

## *Investigating Language Contact Situation in Algeria*

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**Abstract:** *This article attempts to describe the linguistic situation in Algeria from the perspective of language contact as Algerians use languages that are genetically unrelated. The language situation in Algeria is an open issue. Even if it is agreed that Arabic is the mother tongue of almost all Algerians (except for Berbers), the contact situation has imposed the implantation of borrowings and expressions from other languages, mainly French, the legacy of the colonizer. The method of investigation is based on short recordings from daily life. The data obtained illustrate the language dynamics among Algerian speakers and reveal, on the other hand, estimation on the parts of speech that are most borrowed.*

**Key words:** *Language contact – Code switching – Borrowings – Bilingualism.*

**Résumé :** *Cet article tente de décrire la situation linguistique en Algérie caractérisée par le contact de langues, un contexte dans lequel les algériens utilisent des langues génétiquement différentes. La situation de langue en Algérie reste une question ouverte. Bien qu'il soit considéré que l'arabe est la langue maternelle de presque tous les Algériens (à part pour les berbérophones), la situation de contact de langues a imposé l'implantation d'emprunts et des expressions empruntés à d'autres langues, principalement le français, l'héritage du colonisateur. La méthode d'enquête est basée sur des enregistrements courts de la vie quotidienne. Les données obtenues illustrent la dynamique des usages langagiers parmi des locuteurs algériens et révèlent, d'autre part, l'évaluation sur les catégories d'emprunts les plus utilisées.*

**Mots clés :** *Contact de langues - Alternance de codes – Emprunts - Bilinguisme.*

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### **1. Introduction**

Over the years, language in contact and its outcomes have received much attention of specialists from different disciplines, particularly bilingualism (implicitly multilingualism) and related phenomena (e.g. code-switching, interference, borrowing, language change, etc.) have held a central focus among some scholars. The very complex nature associated with contact situations in general can only be adequately accounted for by considering the different aspects of the resulting language phenomena, psychological, functional and structural. However, since the main aim of the present contribution is to consider some phenomena related to language contact in Algeria, the aspects mentioned above are not dealt with.

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## **2. Language situation in Algeria**

It is not the purpose of the present work to go over the details of the language situation in Algeria; it is yet important to sketch briefly its broad contours. The three languages in Algeria, Arabic, Berber and French and their respective varieties, are of different statuses and distributions.

### **2.1 Arabic**

As far as Arabic is concerned, as is the case with all Arabic-speaking countries, the diglossic situation dictates that two varieties co-exist: The High and the Low varieties. Classical Arabic (H), used in formal settings, is the official language of the country and a pillar of the nation unity as well as the symbol of Arabo-Islamic identity. With this intention, policy makers in Algeria rushed to give back Arabic its place in the society and bring back the feeling of pride through the Arabization process. On the other hand, dialectal Arabic, used in informal and daily conversations, is the mother tongue of most Algerians except Berber speakers.

### **2.2 French**

French was introduced to Algeria through the French colonization in 1830 and has existed as part of the linguistic landscape of the country ever and since though it has assumed different statuses (official language during colonization, national language after independence then foreign language lately).

### **2.3 Berber**

Berber with its different varieties (Kabilyan, Tamazight, Chaoui, Targui, etc.) are found in scattered regions in the country.

## **3. Language Contact in Algeria and Related Phenomena**

The contact language situation in Algeria occurred at different periods of the history of the country and involving different languages and their respective varieties. The linguistic outcomes of the long contact between French and the native population for more than 130 years are significant. The French borrowed words used by Algerians attest the anchoring of the French language in almost all the country. The result was that Algerian dialects borrowed a number of words denoting different domains such as: administrative, military, agricultural, technological, other borrowings with concrete meaning referred to objects of clothing, kitchenware, etc.

In addition to borrowed words, Algerians also switch from Arabic to French even in the same conversation. Outcomes of language contact, such as borrowing (hereafter B) and code switching (hereafter CS) have received substantial attention in the literature and have been interpreted and explained in various ways. Sociolinguists admit the difficulties in distinguishing CS from B as challenges to approaches to the difficulties encountered during the discussions of the difference between perspectives on where borrowing ends and code switching begins. Yet, the aim of this paper is not a discussion on the different definitions and competing models on CS and B but rather to present a general landscape of the research.

### 3.1 Code- Switching

Code switching is a language phenomenon, which occurs among bilinguals or within bilingual communities. Code switching is commonly defined as the alternation of codes in a single speech exchange (Gumperz 1982:59). However, the diversity of practices and meanings that code switching encompasses and the multiple perspectives, from which it can be studied, have impelled researchers to put forward different definitions.

Bentahila and Davis (1983: 302) defined code switching as "...the use of two languages within a single conversation, exchange or utterance". Milroy and Muysken (1995: 7) reported the same view when they said that code switching is "*the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation.*"

Myers-Scotton (1993b: 3) gives a more elaborated definition arguing that "Code switching [...] is the selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from an embedded variety (or varieties) in utterances of a matrix variety during the same conversation."

Poplack (1980) has proposed three types of code switching:

**1. Inter-sentential code switching:** it occurs between sentences, at clause boundaries, or between turns as in:

mandʒəmtʃ ndʒi lyoum + *je vais essayer de passer demain.*  
I couldn't come today. I'll try to come tomorrow.

A : *J'ai fait les photocopies*  
I did the photocopies

B: wana ʕmətli mʕak  
And me, did you make for me with you.

A: lla nsit kaməl  
No, I totally forgot.

**2. Intra-sentential code switching:** it occurs within a single clause or sentence as in:

kif taʕməl *pour télécharger le document.*  
How do you do to download the document?

**3. Extra-sentential switching or Tag-switching:** is the situation where exclamations, tags and ready-made expressions from the embedded language are inserted into the recipient language.

A: *Bon* nəbdaw wəlla lla  
Well, shall we start or not?

### 3.2 Distinguishing CS and B

The distinction between the CS and B is a subject of controversy. Poplack (1980) and later Sankoff and Poplack (1981) make a clear distinction between CS and B insisting on the morphosyntactic adaptation as a principle to distinguish between the two phenomena. In his work on the phenomena related to the contact of languages (Moroccan

Arabic/French), Heath (1989: 23) defined the phenomenon of B as: "... the adaptation of a lexical item Py from Ly into Lx, becoming Px (that is, a regular lexical item in Lx satisfying phonological, canonical-shape and morphological rules for this language."

Myers-Scotton (1993b) rejects the morphosyntactic adaptation as criterion of distinction between the lexical loan and the CS considering that both phenomena are a part of one and the same continuum in which, in time and the repeated use, CS can become a B. Yet, Myers-Scotton (1993b: 169) distinguishes, two forms of B: cultural Borrowings and core borrowings saying that: "*Cultural B forms represent objects or concepts new to the ML [matrix Language] culture...*". She goes on saying that "...core B forms are items for which the ML always has ...equivalents."

### 3.3 Data

The examples of naturally occurring data among Algerian speakers are presented here come from recordings and note taking of everyday interactions. The recorded persons are of different age and sex. Selected segments (nouns and verbs) are given for illustrations.

### 3.4 French Borrowings

Many of the French borrowings used by the Algerian speakers were needed because they had no counterpart in the natives' vocabulary as in the domain of technology, administration, etc. However, other B do not come along with any new objects or ideas (core borrowings) but were rather are used as synonyms of native originals which, in some cases, they eventually displaced words of everyday usages.

#### 3.4.1 Categories of Borrowed Words

In Algerian Arabic, lexical words are much more borrowed than grammatical ones. Among lexical words, open word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs etc.) are more borrowed than closed word classes (articles, determinants, pronouns, conjunctions, etc.). Among open word classes, nouns and verbs are the most borrowed than any other word class with a prevalence of nouns. In addition, to isolated words frozen expressions consisting of many words, are also be borrowed.

##### 3.4.1.1 Nouns

Nouns represent the majority of the words of French origin borrowed and adapted phonologically and/or morphologically to dialectal Arabic. For example, the word /blaS/. This word is phonologically adapted to the phonological rules of dialectal Arabic with the replacement of the sound /p/ by the /b/.

Borrowings	French	Glossary
blaŞa	une place	a place
faliza	une valise	a suit-case
ţabla	une table	a table
malla	une malle	a truck
pilla	une pille	a battery
poumpa	une pompe	a pump

<b>kartonne</b>	<b>un carton</b>	<b>a box</b>
<b>bartsu</b>	<b>un par-dessus</b>	<b>a coat</b>
<b>karṭab</b>	<b>le cartable</b>	<b>a satchel</b>

### 3.4.1.2 Verbs

French verbs are also borrowed and adapted phonologically and/or morphologically and/or syntactically to dialectal Arabic. This morphosyntactic adaptation consists of the same affixations and flexions that the verbs of dialectal Arabic. For example, /ΣαρZ↔t/ from the French verb 'charger' 'to charge' has kept all its phonological features of origin. In the verb /vσʊ/ from the French 'signer' 'to sign' the nasal consonant // in /vσʊ/ does not both exist in dialectal Arabic. On the other hand, these verbs are morphologically adapted to dialectal Arabic, by the affixation of morphemes to the root to refer to time, mode and personal pronoun.

<b>Borrowings</b>	<b>French</b>	<b>Glossary</b>
<b>ΣarZi</b>	<b>charger</b>	<b>to charge, to load</b>
<b>demari</b>	<b>démarrer</b>	<b>to start</b>
<b>ṣṭasyoni</b>	<b>Stationer</b>	<b>to park</b>
<b>comondi</b>	<b>commander</b>	<b>to order</b>
<b>terifouni/tilifouni</b>	<b>téléphoner</b>	<b>to phone</b>
<b>demonṭe</b>	<b>démonter</b>	<b>to dismantle</b>
<b>siyyi</b>	<b>essayer</b>	<b>to try on</b>

### 3.4.1.3 Types of adaptations

- **Phonological Adaptations:** the non-existent sounds from French to dialectal Arabic are often replaced by closer sounds for example /f/ for /v/ in /filaʒ/ 'village'. The nasal vowel /ã/ in the French word *ciment* (cement) is replaced by the open vowel /a/ in /ssima/.
- **Morphological Adaptations:** the verbs borrowed from French are conjugated as are the verbs of Arabic with the addition of affixes to indicate the time, the mode and the personal pronoun as in /nətrini/ 'je m'entraîne' 'I train' where the prefix {n-} indicates the subject personal pronoun 'I', and the suffix {-i} is used for the present.
- **Syntactical Adaptations:** the marks of the genre and the number of dialectal Arabic are affixed to the borrowed words. In the word /baṭema/ from French *bâtiment* (building), the final /a/ serves to mark the feminine of dialectal Arabic. To mark feminine plural of this word, the suffix {-a:t} is added to the word /baṭema:t/ for *bâtiments*.

## 2.5 Discussion

Almost all the borrowed nouns and verbs have their equivalences in Arabic. However, they occur in the speech of Algerians. The question that rises is the reasons that

motivate the speakers to use the French borrowings instead of their equivalents in Arabic. On the other hand, the Algerian speakers may use borrowings and their Arabic equivalent in the same utterance. The use of both nouns and verbs is attested like in following examples:

/ʕabbi zudʒ safijja:t wəlla ʃəkara kbira baʃə taʕməl kaməl ʃʃwalah/  
 ‘Take two (plastic) bags or a big (plastic) bag to put all the things’

In the example above, /safijja:t/ is the plural of French *sachet* (bag) and its Arabic equivalent /ʃəkara/ ‘bag’ are used in the same utterance.

/sijja jnowwadha beʃʃaḥ ma ḥabbetʃ ddemari/  
 ‘He tried to start it (the car) but it didn’t want to start.’

In this example, /jnowwadha/ from the Arabic verb ‘nahaḍa’ and its equivalent the French verb /ddemari/ ‘démarrer’ are used in the same utterance.

In examples given above, the use of the borrowings is not motivated by the lexical gap in Arabic. Dialectal Arabic contains many doublets, belonging to two typologically different languages (Arabic and French), may be adapted phonologically and/or morphologically to fit the canonical Arabic matrix frame. Such language behaviour challenges Bentahila and Davies’ view (1983:302) which states that borrowings are used to fill a lexical gap in the recipient language, and confirms Myers-Scotton’s (1993b) view that not all the use of French words is due to the lack of their equivalents in the base language.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study aimed to shed light on one of the many issues related to language contact situation in Algeria. It is highly speculative to try to explain these choices without taking into account, at the same time, the individual and social motivations for such language behaviour. To understand why such language phenomenon exists, factors such as the spread, function, degree adaptation of borrowings must be taken into consideration.

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