

Code Switching and Identity in TA/Berber Language Usage in the District of Tataouine

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Abstract

The study of language in society has been widening scope to account for the different facets of the relationship between individuals and their environment. The present article tries to examine the relationship between language use; namely code switching; on the one hand and identity mapping on the other hand. It is a case study of 'conscious' code switching instances between RVTA and BL with its two varieties in the district of Tataouine (South east of Tunisia). The study of samples of code switching instances may be informative about two aspects of identity delineation of language users. Firstly, it may reflect self conceptualization as individuals. Secondly, it would assume ethnic group membership.

Keywords:

Code switching, language, identity, ethnic group, group membership,

1. Introduction

This article tries to examine the relationship between language use; code switching; on the one hand and identity mapping on the other hand. The present case study opens with an overview of the literature of the relationship between bilingualism, code switching, and identity. Second section will be devoted to the presentation of the sociolinguistic context. It introduces the community under study and the languages and varieties in use there. Methodology of the current article will be presented in the third section. Finally, ultimate emphasis will be given to the analysis of instances of code switching as being informative about identity delineation and ethnic group membership.

2. Literature review

2.1. Bilingualism and identity

Bilingualism has been defined as achieving a native-like proficiency of two or more languages to minimal competence in at least one language other than the mother tongue. It has been maintained that a bilingual is a person who has access to two linguistic codes (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). In this context, the Berber community of Tataouine is bilingual. BI speakers show a native-like control of two codes. They grow from their early days bilingual as they are exhibited to RVTA and BL in their first environment (family).

The theoretical framework of reference for the study of identity has been shifting to language use in social settings rather than other variables. Our discourse can influence our self-concept in one way or another. Language may reveal its user's identity. It can also show their identity, religion, gender, level of education. The present article sheds light on code switching phenomenon as being informative about identity delineation of a bilingual society.

The linguistic behavior of the Berber community of Tataouine, in the present case study, may be interpreted as an instance of conscious identity conceptualization. Language and linguistic behavior observation may shed light on cognition. In the present study, conversation analysis of BL speakers may be informative about their self-conceptualization in terms of individual identity and group membership.

2.2. Code switching and identity

The broadest definition of Code switching may be “the ability on the part of bilinguals to alternate effortlessly between their two languages” (Bullock & Toribio 2009; Namba, 2015). Identity delineation and construction has been connected to many social practices amongst which language may constitute a very important element.

The study of different instances of code switching, in the present article, could be informative about the speakers' self-mapping in terms of identity. The main drive toward this focus has come from the social constructionist paradigm, which leads most sociolinguistic and discourse analytic research on identity. That paradigm is based on the centrality of interactions between local construction of social reality and the primacy

of the concept of practice. The *close observation* of human behavior (verbal and non-verbal) would be informative about the identity of individuals or communities under study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Conversation analysis

The deployed methodology in the current study is conversation analysis. The relationship between code switching and identity delineation in terms of self-conceptualization and ethnic group membership is examined through the analysis of conversation. A number of dialogues containing instances of code switching have been recorded. The aim has been to analyze possible relationship between selecting a code and cognition. BL speakers tend to change their code to achieve certain social as well as cognitive mapping.

3.2. Participants

Participants of the present study are randomly selected members of BL speakers of the district of Tataouine. They have been chosen from different settings (town/village) and different age groups. Ages of participants range from 20 to 60 years. They were not informed that they are being recorded for the sake of assuring 'natural' conversation flow.

Recordings have taken place in many places ranging from café, home to school.

The main concern of the current study is to probe into the relationship between language in use and identity. But before indulging into conversation analysis it is important to scrutinize the sociolinguistic context by presenting different components of the study. Firstly, there will

be a presentation of the community of Tataouine in terms of history and ethnicity. Secondly, another section will be devoted to decode languages and varieties in use there.

4. Sociolinguistic context

Tataouine is situated in the far south east of Tunisia between Libya and Algeria (Appendix B: map). The region is characterized by its dry climate affected by the large desert in its southern part. Tataouine was originally inhabited by the Berber tribes (Mkaddmin, Douiret...). In fact its name Tataouine has a Berber origin [*teTTa:winenna*]: ‘our eyes’.

The first Arabs came to the region with the Arab-Islamic conquest of Tunisia. Then Arabs outnumbered Berbers after the *Hilali* invasion of *Ifriqia* in the 11th century (Benabdellah, 1999). The Hilali tribes, BeniHilal and BeniSoliem, entered Tunisia from this part of the country. ‘The Hilali undertook a continuous attack on all aspects of urban civilization and preferred to settle down in rural areas (Jabeur, 1987). Tataouine was, in fact, one of these places where the Hilali tribes preferred to settle down. At that time, many Berbers decided to migrate to the north of Tunisia, especially the capital. Others preferred to move to mountains where they are living till now in villages like Doiuret and Chnenni. (Readers are referred to map in appendix B).

4.1. Society

Tataouine is influenced by the large desert in the southern part of the region. Its population is of about 155000 inhabitants (2014 census). The main economic sources of life are the small traditional agriculture and

services. It should be noted that there is also a large number of immigrants in Europe, especially France.

The region is characterized by its traditional social structure nevertheless it is now undergoing a change towards a 'modern' one. Some families seem to preserve the ancient size i.e. families of large numbers where the father and his married sons live together. Hence one can find families of 15 to 20 members generally directed by the grandfather or the elder son. Now such social structure is decreasing in favor of a modern one i.e. 'micro-families' of 3 to 6 members especially during the last two decades.

4.2. Language(s) or varieties in use

Like other regions of Tunisia, the community of Tataouine is a diglossic society. The use of Modern Standard Arabic is restricted to official; educational and religious domains. The code used in everyday activities and conversations is the regional variety of Tunisian-Arabic (RVTA henceforth). There is also a case of language contact in Tataouine between RVTA and the vernacular language of Berber (BL hereafter).

The Berber community of Tataouine exhibits language maintenance where they have the possibility of shifting to RVTA. Such concern to preserve the ancestors' vernacular seems to be obvious in everyday code switching between RVTA and BL.

4.2.1. Regional Variety of Tunisian Arabic

RVTA represents the mainstream language in Tataouine. This fact has a historical basis since the Hilali invasions resulted in the increase of number of Arabs who outnumbered Berbers at that time. ‘The immediate linguistic effect was a change of balance in favor of Arabic’ (Jabeur, 1987). This however, does not lead to the total extinction of Berber. Its two varieties are still spoken with RVTA today in both Chnenni and Douiret.

RVTA is characterized by the use of the voiced velar stop /g/that is /ilga:la/ as contrary to /ilqa:la/ variety which is used in Tunis (the capital), Nabeul, Hammamet, Sousse, Mahdia and Sfax (especially urban areas). The following table represents a transcription of some words from mainstream code that is RVTA.

Table 4.1: Some words from RVTA

<i>[ga:l]</i>	<i>“He said”</i>
<i>[g3ad]</i>	<i>“He sat”</i>
<i>[mcei]</i>	<i>“He walked”</i>
<i>[wgi:d]</i>	<i>“a box of matches”</i>
<i>[gri;b]</i>	<i>“near”</i>
<i>[galbi]</i>	<i>“my heart”</i>
<i>[?anej]</i>	<i>“I”</i>
<i>[hnei]</i>	<i>“we”</i>

The next table (4.2. below) provides examples of verb agreement in RVTA characterized as mentioned earlier by the use of the voiced velar stop

[g].

Table 4.2: Examples of verb agreement in RVTA

<i>Pronouns</i>	<i>[hu:wwa]</i>	<i>[hi:yya]</i>	<i>[hnei]</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>she</i>	<i>we</i>
<i>[mcei]</i> <i>To walk</i>	<i>[mcei]</i>	<i>[mcit]</i>	<i>[mcei:na]</i>
<i>[ga:l]</i> <i>To say</i>	<i>[ga:l]</i>	<i>[ga:lit]</i>	<i>[gulna]</i>
<i>[g3ad]</i> <i>To sit</i>	<i>[g3ad]</i>	<i>[ga3dit]</i>	<i>[g3adna]</i>

Table 4.3 below represents some of the characteristics of suffixed pronouns of RVTA.

Table 4. 3: Examples of suffixed pronouns in RVTA.

	<i>[da:r]</i> <i>house</i>	<i>[?i:d]</i> <i>hand</i>	<i>[galb]</i> <i>heart</i>
<i>[hu:wwa]</i> <i>he</i>	<i>[da:ra]</i> <i>His house</i>	<i>[?i:da]</i> <i>His hand</i>	<i>[galba]</i> <i>His heart</i>
<i>[hi:yya]</i> <i>she</i>	<i>[da:rha]</i> <i>Her house</i>	<i>[?i:dha]</i> <i>Her hand</i>	<i>[galbha]</i> <i>Her heart</i>
<i>[hnei]</i> <i>we</i>	<i>[da:rna]/[dyarna]</i> <i>Our house/houses</i>	<i>[?i:dina]</i> <i>Our hands</i>	<i>[glu:bna]</i> <i>Our hearts</i>

4.2.2. Berber Language

The Berber is a vernacular language; it has no written form and no official status in Tunisia. It is believed to have origin in the Punic a Hamito-semitic language (Jabeur, 1987). In Tataouine there exist two varieties of the Berber peculiar to each village of Chnenni and Douiret (CV and DV hereafter). Both dialects do not affect legibility of each other nevertheless there are some lexical as well as grammatical differences between them. The following table is a translation of some words from Berber.

Table 4.4: some words from BL

<i>Berber</i>	<i>translation</i>
<i>[yuggu:rui]</i>	<i>He goes/walks</i>
<i>[yetcu:]</i>	<i>He ate</i>
<i>[?u:l]</i>	<i>heart</i>
<i>[fu:s]</i>	<i>hand</i>
<i>[yu:ma]</i>	<i>brother</i>
<i>[weltma]</i>	<i>siqster</i>
<i>[tmu:urt]</i>	<i>country</i>

4.2.2.1. Differences between CV and DV

It should be noted that CV and DV are only two varieties of the vernacular language of BL. These dialects do not hinder legibility of both of them to all BL speakers. Stokwell (2000) sees that such phenomenon is a “language consists of one or many dialects, all of which are more or less mutually intelligible to other speakers of the language.” The differences between both varieties are mainly grammatical, namely the prefix of expressing the future. It is the *voiceless alveolar fricative* /s/ in CV as contrary to the *voiced alveolar stop* /d/ in DV next to other differences at the morphological level mainly pronouns and plural derivation.

4.2.2.2. Illustrations of CV/DV differences

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 below represent an account for grammatical differences between CV and DV namely future time prefix and pronouns. Whereas tables 4.7 and 4.8 account subsequently for morphological and lexical differences between CV and DV.

Table 4.5: Grammatical differences between CV and DV.

Verbs in the present tense CV/DV	Past tense CV/DV	Imperative Cv/DV	future	
			CV	DV
<i>[yuggu:ru]</i> He goes/walks	<i>[yiyyu:r]</i> <i>[yisqid]</i>	<i>[?isqid]</i>	<i>[daeyyu:r]</i> <i>[daeyisqid]</i>	<i>[saeyyu:r]</i> <i>[saeysqid]</i>
<i>[yiTTas]</i> He sleeps	<i>[yiTTus]</i>	<i>[?aeTTus]</i>	<i>[daeyuTTus]</i>	<i>[saeyuTTus]</i>
<i>[yittit]</i> He eats	<i>[yitcu:]</i>	<i>[iTTic]</i>	<i>[daeyitc]</i>	<i>[saeytic]</i>

Table 4.6: Differences between DV/CV in pronouns

pronouns	CV	DV
<i>I</i>	<i>[nic]</i>	<i>[nicdin]</i>
<i>we</i>	<i>[niccin]</i>	<i>[nicnin]</i>
<i>You (p)</i>	<i>[klimin]</i>	<i>[knim]</i>
<i>You (F)</i>	<i>[cimmin]</i>	<i>[cimdin]</i>

Table 4.7: Morphological differences (plural derivation)

<i>Singular CV/DV</i>	<i>Plural in CV</i>	<i>Plural in DV</i>
<i>[yimmæ] mother</i>	<i>[yimmæ:tniR]</i>	<i>[yimmætnæ]</i>
<i>[tamuTTut] woman</i>	<i>[timuTTuTun]</i>	<i>[?ilxalit]</i>
<i>[tæ:frxt] girl</i>	<i>[ti:frix]</i>	<i>[ti:radin]</i>

Table 4.8: Examples of lexical differences

<i>Words</i>	<i>CV</i>	<i>DV</i>
<i>Father</i>	<i>[bæbæ]</i>	<i>[bæbæ]</i>
<i>Grandfather</i>	<i>[bæbæ]</i>	<i>[dædæ]</i>

5. Data analysis

5.1 RVTA/BL instances of code switching

Berber community conversations tend to be characterized by instances of code mixing and switching especially situational one. They seem to use RVTA and peculiar BL dialect. For instance, it is a well known fact between Berber speakers in Tataouine that they ‘test’ the identity of their partner by asking them in their own vernacular whether they are a Berber or not by saying:

- *TaRu:ri da essah*

If the speaker is a ‘member of the ethnic group the answer will be ready:

- *TaRu:ri da essah*

Of course, if he is not a Berber he will not be able to find the ‘appropriate code to reply. Another example of testing the listener’s identity may be:

- *Bin 3ammiss*

The same procedure may repeat. When the listener is a Berber he will answer:

- *Bin 3ammiss.*

In this context, code switching instances may be interpreted as instances of identity affirmation in terms of ethnic group membership. ‘Identity may be defined as the basic consciousness of one's own group's specificity amongst other peoples, in terms of living habits, customs, language, values (Dorais, 2015).

Instances of code switching in common places tend to be related to speaking about family affairs or 'secrets'. One day, I was sitting in a café. I heard the following conversation between two Berber young men. One of them was telling the other about their cousin that had been imprisoned for committing burglary. Here is the conversation:

A: "*sliRsmis 3ammik.... hu:zintlil?ahbis.*"

("Have you heard about your cousin...he was jailed")

B: "*mah ?aiu*"

("What has he done"?)

A: "*yixnibta:hnut*"

(He has burgled into a shop)

B: "*limmi (yixnib)*"

("When was that?")

A: "*?i:Rrisnha:rin.*"

("Two days ago").

After that the two young men switched back to RVTA to discuss the previous day's match of their favorite team. This code switching has been labeled by Stockwell (2000) as a metaphorical code switching as opposed to a 'situational code switching related mainly to domain change. The above mentioned conversation (in terms of code switching) may repeat every time Berber speakers want to discuss family affairs. Thus, their 'special' code may provide them freedom of discussing these 'secrets' openly at the same time of being protected from any 'linguistic'

interference of possible listeners. In terms of identity, any instance of code switching may be interpreted as an affirmation of the individuals' membership inside their ethnic group (Wardhaugh, 1986).

Some Berbers especially adults tend to change some of the RVTA sounds, like *the voiceless interdental fricative /t̪/* to the *voiceless alveolar stop /t/*. Some of them would say for example:

[*timma wahed yestenna fik*]

("There is someone waiting you")

Another example would be the change of *the voiced interdental fricative /d̪/* to the *voiced alveolar stop /d/*. They would say for instance:

[*cuft di:b*]

("I saw a wolf")

The above made changes to the RVTA sounds tend to be conscious ones. Speakers of Berber try to identify themselves as a separate group. Language has been considered as 'a major badge of ethnicity-that is racial, cultural or family origins' Stockwell (2000). It has been argued that the study of linguistic phenomena like code switching is generally more closely related to the observation of behavior. It is more meaningful to interpret instances of language use in particular settings and situations than to generally apply explanations of linguistic capability (Nilep, 2015).

5.2. Language and group membership

In this context, different instances of code switching (between RVTA and BL) may be informative about the speakers' self-mapping in terms of identity. Firstly, they may reflect one's conceptualization as a 'different individual. Secondly, they may be interpreted as instances of affirmation of ethnic group membership. Lo, (1999) argues that 'reciprocal acts of codeswitching' can constitute a medium of self and other attributions in terms of group membership. BL speakers then, tend to shift to their own vernacular not only to discuss 'secrets' but also to assure ethnic group membership. They seem to preserve their language at the same level of protecting their identity from possible extinction.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the present study has endorsed a conversation analysis approach to probe into possible relationship between language use and identity mapping. Main findings would be summed in the following three points:

1- Language may constitute an important aspect of identity delineation. Most aspects of discourse use may reflect the speakers' ethnic identity and group membership.

2- Language in use or code switching in the present case study represents a very important variable in the emphasis on identity mapping or self-conceptualization for BL speakers.

3- Berber speakers' of the community of Tataouine have recourse to BL to stress their distinctiveness as a separate group. They may resort to discuss their own 'secrets' in their own language far from any 'linguistic' interference of possible listeners.

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Appendix A

Table of Transcription

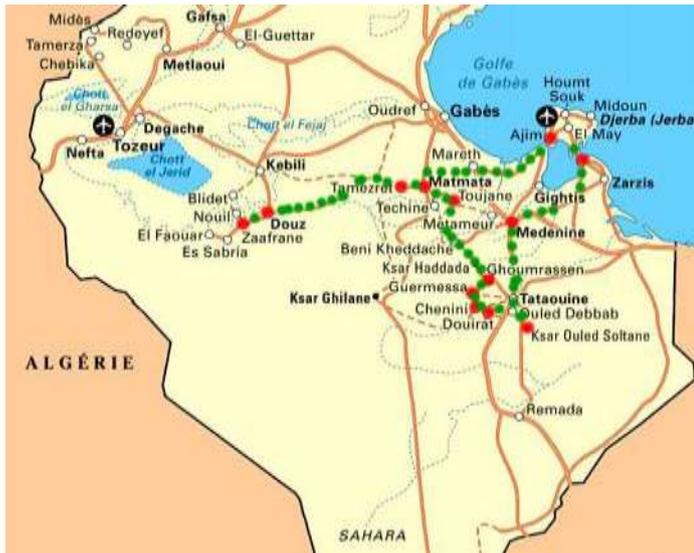
TABLE OF TUNISIAN-ARABIC AND BERBER TRANSCRIPTION			
ʔ	ا	T	ط
b	ب	D	د
t	ت	ʒ	ز
ṭ	ث	R	ر
J	ج	f	ف
h	ح	q	ق
x	خ	g	ج
d	د	k	ك
ḍ	ذ	l	ل
r	ر	m	م
z	ز	n	ن
s	س	h	ه
c	ش	w	و
S	ك	y	ي

D	ض
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Appendix B

A map of the district of Tataouine





Appendix C

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Table 4.8: Examples of lexical differences

