

Sprache, Mehrsprachigkeit und sozialer Wandel

Herausgegeben von Jürgen Erfurt

Band 14

Foued Laroussi (ed.)

Code-Switching, Languages in Contact and Electronic Writings



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Forewords

Most mornings when I come into my office, the first thing I do is to switch on the computer and check incoming emails. On a typical day, I would receive messages from the Far East, from North America, from Australia and from Europe. These messages make me feel that I am in touch with the world. On the odd days when the college computer system is shut down for maintenance, or there is a genuine problem with the computer, I feel lost. I would go to the departmental office and speak to other colleagues, who would look similarly at a loss as to what to do. We are all so dependent on Internet and electronic communications; we can't live or work without them anymore. We depend on the Internet and other electronic resources for information, often as both the first and the last resort.

Internet and electronic communications do not simply mean new tools for exchanging information, but new ways to communicate with people. They add a powerful new channel that changes the way we interact with other people and impacts on the relationships we build with others. For example, they allow us to combine different media – text, graphics, sound, video, etc. – into a single message. That can result in far more meaningful communications tailored to the nature of one's particular audience. Internet and electronic communications are increasingly interactive, engaging the participants in active, two-way communications. They create a new sense of closeness and relatedness, and enhance the notion of a global village. They also challenge the conventional power relationships. Individuals can feel a sense of control when they find direct access to the information they want and communicate with others instantly. They can also overcome barriers and find alternative ways of getting any information over to specific audiences. Communities and groups can be formed spontaneously through Internet and electronic communications. Public opinions can be influenced through these means. We can travel across the global on the information highway without moving an inch physically.

There is another important feature of the new Internet and electronic communication, that is, they are multilingual. There are websites in many different languages, and people communicate electronically in different languages. New words, phrases and symbols are also created specifically for electronic use. This volume gathers together a selection of fascinating studies of multilingual com-

munications in Internet and electronic means. As the Editor says in his Introduction, the studies not only report a wide range of empirical data, but also challenge the standard theories of language and communication. How do we conceptualise a word, a sentence, or even a language? Are the traditional definitions of these concepts adequate or appropriate for the study of electronic communication when what is produced is not only multilingual but also multimodal? Even the once creative and original notion of code-switching seems somewhat inadequate in the present case. But the articles in the present volume go way beyond a purely theoretical discussion of linguistic structures. They address complex and important questions regarding identities, power, ideology, and social change. The contexts that are dealt with in the studies range from migration to business, and a whole variety of languages and communication channels are included.

So in more than one sense, this volume is groundbreaking: it documents innovative studies of the creative use of multilingual resources via new multimodal communication technologies; it challenges received wisdom about linguistic structures and human communication; it raises new questions at the heart of globalization; and it charts a new territory for future research in bilingualism and multilingualism.

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FOUED LAROUSSI

Introduction

“Sometimes I’ll start a sentence in Spanish y termino en español...”. In 1980 this was the title Shana Poplack gave an article in which she set out to produce a typology of code-switching.

This example is one amongst many that show the extent of the interest the study of the phenomenon has held for scholars over the second half of the last century. However, taking account of the complexity of the phenomenon, researchers have sometimes been obliged to restrict themselves to very general criteria according to which code-switching is used, in a given linguistic community, when most of its members use more than one linguistic variety in a single conversation and each variety retains its own structures. Code-switching is generally defined as the use of two linguistic varieties in a single conversation or interaction.

Researchers have also distinguished between different types of code-switching. John J. Gumperz (1982), who has looked at this phenomenon in his research in areas ranging from India or the Slovenian-speaking part of Austria, makes a distinction between “situational code-switching” where distinct varieties are associated with distinct activities and situations and “conversational code-switching” which occurs less consciously, more automatically and with no change of interlocutor or subject in the same interaction. “Conversational code-switching” is sometimes regarded as “metaphorical code-switching”: in other words, when, in a single conversation, a speaker uses an utterance from language B in language A which could evoke associations with language B and which in this way change the connotations of the conversation.

The aim of this book is not to revisit work done on code-switching as a verbal or conversational strategy but to discuss code-switching in electronic writing. That said, we shall simply look at a few points to clarify the ensuing debate for the reader.

“Switch” in “code-switching” carries the sense of sudden or abrupt change. So it is that it can refer both to the action of changing, i.e. the intellectual and neuropsychological process involved, and to the result of the change, or indeed the

several changes, the frequent to-ing and fro-ing between the different languages used in a single interaction.

These two possible meanings of code-switching correspond to two different approaches: one involves psycholinguistic studies, the other sociolinguistic and indeed linguistic approaches.

1) psycholinguistic approaches have in the main adopted a definition of code-switching inspired by the use of “switch on/off” in an electrical context, the mental process whereby a bilingual person moves from one language to the other. I shall say no more on these approaches.

2) sociolinguistic approaches also have different concepts of code-switching according to whether the “socio” or the “linguistic” aspect carries more weight. But both approaches have a lesser tendency than those of psycholinguists to regard it as a phenomenon in isolation from other linguistic factors.

While sociolinguistic studies have explained use of code-switching by conversational, discursive and situational factors, linguistic studies have over time shown its systematic nature, at the lexico-semantic, grammatical and functional level (cf. my own contribution here).

Whether complementary or contradictory, these approaches are in agreement on the complexity of code-switching and its multidimensional nature and do not advocate any exclusive type of study. While there has been much work of this kind, it has focussed mainly on the analysis of oral productions.

What is the position with regard to writing, and more specifically electronic writing? Are the theoretical tools that have been used for analysing oral productions relevant for the analysis of code-switching in electronic writing? Are the same theories to be used to understand code-switching in electronic writing? How useful can the analysis of this new method of remote communication when revisiting the theories pressed into service for analysing oral productions? However complex they may be, these questions do not set the limits of a problem which strikes us as highly complex, but rather open up a debate.

For many studying this field, the Internet has radically changed our way of communicating: besides the speed of transmitting information, the elimination of distances, bringing together people separated by geography, it helps create virtual or imagined communities, which seek to structure themselves by asserting shared identities through the setting up of virtual social networks. Then there is the boom in mobile phones over recent years especially in the developing countries: in 2010, it is estimated that there are 4 billion mobile phones in use across the world.

In this collection dealing with code-switching situations (forums, texts, blogs, etc) in electronic writing we have attempted to give answers to the following major question: when multilingual writers who belong to social networks, virtual or otherwise, have to communicate among themselves in one or more common languages, what happens? That is why we have looked at code-switching both in CMCs (Computer-Mediated Communications) and in mobile phone use. Given the constraints inherent in both types of communication (screen, space, cost, etc),

the written productions they give rise to do not show the same features and therefore do not call for the same treatment.

Dora Carpenter-Latiri looks at the Harissa.com website, catering for Jews of Tunisian descent who were at one time a large religious community in the country. After independence (1956) and successive Arab-Israeli conflicts, most Tunisian Jews left the country and went to France or Israel. Dora Carpenter-Latiri's contribution shows a strong attachment to Tunisia that persists among Jewish émigrés and their descendants and a complex dynamic of identity construction demonstrating pressures for and resistance to assimilation. She analyses the range of language varieties used on the site: French, Judeo-Arabic, code-switching etc., and explains use of Judeo-Arabic in particular by nostalgia for the language and in a more general way by the evocation of the memory of the senses. Harissa.com shows the flexibly constructed virtual community that still claims continuity with a Jewish Tunisian way of life.

To some extent echoing the contribution of Dora Carpenter-Latiri, the contribution by Dawn Marley, on the use of code-switching on websites for the Moroccan diaspora, highlights the concept of the "imagined" community. She sees use of CMCs and opportunities to create online networks as having "transformed the way we see the world, and the social networks and communities we belong to". This is particularly true for diasporic communities which, through the opportunities offered by the Internet – elimination of physical distances, facilitation of contact between geographically separated communities, the transcendence of political borders etc. – create themselves as an "imagined" community where use of code-switching is part of its vitality and its cohesion.

Régine Delamotte and Cécile Desoutter examine business emails and messages posted on a forum, work- or course-based, and produced in a multilingual context. They study language contact situations where while French is the working language, those emailing each other do not all have French as their first language. Here we have situations where native or expert speakers and speakers have an electronic writing relationship through computer-mediated communication, in the service of a common activity. Régine Delamotte and Cécile Desoutter show that the messages posted on the forum and the emails sent may be regarded as "instruments through which the activity can be carried out" and "having a written dimension, they are also the trace left by the activity". The trace in itself influences the content and the form of the messages. Coming from different countries, those communicating remotely use a range of languages: while French is the dominant language, English is used as a "joker" language to make up for lack of competence in French. Code-switching is one of the possibilities available to the writers: exchanges are in the language of which the two writers have the better command.

Following on from these contributions, Fabien Liénard and Marie-Claude Penloup observe the place of code-switching in private blogs so as to better define the relation to writing of multilingual writers, particularly by attempting to answer the following questions: "does electronic writing allow the appearance of multi-

lingual lexicons? Is electronic writing a helpful factor for the multilingual writer in terms of writing and linguistic insecurities?" The authors extend the concept of code-switching to contacts of standard French and text speak or "chat French" even if they do not contemplate this type of code-switching here. Analysing data from "Skyblog", "Canalblog" and "Overblog", they reach a conclusion counter to their initial hypotheses, that inter- or intra-sentential cases of code-switching are relatively rare in the blogs analysed. "As a general rule, they appear more often in the comments, which bear a greater similarity to emails or chats". In the few cases where bloggers engage in code-switching, Liénard and Penloup wonder if this is it is not "always the mark of a pain, a wrench, an insecurity".

In matters of code-switching, the wrench referred to by Liénard and Penloup or the resistance to assimilation spoken of by Carpenter-Latiri recalls the metaphor of the glass half-full or the glass half-empty, often advanced over factors determining the decision to code-switch in conversation. In other words, code-switching is sometimes perceived as the trace of a language loss that is the source of a linguistic deficit but could it not rather be analysed as the mark of over-competence in the language used? With the language loss hypothesis, the writer gives the appearance of clinging on to something that he/she is losing or has already lost, specifically his language. This loss is apparent in the idea of nostalgia or the evocation of memory as explored by Carpenter-Latiri.

While this thesis of a linguistic deficit has gained wide acceptance in explaining code-switching used as a communicational strategy, it does not strike me as always relevant, as code-switching may also be seen as the mark of a over-competence in the writer's second language, and even as a full language variety available to him/her in a multilingual verbal repertoire.

Victoria Goddard looks at the Association of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (Buenos Aires), a group of Argentine mothers that came into being in the context of communication and democracy deficit under the repressive regime of the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1982. In their stubborn search for their missing children, these women gathered and occupied the public space of the Plaza de Mayo so as to exchange information in the hope of finding answers to urgent questions over the disappearance of their children. Victoria Goddard shows that this occupation of a real public space gave rise to another type of occupation: a virtual presence through the creation of the "Association of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo" website. Through the Internet, this virtual space defines new freedoms of expression, constructs new identities and draws new borders but it is to be questioned as a genuine democratic space. Goddard analyses the gendered discourses and the variety of registers. She stresses the following facts:

The increasing importance of cyberspace as a space of communication does mean that words acquire a new salience and power. At the same time the elusive problem of transparency, of who is really behind the words, the name, a particular image or film, continues to beleaguer and taunt us. If there can be no authentic self in cyberspace, can there be an authentic cyberdemocracy?

In an exploration of texting by deaf people (whether signers or not) in a context of bimodal bilingualism in France, Marion Blondel, Jeanne Gonac'h and Fabien Liénard try to test the widely accepted hypothesis that is widely accepted in some quarters that there is a deaf way of writing texts; in other words that the deaf base their texts on the structure of LSF (*Langue Française des Signes*, French Sign Language). To do so, they work on a fine linguistic description of the texts of deaf people (whether signers or not). They place the common or exclusive features found among the deaf and the hearing into four categories, and see the specificities found among the deaf given the other distinctive markers of SMS writing, or even the writing of L2 learners. They highlight another significant fact, that on a socio-pragmatic level, the length of texts shows a concern with making themselves understood which can lead to constructions that are complex and paradoxically less clear.

Isabelle Pierozak writes on the dynamics of language contacts in Creole-speaking electronic community spaces, observing how languages cohabit in them. Her first finding is that the concept of “virtual diglossia” is to be dismissed. Creole-speaking situations seem to her to be far more complex and she would rather treat them as multilingual. She sees the linguistic forms used on Creole-speaking websites as “the negotiated outcome of non-binary, flexible, contextualized representations”. Pierozak’s strong conclusion is the claim that “electronic Creole operates as a “legitimation of Creole” in writing.

In conclusion we would claim that code-switching in electronic writing appears to be a natural phenomenon showing a trend in our modern and ever more globalized society. Linguistic contacts do not involve only those languages used in the interactions, but also the writers, societies and cultures of which they are an exceptional medium. While the contributions to this volume may give an impression of a fragmentation of our field of investigation, the nonetheless illustrate the complexity of electronic code-switching and the need to advocate a multidimensional approach to the issue.

DORA CARPENTER

Harissa.com: Narrative(s), code-switching and nostalgia – a case study

1 The website

The Harissa website is aimed at Tunisian Jews in the Diaspora from Tunisia, the ‘Tunes’. It is a virtual space for discussions, encounters, exchanges and memories. As of September 2009, the site map displayed more than 4300 links. The site was created in the United States in 1999; the Harissa Foundation is an official not-for profit public benefit organization. The founder of the website is Jaco Halfon, a Tunisian Jew living in the USA, and the generic Arabic used in the shared pages of the websites will often be Tunisian Judeo-Arabic. By Tunisian Judeo-Arabic, I refer to the Tunisian oral/electronically transcribed variety spoken by Tunisian Jews. This is again a generic term as they are different varieties depending mainly on region/ generation/ education. For example, Tunisian Judeo-Arabic for the older generations displays distinctive phonetic features ([ʃ] instead of [s], for example) but these distinctions are no longer systematic. This point explains in part the discrepancies in transcribing Judeo-Arabic using Latin characters.

1.1

The websites in the foundation are *<http://harissa.com>* (the website for “Tunes”), *<http://zlabia.com>* (the website for Algerian Jews), *<http://dafina.net>* (the website for Moroccan Jews), *<http://kiftv.com>* (a website for posting/exchanging videoclips and videos), *<http://jrencontre.com>* (a meeting zone for Jews).

1.2

The names of the websites themselves display the most frequent feature of a “languages in contact” situation amongst web-users: lexical switches; these lexical switches are often borrowings (i.e. items borrowed from another language which become part of its lexicon and that are or will be lexicalized). This will be analysed later.

1.3

The website Harissa.com takes its name from the most emblematic ingredient in Tunisian cuisine, harissa, the strong and spicy hot chilli paste, powerfully evocative to the memory of the senses (Seremetakis 1994). The wallpaper for the site is pink marble, doubly emblematic: that pink variety being a typical local stone, and marble recognized universally as a noble material for memorials. The Algerian and Moroccan websites also take their names from North African cuisine and are also evocative to sensual memory: zlabia is a sort of honey-coated fritter common throughout the Arab world, and dafina is a slow-cooked traditional Moroccan/North African Shabbat meal. Kif in kiftv refers to the traditional hedonism of North African Jews and more specifically Tunisian Jews. Kif here comes from Tunisian Arabic and means enjoyment, pleasure (in Moroccan Arabic it is a word used for hashish).

1.4

The base language on the websites is French, although many pages are now also available in English. This reflects the situation of French amongst Tunisian Jews and is also related to their choice of lands of migration: most often France or Israel. Amongst the better-off and the middle classes, French had become the first language from the 1950s onwards, whilst bilingualism (Judeo-Arabic and French, with Hebrew for liturgy) survived amongst the more traditional and economically less privileged. Italian had survived alongside French amongst the Grana community but faded away in migration either in France or Israel. The pages in English reflect the status of English as the language of globalization, the fact that Jaco Halfon the webmaster is based in the USA where Harissa.com has the legal status of a foundation and also the position of “American English” which could be described as “the second language of Israel” (Hagège 2003). The pages where Harissa.com introduces itself to the surfer are the following and are analysed in the following sections:

<http://www.harissa.com/eng/objectifeng.htm>

<http://harissa.com/foundation/presentation.htm>

http://www.harissa.com/D_forum/Culture_Tune/pourquoiunsitejuiftunisien.htm

2 A collective identity?

2.1

The representation of Tunisian Jews as expressed in English on the “statement of purposes” underlines a shared history, a shared heritage and language and a shared identity (It should be noted that when quoting from the site I have neither corrected nor edited the English or French text, except to abridge it where appropriate: translations are my own). Tunisian Jews are defined as “refugees” from North Africa “scattered throughout the world”, whose exodus was brought about