BILINGUALISM AND BICULTURALISM: EXPLORING YOUTH LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN TODAY'S ALGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Language is a culture vessel, it is the means by which culture and its traditions may be conveyed and preserved. Mediterranean countries, including Algeria, seek to preserve their culture and transfer it to other nations and without language, culture can neither be completely acquired nor effectively expressed and transmitted, the reason that makes the link between language, culture and identity so complex.

This paper will explore the relationship between bilingualism and biculturalism, and the impact of language and culture upon youth identity in today's Algeria.

KEYWORDS: Bilingualism, Biculturalism, Language, Culture, Identity

INTRODUCTION

Language is an integral part of a person's identity, it also plays a significant role not only in its construction but also in understanding people's thoughts and feelings. It is considered as an important means in shaping identity between different people or groups of a society. In this respect Fasold (1990:1) states the following:

"When people use language, they do more than just try to get another person to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings. At the same time, both people are using language in subtle ways to define their relationship with each other, to identify themselves as part of a social group, and establish the kind of speech event they are in".

Language is also fundamental to the spread of culture. Not only it is a means of communication but also a vehicle for conveying and preserving culture with its values and traditions the reason for which if languages disappear, cultures die.

What is clearly observable is that every nation who wants to reconquer and maintain its national identity is obliged to affirm its proper culture, gradually despoiled by the colonizer. According to Ennaji (2005:24) "culture is what basically characterises a society as an identifiable community, it encompasses language, history, geography, religion, the political system, literature, architecture, folklore, traditions and beliefs".

If we apply this fact on the Algerian context, we find that this latter contains two different and opposed cultures: the Arabo-Islamic culture and Western culture which has a great influence on the youth, especially the French one. This biculturalism is the result of the contact of languages which has been defined by Smith (2008:65) as follows:

"Biculturalism is the ability to effectively navigate day to day life in two different social groups and to do with the anticipated result of being accepted by the cultural group that is not one's own".

In sociology, biculturalism involves two originally distinct cultures in a kind of co-existence. It occurs in

countries that have emerged from a history of national and ethnic conflict in which neither side has gained victory. This condition usually arises as a consequence of settlement by colonists as happened in Algeria with the French colonial domination. Nobody denies the fact that of all Arab countries subject to European rule, Algeria absorbed the heaviest colonial impact since for almost 132 years, the French attempted to suppress the Algerian cultural identity and remold the society along the French lines.

Biculturalism finds its origin in two divergent concepts; acculturation and assimilation. The former is viewed as "a process, voluntary or involuntary, by which an individual or group adopts one or more of another group's cultural or linguistic traits, resulting in new or blended cultural or linguistic patterns". (Ovando2008:8) whereas, the latter, according to the same author (Ibid) "Assimilation is a voluntary or involuntary process by which individuals or groups completely take on the traits of another culture, leaving their original cultural and linguistic identities behind". So, acculturation involves the adaptation of a new culture without necessary loosing its proper culture. Assimilation is, then, the result of the loss of a person's original cultural or linguistic identity.

In order not to loose the Algerian identity, Algerian leaders and successive governments after the independence worked on reviving Arabic and Islamic cultural values and establishing Arabic as the national language since language is fundamental to cultural identity.

Algeria is considered as a perfect example of linguistic complexity and its linguistic diversity is not only a result of geographic and social criteria, but also a matter of history. It is a multilingual country where different languages are highly present in its society. The sociolinguistic profile of Algeria involves Arabic with its three varieties, Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic and Algerian Arabic (i.e. Colloquial Arabic), French and Berber varieties scattered in a restricted number of areas.

Several factors have been responsible for the complexity reflected in today's linguistic situation in Algeria, some being historical, others political and still others socio-cultural. The impact of French language and its culture was so powerful that it started to reflect in many Algerians' speech and soon led to a sort of dual identity. The influence resulted in the usual linguistic phenomena that occur when two or more languages get in contact: the use of bilingualism and consequent code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing pervading the mother tongue in addition to the well-established phenomenon of diglossia.

Thus, the Algerian linguistic situation is known by its complexity : it is diglossic, characterized by the use of Algerian Arabic and MSA; bilingual by the use of Arabic and French ; and even multilingual by the use of Arabic, French and Berber though this latter language is restricted to just a few areas in the country.

According to Ferguson, diglossia is applied to situations where the H and the L are variants of the same language. However, Fishman (1972) points out that diglossia could be extended to situations found in many societies where two genetically distinct languages « come to divide up the domains in the linguistic repertoire of the speech community » Spolsky (1998: 64). This is what Fishman calls 'extended diglossia'. In other words, Fishman extends the application of the term *'diglossia'* to bilingual and multilingual contexts where the High variety is another language than the Low one. As the varieties involved in the Algerian context are Algerian Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, French, and Berber, the (H) and (L) possible distributions are as follows : MSA vs Algerian Arabic (intralingual diglossia), French vs Algerian Arabic (interlingual diglossia), MSA vs Berber (interlingual diglossia), French vs Berber (interlingual diglossia).

Algeria is characterized by the co-existence of two languages that are totally different: Arabic and French which is still playing an important role in the Algerian society in both spoken and written domains. Moreover, the use of Berber in some Algerian speech communities makes Algeria considered as a multilingual society. Romaine (1995:30) states that « If individuals possess two languages and can function reasonably effectively in producing and perceiving both, they are considered bilinguals ». The Algerian society makes a very intricate situation since a large proportion of the population can operate in more than one code. What is noticeable is that all Algerians, even illiterate people, do use and / or understand at least a few words either from MSA or French in their everyday interactions. In other words, a big amount of French borrowings, adapted and even non-adapted can be observed in the majority of speakers' conversations, especially in urban areas.

Moreover, though MSA is widely spread in education and has replaced French in almost all educational levels (except in some scientific streams), French continues to be used in many domains such as: economy, finance, mass-media…since it is regarded as the language of technology and progress. Because of its long history in the Algerian context, French has been given the status of a widespread language not only in societal spheres but also in educational, political and cultural domains.

In everyday conversations, speakers may use words from another language in order to explain, describe and express a given idea or an object. Sometimes, the equivalents of these words are not available in their mother tongue. This phenomenon is known as 'borrowing'. Spolsky (1998:49) writes that: "the switching of words is the beginning of borrowing, which occurs when the new word becomes more or less integrated into the second language". Borrowing is another way in which switching between languages may take place. It involves mixing languages at the level of language-systems as opposed to code-switching and code-mixing that involve the mixture of languages at the level of speech. In this respect, Hudson (1996:5) asserts that: "…borrowing involves mixing the systems, because an item is 'borrowed' from one language to become part of the other language".

Borrowing is concerned with single lexical items notably, words whether nouns or adjectives, they are called *loan words*. It is different from code-switching and code-mixing where speakers have the opportunity to choose which words or phrases they will use. Loan words are adapted to speakers' mother tongue and are used in ordinary speakers' native language. They may occur at two levels: lexical i.e. the borrowing of words (loan words) or loan translations (or "calques"), and structural which consists of phonological, morphological and syntactic borrowings.

Myers-Scotton (1993a:206) divides lexical borrowing into *cultural borrowing* and *core borrowing*. The cultural borrowed forms are used for objects that are new to the culture of the recipient language, such as internet, sms, web and so on, and also for new concepts and the core lexical borrowed forms consist of words that more or less duplicate already existing words in L1, such as 'auto', 'bus', 'frigo'. Concerning the situation in Algeria, French is deeply rooted in the daily life of Algerian speakers and French words have become an integral part of AA such as college, manége, stylo, tablier…Integration of foreign verbs takes place in a colonial context, in which a European language acts as the superimposed language. [1]Some other loan words are borrowed from other languages like Spanish or English as 'bye-bye', 'week-end'…This lack of vocabulary obliges Algerians to borrow words mainly from French.

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[1] In Arabic Dialectology by Enam Al-Wer and Rudolf de Jong (2009).

Everybody knows that the term globalization refers to changes that occur across the world. Many people agree on the fact that globalization is not a new concept since human beings have been experiencing it since ancient times in the way that modernization and industrialization based on the industrial revolution have clearly been globalization processes, although they have not yet reached every part of the world. Globalization has been an on-going process in the modern world and this is due to the explosion of mass-communication, world trade, tourism and language contact. This kind of revolution has made every kind of information accessible from anywhere and to everywhere in the world.

As a result of globalization some very noticeable similarities between young people from different parts of the world, especially the youth of the Mediterranean countries like Algeria, Tunisia or Morocco are influenced by the culture of Western and European countries. They try to imitate their peers in their modes of speech (as using slang, taboo words when speaking to each other), styles of dress, music and even hairstyles.

Today, as a result of globalization and the spread of the new technologies, the daily aspects of human social life are changing. The internet as a means of communication has permitted to enlarge adolescents' world of peer interactions. It has opened new paths of communicating outside their own community on the one hand, and on the other hand it has broken the barriers of distance, age, ethnicity and religion.

The language of young speakers of Algeria shows a considerable amount of lexical innovations making use of neologism which is a prominent source from which new words are supplemented to the vocabulary stock of this variety. Some lexical items stretch their meaning through a widening process. The word 'money', for instance, has acquired a bundle of terms which are originally dialectal. Young speakers are inclined to use frequently the word [drAhBm]. Yet, this word seems to be losing ground at the moment and it has been replaced by the term [lbBzrA] or the term [l⇨AbbW:t]. The potential of occurrence of these new term escalating in urban contexts which are open to change. This lexical replacement may explain the influence of the mass media on young speakers[2].

Loan translation or calque is one of the forces that lead to this phenomenon and therefore new structures and constructions are added to a particular dialectal use. In calques, the forms of the loan words and their meanings are taken on as models for lexical creations on the basis of a native stock. Consequently, the newly-built forms, while patterned morphologically and semantically on another language, are felt native. Most of the calques attested in our corpus are based on a French model.

In their everyday conversations, the youth talk about various topics concerning their life such as studies, sport, entertainments, girl-friends and boy-friends. These themes are omnimprsent in their language, in addition to unemployment, emigration and their uncertain future. Here are some expressions that express their feelings towards their actual life: [bA☞NnfA⇨⇨At], [bA☞NneskNvN], [bA☞NnA⇨reg], [bA☞NnA⊠tNhA], [bAqN☞Nr Bl hBdda]. All these meaning 'I want to escape' i.e. 'I want to emigrate'

Because of the influence of the occidental culture, especially the French one on the youth, language has been modified the in a crucial way leading to a shift from the established colloquial variety based on the Arabic language to a variety in which French is the dominant one in some topics. Here are some examples:

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[2] [l⇨AbbWt] has been launched in an Algerian TV programme 'bilahudud' from the regional station of Oran.

- **[nbNpi]:** From the English 'beep'. The word has been introduced into colloquial Arabic from the French 'bip', which, in turn, has been borrowed from French. The term means a short high-pitched sound basically made by the horn of a car (Oxford, 2000), but now its meaning has extended to the signal made by electronic device such as cell phones. In Algerian dialect, the word is adopted as a verb and may be conjugated in all tenses: present = [nbNpN], past = [bNpNt], future [mAGN nbNpN]. Consequently, the word has changed its grammatical category and has been modelled to the norms of the Algerian verbs such as: I *eat* [nAkOl]; I *wear* [nelbes]. According to Haugen (1950) [3] " If loanwords are to be incorporated into the utterances of a new language, they must be fitted into its grammatical structure". This word is used by the youth since there is no equivalent for it in Algerian Arabic.

- **[nkOppi]:** The word is introduced into the dialect though the process of borrowing from the French word 'couper' i.e. 'to cut' in English. Its equivalent in Arabic is [qAtA⊠A] but in colloquial Arabic, it is associated with the telephone to mean 'hung up'. We notice that the word is never used in its literal meaning which means that the change here is at the level of semantics known by the semantic narrowing (see chapter 1). Another modification has occurred at the level of morphology in that it has undergone all types of inflection according to tense, gender and number as in [kOppit] for 'I', [kOppA] for 'he' and [kOpp☺w] for 'they'.

- **[n5Ate], [nkCnekte]:** These words are frequently used by the youth since they are in fashion. It is a result of the widespread use of the internet in Algeria and it has been easily integrated in the Algerian society because almost all teenagers are users of the internet. It is worth noting that the words have no equivalent in Algerian Arabic.

- **[nAvigN]:** The word has been borrowed from the French verb 'naviguer' ('navigate' in English), which means literally to guide or to steer a ship or aircraft (Oxford Dictionary, 2000), but there exist another figurative meaning in French which is 'être débrouillard' ('to be resourceful' in English). In using this word, adolescents use only its figurative meaning.

- **[5C: k N: t]:** This verb is borrowed from the French verb 'être choqué' ('to be shocked' in English). The word is borrowed to fill the lexical gap in the language since the standard equivalent [n▪⬇amt] is not used in Algerian Arabic.

- **[A: ktNvN]:** It originates from the French verb 'activer' ('to speed up' in English). In spite of the existence of its equivalent in Algerian Arabic as [UBffBf] or [UBff]

- **[feGles]:** It originates from the French word 'faiblesse' ('weakness' in English). Here, what is borrowed is not the meaning of the word (since its equivalent exists in Arabic [fGBl]) but the structure of the French nouns ending with the suffix 'esse' such as 'finesse' ('delicacy') and 'noblesse' ('nobility').

- **[RGOfAbl]:** The youth in Algeria use this word to joke with their friends since they know that it is neither French nor Arabic. In fact, only the structure of the word has been borrowed from the French adjectives: prefix (in) + root + suffix (able). The root is the verb [GO:f] ('to see' in English). This adjective is used to qualify a horrible thing (or situation), even though, there exist other words to express the same meaning as [mAGNmli:⇨].

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[3] In Dil (1972 :88).

The Algerian society is positioned between tradition and modernity. During the past decades, two factors of the Algerian cultural identity have gone through tensions, revolts and political manipulations: language and religion. The Arabic language witnessed tensions including the uncompleted attempts of urbanization and the presence of the French language -still strong- on the one hand, and the recognition of the Amazing language[4], on the other. Even if they consider themselves as 'hittists'[5], especially those who were excluded from schools, young people, many teenagers still have many leisure activities such as practicing sport, watching television (satellite dishes have considerably enlarged the cultural visions of young Algerians), listening to music, especially Rai music, Algerian Rap, but also Eastern and Western music. In addition, teens like surfing on the internet, playing with video games, chatting, etc.

The way in which the youth communicate, view and position themselves in the society depends on their values and participation. Because of their concern with culture and media, the youth contribute to the values of lifestyles. In order to establish their identity, aspects of youth have included language, music and clothing in varying combinations. Thurlow (2003:50)[6] says that; "adolescents are routinely misunderstood by adults and whose communicative power or capital is greatly reduced i.e., devalued or dismissed". In conversations with youth and adults the recipe for conflict is clearly apparent. Consequently, this recipe of misunderstanding is also present in the interactions between parents and the youth.

Because the youth are part of the society, they are likely to engage in a process of cultural borrowing, from modes of dress to language. The globalisation of culture – the effect upon culture of the "increasing connection of the world and its people" – is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the changing nature of the relationship between the world's youth and their sense of identity (Solomon & Scuderi, 2002:13). The fact that culture is influenced by people who engage in its practices, youth culture can be considered to be socially constructed, that is, created and sustained by the people who experience it (i.e. the youth). The media, music and fashion play a considerable role in modelling youth identity. In Algeria, for example, most adolescents are influenced heavily by music of varying genres, more importantly 'rap' and 'rai'. In the 1980's 'rai' became de facto national music of Algeria in terms of the number of cassettes sold. The recordings provoke pleasure among the youth and become one focal point of a discussion of Algerian society. Algerian youngsters are highly influenced by such music because through it they can express an independent identity in relation to the parental generation and in relation to younger groups.

CONCLUSIONS

From the investigations, it was found that the younger generation in Algeria represented by adolescents is responsible for language change as they shift from Algerian Arabic to a new variety that includes innovations resulting in highly mixed speech with a dominance of French, since this latter is considered more prestigious and practical than Arabic. From all what has been said, one might deduce that the youth in Algeria tend to modify their language in a crucial way leading to a shift from the established colloquial variety based on the Arabic language to the emergence of a new variety which involves language change.

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[4] Law No. 02-03 relative to the constitutional revision adopted on April 10th, 2002, notably allocating to Tamazigh the status of national language.

[5] 'Hittists' refers to young people leaning on walls (the meaning being 'jobless') ; [⇨N:𨈆] means wall in the dialect.

[6] Thurlow (2003) cited in Contemporary Society Essays (www.Antiessays.com).

It is worth noting that innovations are integrated in speech after they have undergone morphological and phonological changes to fit the structural rules of the Algerian dialect, then, those new words are firmly adopted in the speech of the young generation and sometimes even in adults' one until they spread to the whole society leading to language change. Moreover, it was noticed that the need for borrowing and using innovations was not only because their equivalents do not exist in AA but because the younger generation finds that their language is poor and inferior comparing to French, so they feel that they cannot express themselves without referring to French words.

So, we can state that the decrease of the cultural values among youngsters, the influence of the occidental cultures, especially the French one, on their education and habits have led to the wide use of borrowings and the increasing bilingualism which procures in the youth a feeling of having more prestige and occupy a more important status in the society.

The sum of results we can say that language change at the lexical level in Algeria is mainly caused by the youth who inculcate new words and concepts that are not part of the Algerian culture through the process of borrowing and using innovations. In fact, this phenomenon is the result of languages in contact and bilingualism, and thus is becoming a natural and vital practice in the Algerian society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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