

Languages' Interaction in Algeria: Dialectical Text and French Graphic

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Abstract

Algeria is one of those countries where multilingualism underwent developmental states from simple contact of languages to an integrative code where two components from different languages combine linguistically in a significant linguistic system. This linguistic integration, though not so complete as in natural languages, is seen where two codes come into an intensive contact and their users show the inability to use them independently. However, such integration is partial and occurs at only some levels. Thus, multilingualism developed into multiculturalism and later into a monolingual code referred to here as “the integrative code”. The written form of texts expressed in the French language recognizes the influence of the spoken form of the Arabic language and altogether expressed only at the written level mainly for two reasons: (1) In the written texts, there is more space to reveal this unconscious integration because in the spoken form speakers' social conventions may not accept this integration to occur, and (2) the semantic form results from French lexis combined with Arabic meaning and together express an Algerian Arabic meaning. The present paper aims at exploring the notion of integrating independent elements from independent languages in one code addressed to users of only one language of the two. Written French is integrated with spoken Algerian Arabic resulting in an integrative code yet meaningful to Algerian readers and not the French ones due to the semantic restrictions of the integrated meaning.

Keywords: integrated code, multilingualism, multiculturalism, dialectical meaning.

1. Introduction

Algeria is one of those countries where multilingualism underwent developmental states due to different reactions to the phenomenon of language contact. Most interesting and worth studying is “the monolingual start” and “the monolingual end”: the country started to be monolingual before the entrance of the French colonizer but with intensive sociolinguistic contact with the French language, it becomes multicultural and multilingual using a code which combines the two languages in what is termed in the present research as “The return to monolingualism”. The French colonialism left remarkable effects both at the linguistic and cultural levels leading all to a combinatory aspect of both languages not only as a spoken code-switching but also at the written level where a code penetrates another and reshapes it. The present paper interrogates upon the developmental state of multilingualism in Algeria in terms of two main questions: (1) how languages developed from a general contact to a monolingual or unified code? and (2) How one linguistic system integrates into another and together form one code.

2. A historical overview

The history of Algeria noticed innumerable invaders who left their languages behind them, but the languages that survived through the winds of time are Berber, Arabic and French. The following sections present three main periods defining the linguistic situation in Algeria.

2.1 *Monolingual Algeria*

For a long time Algeria was monolingual using the Arabic language. The latter was over spread due to the maintenance of Islam in the great Maghreb. This process was associated with the Arabization of the country, bringing about 'a desired social change and cognitive emotional reorganization represented in the distribution of new skills and statuses related to literacy' (Fishman, 1971: 358-359). The Arabization and Islamization of the Maghreb unified the Algerian nation in the adoption of Arabism. This radical change led Algerians to adopt the Arabic language because of its richness and unique characteristics. Ferguson (1968) in his article "Myths about Arabic" says:

Another feature of the superiority of Arabic which is felt by its native speakers, and often by those whose native language is not Arabic (e.g. Persian speakers), is its grammatical symmetry and logical structure. A real pride is felt in the root-and-patterns system and especially in the derived forms of the verb with the semantic ramification of their formal differences, and in the ability of Arabic to provide just the right word for any concept, abstract or concrete (Ferguson, 1968: 376-377).

The Arabic used by Algerians differs a great deal from the one of the Arabic peninsula. Algerians had been exposed to different linguistic interactions with other languages resulting in the use of a dialectical language lacking the structural stability of Classical Arabic. In that, three varieties are identified: (1) Classical Arabic, (2) Modern Standard Arabic, and (3) Algerian dialectical Arabic. The coming of Islam was associated with the emergence of Classical Arabic. The latter is highly structured, and its use is restricted to religious activities. Modern Standard Arabic is one of the most used varieties of Arabic in Algeria. Cowan defines it as "*that form of Arabic used in practically all writing (forms) of Arabic and the form used in formal spoken discourse such as news broadcasts speeches, sermons and the like.*" (as cited in Ibrahimi, 1997: 30). This variety is frequently used in less formal situations, if compared with Classical Arabic. It has the privilege of being understood by the majority of Algerians.

Algerian Arabic is a spoken variety used almost continuously in Algeria. It includes regional, urban, and rural varieties, as means of communication among speakers of different speech communities. Algerian Arabic covers many terminologies such as "e Maghrebi", "Darija", and Dialectal Arabic.

2.2 *Arabic-French bilingual Algeria*

The long stay of France changed the linguistic geography of the whole country. Such a shift dated back to early times of colonization where the strategy was the domination of the Algerian nation through the domination of its language. Therefore, Algerians found themselves obliged to speak the French language, one time to compel obedience to the French authorities, and another time to join schools. In the 1940's, Algerians adopted the French language, and they reacted either by 'acculturation' or 'enculturation'.

In earlier times of colonization (1900), the linguistic situation of languages in Algeria was a contact of separate codes with the independent proficiency and use of each language. Arabic and French came together in simple code switching whether in simple words or in long items. But

this mixing was not frequent especially in formal usages because it was a time of early contact and social interaction between the two codes was very low.

2.3 Bicultural Algeria

A category of Algerians who were attached to the Arabic language acculturated, i.e. got away from the French language by adopting social distance. However, those who wanted to assimilate and integrate into this language learnt it and enculturated. Fitoury (1983) says in this respect:

We can say that the actual situation in Tunisia, as in the two other countries of the Maghreb, sets off acculturation rather than contact of cultures (...) this is to mark the difference that exists between the contacts implying a real exchange and the imposed contacts, which look for assimilation (Fitoury, 1983: 33).

Algerians' reaction to the French language was not due to the contact with French people but it was rather a contact of cultures. This situation led to a social interaction between the two languages though the colonizer left in early 60s. The 80 and 90's generations were less proficient in the French language but with a high tendency for its use.

Though the cultural factor was imposed, it could maintain the linguistic presence of the colonizer. Therefore, the presence of the French language in Algeria emerged with the appearance of the French colonizer and should normally disappear with its disappearance (Ibrahimi, 1997). But this fact was denied by Algerians' attachment to the French language. A century of the co-existence of Arabic and French led to the development and maintenance of the French language inside the linguistic community as a whole. More than one hundred and fifty years of the co-existence of these languages led inevitably to bilingualism.

3. Integration of the two languages

After the independence in 1962, the French language continued to dominate the Algerian linguistic atmosphere though the country's policy was rather for maintaining the Arabic language in education and formal uses. The result of this multiculturalism is the integration of the two languages at two levels: spoken code switching and bilingual writings. At the spoken level bilinguals use frequently a code switching for social mobility and in accordance with their Arabic dialects. Examples are:

Table 01. Illustrations of code-switching in Algeria

Code-switching	Interpretation into French
Ma trakroǧǧif.	Ne raccroches pas.
Propozit el wasmah.	J'ai proposé le truc.
Konvokinek beh ndiru l'anniverser anta3 bentek.	Nous t'avons convoqué pour faire l'anniversaire de ta fille.

(Ibrahimi, 1997: 117)

These sentences indicate the interdependence of the Arabic and French languages. Code switchers have a facility to switch between sentences and words. As Haugen (1979) says, individual speakers who use two languages can produce a "clean switching" that requires a clear code marking of each rule and each lexeme that is stored in the speakers' memory (78). Table 2 shows that the grammatical categories of Arabic go hand in hand with those of French. In this respect, Ibrahimi (1997) comments:

We see how the elements of the French language are mixed with the elements of the Arabic language: we can even say that they are integrated into the system of the language. The French verbs are conjugated in the same way as the Arabic verbs (1997: 117).

This interdependence remains at the spoken level because in writing the two languages kept independent as the written language was either Arabic or French. In fact, this situation lacked formality because all documents were authorized in the Arabic language and if French is used it is a pure French. However, the lack of mobility in the written word was not general since Algerian literature had a space to bring the two languages together in integrative form.

3.1 *The integrative code*

The written form of texts expressed in the French language recognizes the influence of the spoken form of the Arabic language for two main reasons:

(1) In the written texts, there is more space to reveal this unconscious integration because in the spoken form speakers' social conventions may not accept this integration to occur.

(2) The semantic form results from French lexis combined with Arabic meaning and together express an Algerian Arabic meaning.

Besides, writers who are proficient bilinguals have more capacity to combine the two languages:

Monolingual and monodialectal speakers who do not have a clear sense of different codes in the community repertoire are currently said to shift between styles. Bilingual (or multilingual) speakers, speakers from diglossic communities, and bidialectal speakers on the other hand have access to community repertoire which are perceived (and usually named) as different languages or as different dialects of the same language, and such speakers are said to switch between codes (Milroy, Matthew & Matthew, 2003: 198).

The history of multilingual novels is short and it is almost rare that literary writings appear with multiple codes. If these exist, it is with slight code switching that does not affect the text's standard form. Multidialectal codes are rather frequent as the switch to another code of the same linguistic nature does not affect the main text. The resulting monolingual code refers to a Standard language, a French text, influenced by an Algerian Dialectical Arabic, which is linguistically different from it. Both codes exist in an intensive interactional repertoire. It is more than bringing elements from the dialectical speech but rather rendering the whole text semantically dialectical while its external form is realised with a speechless lexis (French). In other words, a grammatical system penetrates another and the whole becomes an integration of elements from both codes. But the integrated code is not arbitrary because it results from a high proficiency in the French language (Kateb, 1966) enabling the writer to insert meaning from Arabic and take off the French one.

The two languages come together in a one linguistic item which ranges from a single word to an utterance with two levels; the surface is French the underlying form is Arabic. It is, thus, a code combining the semantic component from the Algerian dialect and the lexicographic form from the French language. With such a form the French text becomes an instrument for the writer to insert a language and its meaning. This type of texts is written the most by those writers who write in the French language but proclaim the Algerian culture through their writings. When the writer is fully enculturated to the Arabic culture, he/she makes use of the dialectical items from his Arabic language. By contrast, French Algerian writers with partial enculturation write about cultural images but do not allow the text's purity. The following texts illustrate more:

*Dépliant leurs roues émeraude, affichant premiers et bracelets d'époque, effaces ou cancanières, les Mauresques occupent la totalité de mon salon. Je ne croyons pas ma famille si nombreuse, nièces, tantes, cousins, grand-tantes, plus petites tantes, mères, belles-mères, grand-mères, belles-mères, grand-mères, habilleuses, maquilleuse, musiciennes, mangeuses, voyageuses, pleureuses, toute la palette féminine de l'est, de l'ouest, du nord et du sud d'Alger est réunie en mon honneur. Quel honneur! lèvres timides et bouches gourmandes, ventres gras et côtelés, un orchestre désaccordé joue la symphonie bien connue de la basse-cour en folie! les mâchoires claquent dans l'air trop parfumé tandis que les plus vieilles Sarrasines, accrochées aux murs comme des anciennes tentures ressorties pour la fête, tapent dans leurs main pleines de corne et de souvenir». (**Bouraoui**, *Voyeuse interdite*: 25)*

*Je n'ai pas, cependant, les réduire longtemps au silence, ni changer le fond de l'affaire. Pour eux, je m'étais conduit comme un égoïste et un sot. Je ne pouvais même pas les condamner entièrement. Lorsque, pour la première fois, ma mère me demanda avec une moue d'enfant gâtée, de lui payer une paire de chaussures, il me fut pénible de refuser. (**Memmi**, *Agar*: 72)*

*Ah! Pauv'petite, je t'en dirai que j'ai entendu : il paraît que oui. Ca s'appelle l'Algérie, c'est au nord de l'Afrique, qu'ils disent! Moi, tu sais, je suis pas assez instruite pour t'en dire beaucoup. (**Raspail**, *La Chaouia d'Auvergne*: 4)*

*(...) Il restera sans bouger? Devant la mer, personne ne lui fêtera ce jour, on n'a jamais fêté les « jours de naissances » chez lui, sa grand-mère lui expliquait autrefois : « pas parce que les Français seuls font de l'anniversaire une fête, non, - alors, pourquoi ? demandait l'enfant. –Que le prophète nous protège, ajoutait la voix des autres femmes, parce que cela porte malheur!» (**Djebar**, *Disparition de la langue Française*: 15)*

*Il faut dire qu'il n'y a pas de bouchers chez nous. Lorsque le fellah se mêle de débiter les quartiers de bœuf, il se livre à un carnage sans pareil, à croire qu'il retrouve, au tréfonds de lui-même, l'instinct sanguinaire des premiers hommes. (**Feraoun**, *Jours de Kabylie*: 50)*

*Je n'aime pas l'école coranique, et surtout je hais la rue où elle se situe; elle sent le linge bouilli et les saucisses grillées au feu de charbon, celles que l'on fait, selon les tantes, avec les boyaux de chats (gamin, j'en mangeais exprès, pour avoir l'âme d'un chat et ne pas mourir, puisque ma mère répétait tout le temps que les chats ont sept âmes). (**Boudjedra**, *La Répudiation*: 94)*

It is usually the case that writers bring cultural images in the text. But they keep the two codes separate in the direction of a French style. The first, second and third texts depict cultural images in a pure French language because the writer writes about them as commentators not implied in this culture. This is not the case of the fourth, fifth and sixth texts which are written within the local culture and aim at bringing this culture within the French text to the extent that Arabic words substitute French words (e.g. Fellah), and put on purpose to communicate the Arabic meaning. Other interesting examples taken Boudejraa's texts (*La Répudiation*) with similar purposes are:

- (1) *Le taleb est un vieil homme;*
- (2) *Gros commerçants;*
- (3) *Est-ce que tu veux me tuer avec de l'eau froide?*

The word “taleb” has the equivalent “magician”. The writer could use the French word “magicien” but the meaning may not be the same as it would refer just to a simple magician. The writer wants rather to communicate a dialectical meaning carrying cultural differences with the French meaning. The same thing for “gros commerçants” which is not used to mean “fat merchant” but rather “dishonest merchant”. The last example has meaning taken from a common local

meaning very much used to refer to behaving indifferently to somebody's action and not killing with cold water.

3.2 Motivation behind the integrative code

Algerian literature expressed in the French language proclaims its identity by several effective means to become significant and distinct (Eamon, 2005). The integrative code, one of these means, reveals writers' bicultural state which comes out of a deliberate choice of merging the two languages together. The reasons for that are purely cultural because the integrative code appears the most in enculturated writings. Writers write for a specific reader who is Algerian using dialectical Arabic because they want to raise the truth that Algeria is a country using dialectical Arabic which is an advantageous code providing its speakers with the facility of usage; and, also, the fact that Algerian literature should make a transition from writing in the French language to dialectical Arabic. This is summarized in the Boudjedra's words:

... This literature of French graphic has no future. It is temporary and doomed historically to disappear in favor of a literature written in the more flexible and modern Arabic. I am even more aware that I intend to publish shortly, a novel written in Arabic. This is where the future lies and not elsewhere. We must be lucid. So why continue to write in French? Because the writer is maghrebin and makes part of his society which is full of contradictions at all levels especially at the level of language (Interview by Salim Jay, 1976).

Hence, the interest in such writings lies in two main reasons, the writer's command of language and his play-with. Algerian writers like Mouloude Feraoun, Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar, Rachid Boudjedra and others produced texts not to distinguish from their counterparts in the French language due to a peculiarity created from the linguistic dominance on the French language and the sociocultural depicted values. The values added to these texts, and which make the difference with other native texts, are a set of aspects accompanying the text.

4. Conclusion

In unstable multilingual settings, the use of languages, whether spoken or written, undergoes developmental stages and makes it difficult to predict future usages and set its dimensions. In that, multilingualism becomes an instrument for setting objects despite the independence between languages as very different languages can come together in an integrated code because this has already been instantiated in the social use and its written form is no more than recognition of the social integration. The integrative code is concretely formed of one language or one form, a fact that indicates the full integration in a monolingual code which is intelligible to the Algerian Arabic reader and not the French one because after all this code is constructed for the Algerian reader to whom the French graphic is readable more than the Arabic one.

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