

Constraints on Algerian Arabic-French Intra-sentential Code-switching

BOUAMRANE Ali
(Université d'Oran)

Introduction

Algerian Arabic (AA) and French (Fr) are the two most spoken languages among bilinguals in Algeria¹. These languages are often mixed. In fact this code switching² constitutes the most salient feature of the speech of Algerians.

This AA/Fr code switching is prohibited in specific structural environments by a number of constraints. Most of the following constraints confirm those found by Abassi (1977) for Moroccan Arabic-French code-switching and consequently refute Bentahila and Davies' (1983) claim that Arabic-French intra-sentential switching in Morocco is possible at all syntactic boundaries except at word-morpheme boundaries.

¹ . For more detail see Bouamrane (1986)

² . Following Poplack (1980 :583), I use the term code-switching to refer to « the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent.»

In this paper, a distinction is made between borrowing and code-switching. The former refers to items from one language that have been integrated phonologically and morphologically into another language. The latter refers to items which have not been (for more detail see Pfaff, 1979).

The constraints

A. Switches to Arabic after French conditional conjunction are impossible:

- (1) *et si waħəð vient me chercher
“And if someone comes to look for me”

B. The relative pronoun must be in the same language as the rest of its clause :

- (2) *kæjən bəzzæ:f ə nnæ:s lli ne font rien
“There are many people who do nothing”

- (3) *il y a des gens qui jahhadru bəzzæ:f
“There are people who talk a lot”

C. Switches from Arabic wh-word to French are impossible if the word is followed by a verb, switches from a French wh-word to Arabic are impossible:

- (4) *ʃkun a dit ça?
“Who said that?”
- (5) *qu’est-ce que kliti
“What did you eat?”

D. Switches between French clitic pronouns subject (je, tu, il, etc.) and Arabic verbs, or between Arabic disjunctive pronouns (ana (I), nta (you, masc), etc.) and French verbs are not permitted:

- (6) *Je nakul
“ I eat ”

- (7) *ana vais
18

“ I go ”

E. Switching between a French pronoun and an Arabic verb is impossible:

(8) *moi dχalt
“me, I went in”

(9) *eux klaw
“Them, they have eaten”

F. Switching between Arabic auxiliaries and French main verbs or vice versa is impossible:

(10) *baχi partir
“I want to go”

(11) *ma rahǰ i fonctionner
“It is not working”

(12) *je dois nərgud
“I must sleep”

G. It is impossible for a preposition in French to govern a noun phrase in Arabic:

(13) *dans l bi:t
“In the room”

(14) *en ʔæmi:n
“In two years”

H. It is impossible for a French determiner to accompany an Arabic noun:

(15) *des mraǰæ:t
“Some mirrors”

(16) *un ʕassakri
“A soldier”

I. Switches between verbs and object pronouns are not permitted:

(17) *(ana) les nʃu:f
“(I) see them”

(18) *Je vois huwa
“I see him”

J. Switches between Arabic NPs and French VPs are impossible:

(19) *hæd əl wəld mange beaucoup
“This boy eats a lot”

(20) *nnæ:s ne font pas attention
“People do not pay attention”

Conclusion

The many constraints on AA/Fr code switching indicate clearly that this switching does not constitute a « third code » or a « separate language variety » as claimed by Bentahila and Davies (1983: 302) for Moroccan Arabic-French code-switching.

Crucial to this appraisal is the fact that though an Arabic-French bilingual may alternate languages, the verb system remains inviolable (see constraint F and examples 10-12). All observed examples of AA/FR code switching show no sign of pidginisation. They are all made up of complete and clear-cut French and Arabic constructions, which seem to ensure the integrity and independence of each of the languages involved.

Bibliography / References

- ABASSI, A. (1977) *A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Multilingualism in Morocco*, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Texas
- BENTAHILA, A. & DAVIES, E. The syntax of Arabic-French code-switching (1983), *Lingua* 59, 301-330
- BOUAMRANE, A. (1986) *Aspects of the Sociolinguistic Situation in Algeria*, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Aberdeen
- PFAFF, C.W. (1979) Constraints on language mixing: intra-sentential code-switching and borrowing in Spanish-English, *Language* 55 (2), 291-318
- POPLACK, S. (1980) Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English y termino en Espagnol: towards a typology of code-switching ». *Linguistics* 18, 581-618

Cahiers de Linguistique et Didactique, Numéro 5

- FERGUSON, C.A. (1959) Diglossia. In *Language Structure and language Use. Essays by C.A. Ferguson*. Stanford University Press (1971)
- FISHMAN, J.A. (1972) *The Sociology of Language* Rowley : Newbury House Publishers
- MACKEY, W.F. (1968) The description of bilingualism. Fishman, J.A. (ed.) (1968). *Readings in the Sociology of Language*. The Hague, Mouton
- MARÇAIS, W. (1930) La diglossie arabe. *L'Enseignement Publique* 12, décembre 1930, 401-409
- MONTEUIL, V. (1960) *L'arabe moderne*. Paris: Librairie Klincksieck
- RUBIN, J. (1968) Bilingual Usage in Paraguay *Fishman, J.A. (ed.)*, (1968)