩ su:r// adv. adj. Of course

Speaker A. //(Fr.) dā kæl departemã//

prep. in pron. which N(sg.) department. In which department?

Speaker B. //(Fr.) tɾɑduksjõ// N (sg.). Translation (dept.)

In example 2, both the last question and answer are in French. This is indicative of what we referred to

³ . I.L.E (Institut des Langues Etrangère).

earlier: the social context (university) dictates somehow the code to be used, although the whole process is of course unconsciously triggered in the speaker's mind. The sentence structure in this example is totally in French. In the first part of the talk, however, the string is based on the verb {nšu:f} 'I see' and it is constructed on an Algerian Arabic (henceforth AA) model (VSO) with inserted French (henceforth Fr.) forms such as {dapre, di itidiã, li ɛl lə}. We notice that under normal circumstances, the Fr. sentence would have required the predicate {vu zɛt} (Fr. vous êtes 'you are') to produce something like {vu zɛt de etydiã, ... li ɛl lə}⁴ 'you are students (at) the I.L.E.'. Yet, it is missing in the actual speech because we presume that the string has already got a main verb (the AA verb {nšu:f} 'I see') which becomes the functional verb of the sentence. Thus, although on distributional grounds, there are more Fr. morphemes in this string than AA ones, the principle stated above and according to which the language of the main verb and the functional morphemes that make up the internal structure of a string indicate the ML in that string, one can only recognise this string as characterised by AA as ML and Fr as EL. This, in fact, is a very

⁴ . Needless to say here that the French vowels [e] and sometimes [y] are often rendered [i] in AA even by speakers who have a sound mastery of French. This is mainly true in relaxed speech situations or when the interlocutor is of an arabic background. In our case, one must say that speakers A and B of the corpus are more Arabophones than Francophones. Thus, [etydiã] → [itidiã]

productive type of string in the corpus under investigation.

Example 3:

Speaker A. //vu zɑve de difikulte//

Fr. you vb. have Npl. difficulties

Do you have difficulties

Speaker B. //šwijja kimaki taʃʃarfi ʃæddna le modyl
bəzzæ:f//

AA. adj.. some expr. as you know pron. we vb. have Fr.
def. art. the Npl. modules adj. Many

Some, as you know we have many modules.

Speaker A: //(AA) u (Fr.) ʒɑva (AA) bəllæʃtu wəlla
wæ:lu//

and expr. is it allright vb. pl. did you(pl.) (lit.) close conj.
or neg. not

‘And is it allright, did you (close) (get all the modules) or
not.

Speaker B. //(Fr.) ʒɑva (AA) kəjən (Fr.)kælk zitidjā
(AA)lirahum mbellʃi:n//

expr. it’s allright. be 3rd pl. there are prep. some N-pl.
students pron. Who vb.-pl. are (lit.) closing

‘It’s allright. There are students who got all their
modules’

//(AA) kəjən limæzæ:lu jduχlu ləd (Fr.) de ɛ:s (AA)u
gæ:ʃ//

there are pron. who adv. still pron . they vb. pres. enter
(sit for) def. art. the DS and all
'There are some who still have to sit for the make up
session and so on'.

Example 3 illustrates a case where in the sentence produced by speaker B, //šwijja kimaki taʃʃarfi ʃæddna le modyl bəzzæ:f//, the embedded Fr. noun 'modules' is inserted with the Fr. def. (plural) article {le} to give {le modyl}. The same applies in fact for {le respõʒɑbl}, {le vakatɛ:r}, etc. in example 4 below. This is very frequent and seems to depend on the context where French appears likely to be used. The Fr. noun is generally preceded by this article {le} in the plural. We rarely hear something like {əl modilæ:t} which would be the AA construction for Fr. plurals as in {əl loʈowæ:t} 'the cars'. One notices that each time the noun is either a technical or a scientific one in Fr., the definite article {le} occurs instead of the more common {əl} of Arabic, e.g., {fug əl byru} 'on the desk' ; {lə} {lə de ɛ:s} 'the DS' (a make up exam).

Example 4:

Speaker A. //(AA) tgulu:li (Fr.) ženeralma la sitiasjõ
(AA)fəð (Fr.)departma (AA)ttæʃkum//

You(pl.) vb.tell obj.me adv.-generally def.-the N-fem-situation prep-in N-masc-department pl.-your

“Can you tell me, in general, the situation in your department?”

Speaker B. //(Fr.)bō (AA)hædi gæ:ʃ maʃi (Fr.)sitiasjō //

adv.-well dem.fem.-this adv.-all neg.-not N-fem.-situation

“Well, this is not a situation at all!”

Speaker B (contd.) //(Fr.)žə pã:s kə le respōʒɑbl (AA)

rahum sæ:mħin fina bəzzæ:f //

subj.-I vb.-think prep.-that def.pl.-the N-pl.-responsibles (staff) aux.be+ing pp. neglected prep.-in suf.pron.pl.-us adv. much “I think that the responsables (staff) are neglecting us a lot”

Speaker B (contd.) //(Fr.) surtu o nivo du program anujæl//

Adv. mainly prep.-at the Nsg.masc.-level prep.-of the Nsg.-program adj.-annual

“Mainly at the level of the yearly (annual) [teaching] program”

Speaker B (contd.) //(AA)raki ʃærfa ma ʃæddnæ:ʃ hətta

(Fr.)program a swivr//

subj. fem.-you- vb.-know neg. -no vb.-have pron.-we adv.-no Nsg.-program prep.-to inf. follow

“You know, we have no program to follow at all”

Speaker B (end) //(AA) zidi tæni bølli rahum iqarrona

bəzzæf (Fr.) le vakatɛ:r e tu ki nə sō pa kalifje pa

kōpeʈã// pron .fem you vb.-add prep.-also prep.-that

pron-they aux-be vb.teach + ing prep.-many def. pl.
 Npl.part-timers and adv.-all pron. –who neg.-not aux.-be
 pp.-qualified, neg.-not adj. competent “You add that
 there are lots of part-time teachers and so on who are not
 qualified, not competent”

This longer sample is characteristic of Algerian Arabic. At the supra-phrastic level, it is characterised by AA as the ML on the grounds that the internal structure of the sentences bears the main verb in AA {tgulu:li; rahum sə:mħin; ma ʃæddnæ:š, rahum iqarrona}. There are whole strings in French as in //vu zæve de difikulte//, which are inserted in the body of the text, but the bulk of the structures is in Arabic. French is the EL in this particular case because forms like {ženeralmä, la sitiasjō, departmä}, {bō, sitiasjō} etc. are more likely to be analysed as content words which are embedded in the otherwise AA structure. At discourse level, whole strings like {žə pā:s kə le respōsɔbl} {surtu o nivo du program anujæl} {program a swivr} {le vakatɛ:r e tu ki nə sō pa kalifje pa kōpeṭā} are totally in French and no content word as it were is embedded in these strings. In the case of // žə pā:s kə le respōsɔbl rahum sə:mħin fina bəzzæ:f//, the second part of the sentence that bears the predicate {rahum sə:mħin} represents the verb phrase of

the string in question. Therefore, it stands as the ML on the basis of the internal make-up of this string.

Example 5:

A. //(Fr.) es kə vu ... // //(AA)ʃændkum ʔuqo:q hnæ:ja
fəʒ ʒæ:miʃa//

be pres. prep. you... have you Npl. rights adv. here prep.
in def. art. the Nsg. university

Are you ... Have you got rights here at university?

B. //(AA)lʔuqo:q hnæja raki taʃʃarfi qeʃʃa ʔwe:la//

Def. art Npl. rights adv. here you (aux.)vb. know (is)
Nsg. story adj. fem. long.

Rights here, as you know, is a long story.

//(Fr.)swa dizā ð ne de zetudjā (AA)zæʃma ʃæddna
(Fr.)le drwa//

Fr.expr. soit disant (supposedly) Fr. 3rd indef. (on) we
aux.. are indef. art. pl. (des) N pl. students AA.expr. (that
is) verb. pres. have we (we have) Fr. def.art. pl. N pl.
rights

We are so called students, that is we have rights.

//(AA)bəʃʃəħ (Fr.)sur lə terrī ð na okū drwa
(AA)gæʃ//

AA expr. In fact Fr. adv. on def. art. the N sg. terrain (in
reality) 3rd. Indef. (on) we vb. pres. have neg. no Ns sg.
right prep. all (at all)

But in reality we have no rights at all.

//(Fr.) par egzāpl prənð legzāpl (AA)tæʃ (Fr.)le sal//

Fr. for example vb. let's take def. art. the N sg. example
adv. of def. art. pl. the N pl. rooms

For example, let's take the case of rooms.

//(AA)gæŋ əl ʔæ:m wəħna nahhadro ʔla (Fr.)le ʒɑ:l
(AA)mɛ ddæwhæ:ʃ gæ:ŋ fi:na//

AA. prep. all def. art. sg. the N sg. year prep. and we vb.
talk (claim) prep. on (about) def. art. pl. the N pl. rooms
neg. not vb. pres. consider prep. all adv. in us

We have been talking the whole year about rooms. They
didn't care about us (listen to us) at all.

//(Fr.)primjɛ:rmã (AA)ħna (Fr.)əʔtã... ɛʔtã done kə kom
de zetudjã de lã:g etrã:ʒɛ:r ã pɾĩsip (AA)ħna jku:nu
ʔæddna (Fr.) de laborɑʔwæ:r d fonetik (AA)u gæ:ŋ//

First of all, given that we are foreign language students,
in principle, we ought to have language laboratories for
phonetics etc.

//(AA) æjja mæ ʔæddnæʃ wə hdarna w mæddæwhæ:ʃ
gæ:ŋ fi:na//

prep. so neg. not vb. have pron.suff. we and vb. past. talk
pron. we and neg. not vb. pres. consider prep. all adv. in
us

So we have none and we talked and they didn't care
about us (listen to us) at all.

//(AA)ajja šaki lħaqq ɛttæŋna wirrah lħaqq hæda
wirrah//

prep. so what Nsg. right poss. pron. our prep. where
vb. 3rd. is pron. it Nsg. right this where vb. 3rd. is
So what ... Our right where is it, this right, where is it?

This example is characteristic of the native speaker who is carried away in the speech act and wants to stress on a particular point. It is also indicative of the speaker's mood. Clearly, speaker B is not happy with the situation. So most of his speech is in AA with whole Fr. strings which are embedded in the otherwise AA construction as in :

//(Fr.) swa dizã õ ne de zetudjã (AA)zæfma fæddna
(Fr.) le drwa//

//(Fr.) primjɛ:rmã (AA)ħna (Fr.)ətã... etã done kə kom
de zetudjã de lã:g etrã:žɛ:r ã prĩsip (AA)ħna jku:nu
fæddna (Fr.) de laborɑtwæ:r də fonetik (AA)u gæ:f//

In the above Fr. strings, AA verbs are embedded and they keep their original morphological shape as in {fæddna}, {jku:nu}. This is very productive in the dialect. Embedded Fr. verbs are often inflected according to AA rules, mainly when these verbs are tri-syllabic or more and belong to the first group (ending in –er) as in {jdirãzi} ‘he disturbs’, {tikspiki} ‘she explains’ (found in the corpus) but ‘jakul’ ‘he eats’ or {təlɣæb} ‘she

plays' that cannot be rendered *{imāʒi}⁵ or *{tʒui} respectively. Bi-syllabic Fr. verbs of the first group (bouger, changer, manger, dancier, etc.) are rarely inflected according to AA rules as in {buʒa (perfective); ibu:ʒi (imperfective)}, but not *māʒa / imāʒi (to eat), or *šāʒa / išāʒi (to change).

Embedded AA verbs, on the other hand, keep their morphological load and shape when French is the Matrix code. We also note that the last part of the speech in example 5 is almost exclusively in AA //(AA) æjja mə ʕæddnæʃ wə hdarna w məddæwhæ:ʃ gæ:ʕ fi:na// //(AA)ajja šaki lħaqq əttæʕna wirrah lħaqq hæda wirrah// which is probably due to the speaker's mood. This remains an assumption that needs further investigation.

This illustration of discourse free from any social constraint reveals at least two systems at work: AA with maximal doses and Fr. with minimal doses. This is indicative of the presence of a system (the ML code) and sub-systems (the EL code) that cohabit in speech. Whether this sample of language represents a continuum (of Arabic) or a typical case of code-switching, or even an example of a supposed continuum Arabic-French is not the purpose of this paper. Rather, we want to recall

⁵ . Incidentally, there are cases where the verb 'manger' (Fr) is inflected in expressions like 'ræɡda wa tmāʒI' (fem.sing) meaning 'leading a carefree life'.

that it would be regrettable to consider such a 'state of language' as an exception to the rule(s) of bilingualism and code-switching and consider is outside the scope of linguistic questioning. It represents in fact aspects of the dynamics of language use in Algeria. A thorough analysis of this form of speech will no doubt demonstrate that it represents an organised speech in the Algerian context in that there exists a minimum agreement and understanding between the speaker and the hearer on this issue at stake.

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