



The Linguistic Characteristics of Language Use Among Immigrants from Ghazaouet to Tlemcen

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Abstract:

This present study is part of one of the fields of sociolinguistics; it is interested in the fact of bilingualism linked to immigration. Indeed, knowledge of both languages; French and dialectal Arabic; remains a natural need because that of the host country is a necessity for social, cultural and above all professional integration, on the other hand, dialectal Arabic designates Ghazaouet as a refuge for family meetings, holidays, parties, etc. . Code switching and borrowing are assimilated to social and identity processes and mark the language practices of immigrants. Finally, the duality of space creates an original bilingual identity that appears in the communication of immigrants in the Ghazaouet region in Tlemcen.

Keywords: language practices- immigrants-alternation/borrowing -dialectal Arabic/French.

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Introduction

Our research focuses on the language practices of a group of immigrants of Algerian origin. In fact, the immigrant experience presents a challenge for anyone seeking to integrate and achieve their personal goals of social inclusion. It is one of the essential conditions for achieving individual autonomy through social, cultural, and, most often, professional integration. It is within this sphere that immigrants find themselves immersed in bilingualism and in constant contact between Arabic and French.

F. Grosjean (1984:16–17) observes that: “A bilingual person is one who regularly uses two languages in everyday life, not one who possesses a similar (and perfect) command of both languages ... And a migrant worker in these same countries of immigration is also bilingual, even though their knowledge of the two languages is very different.” ”

The coexistence of French and dialectal Arabic (both of which are in use) leaves its mark on the sociolinguistic level. In such a way that speakers are led to acquire specific verbal habits that translate into “communicative strategies.”

Bilingualism remains a natural phenomenon, occurring whenever there is a need to communicate in another language—which is, most of the time, the variety or language of origin. It is common across all social classes and age groups among immigrants.

However, there is always an imbalance between the two languages in question.

In the case of Algerian immigrants in France, the two languages—Arabic and French—that come into contact with one another have become specialized in certain registers: French as the national language (used in government, the workplace, schools, public spaces, etc.) and dialectal Arabic as the lingua franca among peers (at home, among siblings, in Arab neighborhoods, in the country of origin, etc.). Consequently, the bilingual immigrant is constantly required to adapt their linguistic competence and verbal repertoire according to changes in environment, needs, situations, and interlocutors.

Likewise, F. Milliani (1999:59-77) emphasizes that code choices are not random but predetermined by pragmatic-discursive or discursive constraints. He has identified links between the realizations Alternating within these corpora and the conditions under which this bilingualism emerges, these links nevertheless point to the construction of a plural identity. In this sense, since bilingual phenomena (code-switching, borrowing, etc.) are associated with the identity-forming processes that characterize the language practices of all immigrants, they are primarily markers of identity.

In this approach to bilingualism, Poplack and Sankoff (1981:461) seek the formal rules of arrangement that govern the forms of mixed constructions (simple alternation and complex alternation) through syntactic constraints.

This work focuses on a sociolinguistic issue and phenomenon that represents a very interesting field of investigation for researchers on the other side of the Mediterranean (J. Billiez, L. Dadène...). Their studies addressed several points: bilingualism as a means of integration, identity construction, and integration...

These issues are also addressed by Algerian researchers (of immigrant origin), particularly regarding the dual use of the two languages—Arabic dialect and French—and related questions.

At the same time, our study examines the issue of bilingual language practices. We are particularly interested in the influences of the environment and the setting in which immigrant subjects find themselves, both here and there (dual homeland and dual identity).

To this end, the population of Maghrebi immigrants in France (from the Ghazaouet region) may provide a useful group for studying issues of bilingualism. However, we believe it is important to note that we are dealing with two generations that exhibit distinct language practices and behaviors.

The focus of this study will therefore be specifically on the linguistic behaviors and habits that distinguish these categories of immigrants, particularly since they do not use the two languages in the same way.

The subjects of this research possess a specific linguistic heritage that constitutes a genuine field of study due to its unique characteristics. We began primarily with the idea that these immigrant subjects oscillate between two distinct identities and cultures, which means that their speech remains the result of the construction of a Franco-Arab-Algerian identity.

1. Preliminary Observations on the Subjects of the Study

The immigrants who are the focus of this research come from all age groups and both genders (retirees, young adults, teenagers, homemakers, etc.). They are all characterized by having lived in France for a long time and they oscillate between two distinct linguistic systems (French and Arabic dialects). Most of them tend to spend their vacations, Eid holidays, and family celebrations (weddings, baptisms, etc.) here in Ghazaoua with their families of origin.

A large number of these immigrants can be found during the following periods: the two Eid holidays, the month of Ramadan, the periods between February and March, and during the summer vacation (from May to July). Because of their frequent comings and goings, they live in small villas scattered throughout the area and concentrated in a few neighborhoods (Boudjelid, Beghouéne, Ben Saney...), forming a small bourgeoisie in Ghazaouet.

Generally speaking, retirees (the first-generation migrants) spend most of the year in the countryside, inviting or compelling the rest of the family to join them (especially their wives, who prefer to stay with their sons or grandsons).

2. Code-switching:

When multiple languages coexist in the same setting, sociolinguists always expect code-switching to occur. It is the most common communicative strategy and linguistic habit among bilingual speakers.

According to the Dictionary of Linguistics and Language Sciences: "The communication strategy whereby an individual or a community uses two distinctly different varieties or two different languages within the

same exchange or utterance. The speaker(s) may be proficient in both languages—this is the case with competence-based code-switching, which serves as a means of ensuring social communication—or, if they are not, it will be a case of incompetence-based code-switching.”

Thus, simultaneous mastery of the two codes or languages is no longer a prerequisite for determining code-switching within discourse. It will therefore be:

“The juxtaposition within a single utterance of two grammatical systems or subsystems and the shift from one to the other” (Gumperz, 1972:203–225).

This shift occurs through a flexible and continuous control system, responsive to changes in both the linguistic and non-linguistic environment, yet never completely excluding either language.

Gumperz demonstrates in his work that alternation is neither random nor arbitrary, but rather an additional communicative strategy. This strategy becomes a modulating element of discourse.

“Rather than saying that members of a linguistic community speak this or that language, it would be reasonable to describe the linguistic behavior of human groups using the concept of a linguistic repertoire, which consists of a set of codes that interact with one another” (Gumperz, 1982:61).

He is interested in the systematic and syntactic functioning of this contact and its effects. He studies linguistic, discursive, and communicative (metaphorical) functions. In the first case, the alternation is due to changes in interlocutors or topics, whereas in the second case, the alternation is not governed by these types of activities or social affiliations. In the second case, alternation is not governed by society; it is simply one of the concrete forms of verbal exchange, a system, a mode of speech.

Other sociolinguists speak of languages rather than code-switching. Merce Pujol (1991:40) discusses this; she considers it the juxtaposition of sentences or sentence fragments that nevertheless remain faithful to and adhere to the morphological and syntactic rules of the source language.

Carol Mayers Scotton (1990:59) defines code-switching as:

“The selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from one variety inserted into utterances of a matrix variety within the same conversation; code-switching can occur between linguistic varieties at any level of differentiation—structural, that is, between styles, dialects, or languages.”

3. Borrowing:

Code-switching forms part of a continuum with borrowing, as it occurs through the integration of elements from one language into the other and vice versa. This integration may involve a morpheme or a larger unit (fixed expressions, proverbs, etc.). Arabic words constitute one of the main categories of loanwords in the French language. Several terms have an indigenous meaning: *casbah*, *oued*, *djin*, *chéchia*... many have been assimilated with slang connotations: *cleb*, *toubib*, *maboule*, *barba*...

Currently, the influence is greater, and the French language is further enriched by new terms belonging to the dialects of Maghreb immigrants. Even though most of these words are not included in the dictionary, they are widely used among all bilingual immigrants. It should be noted that even native French citizens, particularly young people, use these Arabic words, which have been fully assimilated into standard phonetic patterns, such as: *kif kif*, *bezef*, *flouze*, *bled*... This is linked to the frequency of the words, which is always correlated with their phonetic and morphological characteristics (syllabic structure, etc.).

4. Analysis and processing of collected data:

To develop the study corpus, we transcribed spontaneous oral speech and structured interviews. We also analyzed several recordings containing the largest number of utterances and sentences.

This corpus facilitated our bilingual identification and tracking of the terms, expressions, and linguistic units used in the speech of these immigrant subjects. Immigration pushes immigrant subjects toward adopting the dominant language, French, as the primary vehicle of communication in all oral exchanges. However, analysis of the data reveals frequent use of the language of origin as a vehicle of communication.

Here is a sample of a recording made with Bouzid (30), who lives in Menin with his family; he was born in Sevrant, lived in Tounane until the age of 8, and returned to France when he was 20.

A : Qu'est-ce que tu penses de ton langage quand il est alterné ?

B : Je me sens à l'aise, a3la khater yana a machi kabir lhih, zid mes parents aussi ne maitrisent pas le français... Yana ma3andich problème chbir avec lagwar... Rach chayfa la situation... alors...

A : t'as un manque alors, mais tu parles notre vrai dialecte ?

B : Oui, exactement. Le « cha » c'est spécial cocktail avec le française. Tchima rach à l'écoute, j'ai pas changé l'idiome nta3 lajdoud.

Bassah hna fleblad, je parle que daridja ,ici ma yafahmouche francisse. Eh...F les vacances, les, c'était a souk larba3, le grand marché de Tounane. Deux jeunes filles passent devant moi tchach 3amline... Je les croyais migriyet, alors j'ai lancé mon petit bonjour, koul sbah lakhir. Une des deux m' a dit : Ri wlad l'bled, hssabtou migré. J'ai quitté le français, alors je suis devenu un simple arabe...

This is an example of dialogues in which words from the Tounane dialect are inserted. Thus, alternation becomes the norm, marking the distinctive nature of immigrants' speech. This creates a diglossic complex, within which we can identify: borrowing and alternation, as well as strategies for integration.

From this perspective, language is a heterogeneous system in which heterogeneous French/Arabic utterances coexist with homogeneous Arabic or French utterances.

There is always the insertion of bilingual sequences that retain the morphosyntactic features of that language.

Bilingual speech is used as a code; the protagonists are accustomed to speaking French, but they deliberately and consciously choose to use both codes. This demonstrates their refusal to use a single, dominant linguistic system and serves as proof of their reaffirmation of their parents' identity and language/culture. This reaffirmation is achieved primarily through their knowledge of the rural Arabic dialect as it is spoken in their country of origin, passed down by their grandparents. Even if our speakers cannot pronounce a word correctly, their linguistic deviations are not pointed out by the rest of the group; all errors are accepted by the group.

This research, conducted through a written and distributed questionnaire, individual interviews, and recordings, also allowed us to develop a typology based on the two spoken languages.

Age groups	Dialectal Arabic	French	Alternation between the two languages	Quality of verbal repertoire (Arabic + French)
1st generation 50-76 ans	100 %	20%	40%	-Speaks Arabic perfectly -Speaks French poorly
2nd generation 34-49 ans	70%	95%	70%	-Both languages are equivalent
19-30 ans	45%	100%	50%	-Speaks Arabic at an intermediate level -Speaks French fluently

13-19 ans	25%	100%	45%	-Very good at French -Very poor at Arabic
6-13 ans	50%	50%	30%	-Poor at French -Almost fluent in French

We can observe that colloquial Arabic is used as a lingua franca among the younger generation. Furthermore, the data show that code-switching plays a significant role in bilingualism, leading to biculturalism and the development of a new identity.

In response to self-assessment questions, participants generally answer based on their perceptions of the two languages in question.

- Question: How would you rate your Arabic?

70% rate their Arabic as average

10% rate it as poor

20% rate it as very good

Among these young people, 35% of girls rate their Arabic as good, 40% rate it as poor, and 25% rate it as very good.

- Question: Which of the two languages is your mother tongue?

100% say Arabic dialect for the first generation (under 42 years old)

40% say both languages equally

22% say Arabic dialect

38% say French.

Mr. Terras, born in Montreuil-sous-Bois, lived in Tounane for 7 years (from 1981 to 1988). He is in charge of transportation and logistics operations. He speaks French and Arabic dialect. He answered the previous question as follows: "I am indeed the son of an immigrant, but having grown up in France and been born in France, I consider myself fully French, and I feel Algerian just as much—just as I wouldn't choose between my father and my mother."

- Question: Do you value the blend of Arabic and French?

89% say it is very beneficial

Zoubir says: "...in France, they say that people from any immigrant background have an added advantage compared to them, because we have a second language, a dual culture... It's all beneficial for us; it's not an obstacle, a shortcoming, or something to be ashamed of..."

11% say they avoid this blend.

Regarding the proportions derived from the collected responses, the table above summarizes these results, which are based on work conducted in the same neighborhood and with a few other families who also live in Tounane.

- Question: Do you encourage the transmission of the Arabic dialect to your children?

For the first generation, they say they have fulfilled their mission (95% are fluent in Arabic). 43% are interested in the future of the Arabic dialect among their children.

27% prefer that their children focus on learning French to secure their future.

30% are parents who express no preference or who leave the choice up to their children.

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Thus, grandparents are always at odds with their sons and daughters when they neglect to pass on and preserve the Arabic language and culture.

For example, here is a statement from Ms. Zoulikha:

« ...Chouf Ghi les Kabyles....Yafarho.....Khir ma wladna di samho fal Erbia..ghi l francisse... »

For children aged 6–13: before this age, they babble in the dialect and utter a few words in French. From ages 6 to 13, they strike a balance between the two languages. Even in preschool, they already have a near-perfect command of the Arabic dialect. Later, as they learn French at school through interaction with their peers of French descent, these children gradually reduce their use of the Arabic language in conversation. However, they switch between the two languages among peers, with some gaps in Arabic, as they are discovering the French language at school (the pronunciation is quite different from that of the Arabic dialect). From ages 16 to 19, these young adolescents begin to adapt to both systems simultaneously and fill in some of the gaps.

The young people surveyed learned dialectal Arabic from their parents within the family and in their home country during their vacations. It is learned on the job; they do not possess the same proficiency in both languages.

For the first generation, they learned French on the job; nevertheless, both categories of immigrants switch between the two languages—this is the specific mode of identity construction for each generation.

According to the survey, we find that 95% of immigrants switch between the two languages, while the remaining 5% consists of a few young people who no longer speak Arabic fluently. This is because we distinguish between two scenarios: some actively use the language (switching between the two depending on the situation), while others use it in a non-reciprocal or passive manner, as they understand their parents' language but claim not to speak it.

French also takes on a much more complex identity-related dimension. It remains the language of the city, school, government, work, and integration; 90% affirm this reality. Furthermore, the Arabic dialect remains the language of religion, culture, and memories of the homeland. It is generally passed down from parents and grandparents to their children.

We have observed that code-switching is practiced primarily to facilitate communication, to promote mutual understanding between speakers, and to foster closer relationships.

We also observed that a playful function is present in the discourse of the young respondents. In their speech, when they address a personal or taboo subject, or when they want to make fun of someone, they communicate through their own idioms (slang, metaphors, etc.). This behavior even occurs in the presence of local people who are fluent in French.

Conclusion

The language practices of immigrants in the Ghazaouet region reflect an aspect of multilingualism (the Arabic language) and multiculturalism (the culture of western Algeria).

We can say that young people from the second generation onward are more proficient in French; this language provides them with a sense of belonging, identification, and the normal flow of their daily lives in their homeland, yet they remain acutely aware of the evolution of their identity and culture.

From this duality of space, a distinct and original bilingual identity has emerged. This reality is corroborated by the linguistic habits and identity markers that appear in their communication. Code-switching and borrowing are thus the most frequent communicative strategies, manifesting through banter, teasing, groups of friends, and interactions with the country of origin... All these situations are identity-related challenges that demonstrate that bilingualism is authentic; it is present across all generations (the construction of repertoires and identity).

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