

A Glance at the Position of Colloquial Forms in Education along Sociolinguistic Realities in Algeria

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Abstract

One of the main concerns of sociolinguistics is to study language in the society from different corners and in its different aspects. In the present paper, it is associated to another science, which is translation. The study will be then approached from a sociolinguistic point of view in talking about translation recommendations. Respectively, a description of the sociolinguistic situation in Algeria has been explored and described with a former intention of discussing the languages proposed for a translation purpose in Algerian higher education. The study tries to integrate, within its propositions, the colloquial codes used among Algerians for communication in daily speech. As already noticed in the designed programmes of translation, the languages serving translation are three: Standard Arabic, French, and English. Only to some extent do all of them achieve some functions in the society. As for Standard Arabic, the function is fundamentally transmitted through writings, while the spoken form remains a medium of interaction in some formal situations. However, French has been maintained for historical reasons, nowadays extended to scientific purposes. The third language is English: it is taught at schools and universities to serve contemporary needs in science and technology.

Key Words: Language, Education, Multilingualism, Translation, Sociolinguistics

Résumé

Dans son objectif principal, la sociolinguistique étudie la langue et son usage dans la société. Cette approche a été développée dans le présent article pour être associée à une autre science qui est la traduction. Cette étude introduit la réalité de la situation sociolinguistique en Algérie, qui en parallèle ne trouve pas son reflet ni ses racines de continuité dans l'éducation. Cette dernière s'est contentée des trois langues, dites principales, qui sont : l'arabe, le français et l'anglais pour enseigner la traduction et former des traducteurs.

Mots Clefs: langue, éducation, multilinguisme, traduction, sociolinguistique

1. The Sociolinguistic Situation in Algeria

Language in Algeria is one of the various subjects causing paradoxical views and relationships between the members of the Algerian speech community. This community distinguishes a variety of social groups in respect to their use of different vernaculars and to their attitudes towards different languages and linguistic forms. In this sense, language may be regarded as a salient characteristic of an ethnic identity group, a group which within the Algerian context will develop some values that are regarded as forming the most fundamental components of its culture. All arabophones, francophones, and berberophones in Algeria can be identified as distinctive cultural entities. Each group stresses language as the main carrier of its culture and the expression of its identity; even though, there are linguistic variations between and within these groups.

In a multilingual speech community like Algeria, a whole range of languages in a verbal repertoire is available to speakers. Gumperz (1968) clarifies the components of the linguistic repertoire and says that: “[Verbal repertoire refers to] the range of dialects, registers and styles typical of a unilingual community of speakers where the choice of one variety over another can have the same social significance as code selection in a multilingual community.”^[1]

Hence, for a typical Arabic-educated Algerian, a common speech repertoire might include: his mother tongue (Algerian Arabic), some French, some formal Arabic; each language or variety is arranged in a linear polyglossic ^[2] distribution. This situation may present a new variety in Arabic that has been defined by some linguists as Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA). Other interesting situations can be found in the sphere of linguistic variations in the Algerian context with typical French-educated Algerians, or with uneducated persons, and other cases including Berber speaking individuals.

Further, variations within Algerian vernaculars help us distinguish between rural and urban dialects in relation to different geographical locations; the difference between the two varieties is often based on some phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic features, which are specific connotations for particular groups. An example of how a multilingual speaker (French-educated Algerian) in Algeria might use the different codes in his repertoire: he uses French for greeting his children and wife in the morning; he goes to work in an administration, where he uses a mixture of French (spoken) and Standard Arabic (written); he leaves for the market and finds it compulsory to use Algerian Arabic (rural /urban /or maybe a mixture) with the shopkeeper.

From these facts, we can say that Algerian speakers classify languages and varieties of language in the following ways: languages of identity, languages of cross-communication and others of culture. In a wider domain, we can distinguish gender and age differences under the same classification.

Moreover, languages in Algeria can be seen in the perspective of two domains, the written and the spoken. Within the written domain, French and Standard Arabic compete against each other. The Arabicization law aims at eradicating the French language from the

public domain. However, and with the globalization process, French is a path towards modernization and scientific extension.

The spoken varieties that compete with each other are not only Arabic and Berber dialects, but also French in response to social needs; hence, when two or more languages and/or varieties of language are complementarily distributed to fulfil a myriad of functions in respect to different social contexts, people may find themselves using one /two or all these linguistic forms simultaneously in a course of interaction. The situation is consequently one of language contact, which may result in a set of sociolinguistic phenomena, like code switching, diglossia, code mixing,...etc. Borrowing is widespread as there is exist of constant interferences and shifts from one language or variety to another.

However, not all Algerians are multilingual; we may find bilingual Algerians, either. A large percentage has knowledge of at least one spoken dialect, some French, and / or Standard Arabic, and studies cannot define how many are monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual. Arabic and Berber vernaculars are not mutually intelligible. However, many Berbers are familiar with an Arabic dialect in addition to their own vernacular, though the same does not necessarily apply to Arabic speakers.

One may predict that there is a favourable switch from Berber to Arabic, as Berber speakers are minority groups in comparison to Arabic ones, and that there is often a preference towards the use of French. But Standard Arabic remains the official language that Algerians ought to respect and use in major formal situations for spoken and written purposes.

Here is a figure of the existing varieties of both spoken and written languages in Algeria. For the purposes of this paper, we will make the simple and popular distinction between ‘Modern Standard Arabic’, meaning the written, standardised form, and ‘Dialectal.’

Arabic, the spoken, non-standardised form is another layer of diglossia (fitting Ferguson’s original 1959 definition), which exists, with Classical Arabic the High ‘H’ variety, used for religion, education and all official, written functions, and dialectal Arabic acting as the Low ‘L’ variety for all informal and spoken contexts. The sociolinguistic situation is, thus, already complex with layers of bilingualism and diglossia, and it has become even more complex during the twentieth century when the French language was recognized in a diglossic situation used as the ‘H’ variety in parallel to vernaculars, which represent ‘L’ varieties.

In a stable diglossia, a multilingual community maintains its different languages by reserving each of them for certain domains, roles and functions with some encroachment of one language upon the domains, roles, and functions of another. This maintenance depends upon stable relations between the groups of the community. However, when these relations change, and one group begins to assimilate to another, language maintenance starts to break.

Hence, some features of non- stable diglossic situations lie in the educated speakers’ use of dialectal forms in formal settings, as it is often the case of Algerian media. The linguistic situation in Algeria has developed other sociolinguistic phenomena, generally considered as

signs of incompetence in one or more languages, like code switching, code mixing, and borrowing.

Code switching in Algeria, and in respect to some definitions, mainly the one given by Gumperz, may be easily detected in a course of interaction between bilingual speakers using both Arabic and French, or Berber and French, or Berber and Arabic. Bloom and Gumperz (1972) distinguished between “situational code switching”, where speakers switch to another language when there is a change of topic or situation, and “conversational code switching,” which may come out of necessity of conversation to communicate ideas, without any change in the topic or situation. There is a continuum between code switching and code mixing. Code mixing is largely found in Algerian linguistic situations; it can express lack of competence in the base language, such as lexical items, and in this case, code mixing can compensate for this deficiency. However, as for code switching, code mixing can be a bilingual’s specific code, which enables him to express attitudes, intentions, roles, and to identify with a particular group. In a code mixing situation, bilingual speakers in the same languages transfer elements or rules of other language at all linguistic levels. For example, when someone says: /lportabl rah jvibri/ (The mobile is vibrating), is a sentence where code mixing is apparent in the linguistic adaptation of French words (*portable*) and (*vibrer*) to an Arabic grammatical rule and morphology. Hence, /jvibri/ is a verb conjugated in a present tense, a tense which in MSA is identified by a prefix inflexion starting with /j/, and suffix inflection ending with /u/, or /i:/ as it is the case for this example, while the stem is a French word. The word /portabl/ is a French word whose lexical structure has been adapted to an Arabic linguistic one, in adding to the /l/ which is used as a definite article in Arabic. If there was no linguistic adaptation of foreign words to the base language, these words would be considered as loans, or borrowed words, which might not have equivalents in the base language, or they are simply ignored by the speaker.

2. Translating for Algerians in Multilingual Algeria

Along this sociolinguistic description, Algerian education has been submitted to a range of linguistic needs, which installs the teaching and the learning of translation in response to academic, economic and social needs within the Algerian society. In contrast, within the programme traced for the teaching of this discipline, the languages that constitute the translation paradigm are mainly Standard forms of Arabic, French and lately Tamazight with no mere consideration of local or colloquial varieties of each form. The situation will necessitate the clarification of the function of translation and its delimitation to academic infrastructures. Simultaneously, the sociolinguistic situation will be explored in this regard for understanding translation values in a multilingual context, to mean widely the democratisation of educational programmes as one of the important facets of social acceptance and recognition.

3. Defining Translation

Translation is an activity that engages linguistic and cultural parameters in mediating nations using different languages for the aim of transferring messages and clarifying important ideas. The word science can refer to this activity as it has been assigned a typical attention in the

world of research. This science is also a discipline as it represents a particular area of study provided with a set of academic parameters used for its teaching.

Many authors consider it as a *phenomenon*, which might have different descriptions. Basil Hatim and Jeremy Munday are among these authors. They use the words: *process of transfer*, *the written product*, and *the cognitive linguistic, visual, cultural and ideological phenomena*^[3] in defining the ambit of translation.

In the present work, all definitions will be maintained and used in different manners as each one represents an integral part of the social context of translation.

4. The Academic Prescription for the Teaching of Translation

In Algeria, the training of translation students is submitted to a programme, which is fundamentally based on the learning of languages in isolation. These are: Standard Arabic(L1), French(L2), and English(L3). Simultaneously, the students should have acquired some methodological guidelines for the translation process that makes use of the linguistic and cultural knowledge they already possess. However, the main idea of the present paper is to understand the position of colloquial codes in the translation discipline. The background of the scientific existence of translation, as a module or as a functional attribute, makes use of three linguistic codes, which despite of their sociolinguistic value, remain ideologically limited to specific situations, that do not widely serve all the social contemporary needs that shape homogeneity in the Algerian society.

4.1 Translating from Colloquial L1 to L2

Far from dealing with interpretation, translation of L1 spoken or written forms to L2 must benefit of an elaborated academic value that permits an associated linguistic and cultural correspondence between the two forms. Accordingly, what we may call the public voice, the public opinion, the public tradition,... etc., will find its linguistic equivalence and definition, hence its place in the language of the others. The situation will probably be extended to understanding the social attributes of Algerians as inspired from their real context. In other words, the translation of social situations from Standard L1 to French does not reflect the ideology of the society in its real conception.

In this respect, the public word may be found in proverbs, poems, graffiti, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, Viber, Skype,...etc., and may represent a variety of gender, age, and social categories with different attitudes and opinions. Beside, the elaboration of a translation programme from colloquial L1 to L2 will provide Algerian emigrants, who may not possess a linguistic background in L1 with a vocabulary that permits their conceptual integration in the Algerian culture. The translation from colloquial L1 under this situation might not need a teaching programme in the sake of its understanding; however, to ensure linguistic scrutiny within words and syntactic structures, hence discourses, the teaching of this variety will be considered from a structural corner to a cultural one.

4.2 Translating from L2 to Colloquial L1

In reverse to the previous direction of translating, the present one will aim at generalizing information to the public context. One of the prominent correspondence between L1 and L2 is to translate between the formal writings about or in administration, education, media,

literature, scientific works,... etc. The situation might have implicated a limited rank of reading actors composed of intellectuals and literate persons. However, as mentioned before in this paper, there exists a group of Algerian citizens, who might not understand L2.

In this respect, the teaching of translation will focus on transforming information from a culturally different nation, though some religious margins need to be taken into consideration in the selection of some source texts; however, the translation task will have, as purpose, the fulfillment of the needs of the target community. Therefore, texts and games reserved for children, recipes, health information, psychological orientations, leaflets, labels,...etc., come under the selection of texts reserved for translation from L2 to colloquial L1.

Translation from and to colloquial forms will come under sociolinguistic perspectives that count for the transcription of dialects for informational purposes. However, other dimensions will evolve under the same project, as to support the fighting against ignorance in Algeria and the valorisation of public opinion. The revision of identity among the population will come under the lines of this project when an academic attention is assigned to the promotion of colloquial forms when installed in the programme as a medium of intercultural relationships.

Moreover, and in reference to the translation of texts, there exist a set of research excerpts in the two kinds of translation; nonetheless, their main objective has rather been descriptive than informative. For instance, in some research works in translation, studies focus on methodologies and methods of translating if not on criticizing translation. Though this attempt remains scientific, working on translation as a functional medium is one of the fundamental projects taking its roots from social needs and realities.

On another hand, some dictionaries have shown an interesting attempt towards the translation of words from and to colloquial L1. People in need may make use of this product in different situations and for different purposes. However, the attempt of the present article is to stress the importance and the necessity of translating whole texts and discourses that can be read or listened to in the aim of widening information.

Conclusion

The sociolinguistic situation in Algeria is, at the time, complicated for its heterogeneity and interest for scientific creativity. Translation, in this context, may be considered as a discipline, whose main agents are languages or varieties of language. Its main approach may seem purely linguistic; however, researches, in the field, have revealed the multidisciplinary aspect of this science. All what surrounds language concerns society. The latter deals with individuals as members of groups; each one is characterized with personal and psychological features, the whole living in a sphere of economic and material subsistence.

Notes:

[1] quoted in Hamers and Blanc(2000:292).

[2] Fergusson(1959) originally developed the concept of diglossia to describe two functional varieties within a single language , one of which called the High(H) variety is reserved for

formal functions and is formally learned, the other the Low(L) variety is used in informal situations.

[3] Quoted in Basil Hatim and Jeremy Munday (2004, 6).

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