KABYLE/FRENCH CODESWITCHING: A CASE-STUDY*

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Introduction

Kabyle is a Berber language belonging to the Afroasiatic phylum, spoken in the North of Algeria, by approximately five million people (much more if we consider emigrant Kabyle speakers in Europe or Canada). It is the main (and sometimes sole) language of 85% of the population\(^1\) of the region of Kabylie, and is used for all domains of everyday life, in all generations. Switch to French or Arabic by bi- or trilinguals is triggered by specific situations, and is not the norm.

As Algeria was a French colony between 1830 and 1962, French is one of the languages spoken by Algerian people, alongside Arabic (standard Arabic is taught at school, and is the official language of the country; Algerian Arabic is spoken by non-Berber speakers, and by a number of bilingual Berber speakers). In this paper, I am interested in Kabyle/French codeswitching, and the way it can be characterized linguistically.

My aim will be to show that, in the corpus analyzed for this case-study, the language that provides the highest number of words in the conversation is not necessarily the structurally dominant language in codeswitching. This claim will be supported by a morphosyntactic analysis of codeswitching within the model developed by Myers-Scotton (1993) and (2001). I will then confront the results obtained within this framework to the study of the prosody of codeswitching, and show that prosody reflects to a certain extent the separation between the two languages. Thus, morphosyntax and prosody can be seen to interact in codeswitching, allowing for both interpenetration and separability of the two languages.

\* I warmly thank Nwara and Zahra B. for their friendly participation in several recording sessions.

\(^1\) According to the Centre de Recherche Berbère de l'INALCO: \texttt{http://www.inalco.fr/crb/crb_2/fiches_dialectes/kabyle.htm}.
1. The conversation

The data consists in a long conversation (57 mn) that was recorded and videotaped in Azazga (Kabylie, Algeria) in June 2002. The speakers are two sisters, Nwara (30), a civil engineer, and Zahra (27), a high school physics teacher. The sisters’ mother is monolingual, and their father is a French-Kabyle bilingual, who used to be a primary school teacher when French was still extensively taught in primary school (1962-1980). Exposure to French for Nwara and Zahra was therefore realized at primary school and later, and also through their father’s occasional use of French at home. The two young women speak fluent French, alongside Kabyle, their main language.

The circumstances of the recording were the following: I had collected a high amount of Kabyle speech by older women, and wanted to have recordings of Kabyle spoken by younger generations. I didn’t participate in the conversation, and only monitored the recorder and videocamera. I asked Nwara and Zahra if they would agree to be recorded while speaking ‘the way they, as young women, speak Kabyle in everydaylife’, about topics that were specific to their age and preoccupations. Codeswitching was not elicited as such, and came out spontaneously. When I questioned them afterwards asking them if they used this mix of Kabyle and French at home, they assured me they did, when they spoke among themselves about the kind of issues they broached in this conversation.

The topics of the conversation revolve around the difficult position of women between tradition and modernity: how practising sports is a problem, how men/women relationships are cramped by tradition and the control of family and society. Lighter subjects, such as the preparation of Zahra’s wedding, were also discussed.

Although the analysis and findings concern the whole conversation, our examples are taken from a 4.56 mn excerpt corresponding to the subtopic of Zahra’s trousseau, which occurred at two thirds of the conversation. The excerpt was chosen because it belonged to the core of the conversation and not the beginning (beginnings often displaying adjustments in term of linguistic performance), and because it preserved the intimacy of the young women’s feelings on more personal issues.

The transcription of the conversation is orthographic, and the ‘punctuation’ is prosodic: a slash is used for non-terminal boundaries, and a double slash for terminal ones; stars indicate overlapping.
Some parts of the conversation are in French, and some parts are in Kabyle. The maximum length of French with minimal codeswitching in the excerpt is seven sentences in a row:

(1) Z: [...] je peux aller jusqu’à dix mille / acheter une belle robe de soirée etcetera // mais akkagi j’ai beaucoup de trucs à acheter // j’ai tellement de trucs à acheter (/) / acheter les chaussures / acheter les / acheter le / acheter la / la literie aynat les trucs-agini / donc je peux pas me permettre une st# s# s# / une robe de soirée pour *huit mille dinars* //

Z: [...] I can go till ten thousand / buy a beautiful evening dress etcetera // but so I have lots of things to buy // I have so many things to buy (/) / buy the shoes / buy the / buy the / the bed-linen stuff those things / therefore I can’t afford an eve# eve# eve# / an evening dress for *eight thousand dinars* //

The maximum length of Kabyle with minimal codeswitching in the excerpt is two sentences in a row:

(2) N: ih tura zriy belli annect-agi i d-tuyed non / mi d-teqqared akken ad d-ayey akkagi ad d-ayey akkagi //

N: yes now I know you bought that kind no / when you say thus I’ll buy such and such //

Apart from those isolated stretches of Kabyle or French, the great majority of the conversation is in both languages, with clauses containing both French and Kabyle material, or isolated monolingual clauses.

There are speaker differences in the amount of each language used in the conversation: Zahra tends to use more French, Nwara more Kabyle. This corresponds in part to role strategies, Zahra being in a way the centre of attention at the time of the interview, because of her upcoming wedding, and Nwara challenging her on a number of issues concerning tradition and modernity.

Apart from those personal and circumstantial differences, some general tendencies can be found in the use of either language.

French is a source of vocabulary, especially nouns (trousseau, robe, ‘dress’). Sometimes the noun has a Kabyle equivalent (aseddaq, ‘trousseau’, tagendurt, ‘dress’), sometimes not (le body, ‘the tank-top’). Adjectives are
also often in French (jaune poussin, ‘bright yellow’, grenat, ‘purple’, belle, ‘beautiful’, etc.). Here again, sometimes the noun has a Kabyle equivalent (telha, ‘it is nice’, cebhen, ‘they are beautiful’), sometimes not (grenat). It is therefore not the lack of certain words in one of the languages that triggers codeswitching, but it is rather the choice of the speaker, motivated by the subject matter and the social positioning they have towards it (French is associated to education and modernity whereas Kabyle is associated to tradition).

French is also used to mention prices (huit mille dinars, ‘eight thousand dinars’), styling (style anglais, ‘English style’, le style-mni constantinois, ‘that Constantinois style’, quelque chose qui va se démoder, ‘something which will go out of fashion’, le col dégagé, ‘an open neckline’, quelque chose de simple, ‘something simple’). It is used in set expressions (pour fêtes, ‘for parties’, ça fait fête, ‘it is formal (for parties)’, pour tout jour, ‘for everyday’, je n’ai aucun sou, ‘I have no money’, il faut profiter, ‘one must make the most of it’, j’ai fermé l’œil, ‘I closed my eye on it’, par exemple, ‘for instance’).

As for Kabyle, even if personal preference is generally expressed in that language (usiy-tt tcejb-iyi mlîh, ‘I found it pleased me a lot’; nekkîni əmley/m’ara lsey lhağa, ‘as for me I love / whenever I wear something’), and Kabyle is the source of most demonstratives, vocatives, discourse particles (akka, ‘thus’, ney, ‘or’, …), most Kabyle sentences, lexical items, discourse particles, can also appear in French elsewhere:

- ‘if’: si (Fr.), lukan (Kb)
- ‘because’: parce que (Fr.), axqatar (Kb)
- ‘it is not’: c’est pas (Fr.), mačči (Kb)
- ‘I bought’: j’ai acheté (Fr.), uyey-d (Kb)

Regularly, whole sentences are repeated in the other language:

(3)

Said tura a yi-d yernu yiwet / pour tout jour / […] Said va m’acheter yiwet pour tout jour (.) /

Said now said he would buy me another one / for everyday use / […] Said is going to buy me one for everyday use (.) /

Since French specializes more in some areas mentioned above, whereas Kabyle has no specialized domain, Kabyle can be considered as the
unmarked choice in codeswitching. The two languages have unequal functions.

This first look at the overall distribution of Kabyle and French is not enough to really describe how the codeswitching process is at play in this conversation. For this reason, we need to look more carefully at the syntax of codeswitching.

2. A syntactic approach of codeswitching

The framework used in this part of the paper is the one developed by Myers-Scotton (1993 & 2001), where the assumption is that the morphosyntactic frame for two of the three types of constituent contained in sentences showing intrasential CS, ML+EL constituents (those showing morphemes from the two or more participating languages) and ML islands (constituents composed entirely of ML morphemes). The third type of constituent, the EL island, is produced when ML morphosyntactic procedures are inhibited and EL procedures are activated” (1993: 229).

According to Myers-Scotton (1993: 229), “the major organizing device which the ML uses in setting the frame is the division between system and content morphemes”. In Myers-Scotton (2001: 43-48), those morphemes are defined in the following way: early system morphemes are close to content morphemes, they do not assign or receive thematic roles (they are for instance articles, determiners, adverbs). Late system morphemes are further subdivided into two categories: ‘bridge late system morphemes’, which unite elements within a constituent (genitives, some prepositions are examples of such morphemes), and ‘outsider late system morphemes’, which depend on grammatical information outside of their own constituent (as for instance agreement, case assigned at Complementizer Phrase (CP) level). Only Outsider late system morphemes identify the matrix language in the CP.

Analyzed within this framework, the conversation yields a number of bilingual CPs. Some of them have Kabyle as their matrix language, some of them have French. In the following passage, CPs have been bracketed, and bilingual CPs numbered. Monolingual CPs are underlined and not taken into account, and the chunk between accolades is a barely audible part, therefore also excluded from the analysis. For bilingual CPs, if we code ML in small

Note that CS stands for Codeswitching, ML for Matrix Language, and EL for Embedded Language.
capitals and EL in standard font, and Kabyle in bold and French in italics, we find the following organization:

(4) [MACCI quelquechose]₁ [qui va se démoder] [tezrid] [MACCI LHAÇA] [ITTdimodin]₂ [a s-ten] [TESCA la dentelle NET quelque chose de simple]₃ [d acu tesca] [TESCA KAN le décolleté AKKAGINI avec un bretelle]₄

[IT IS NOT something]₁ [which is going to go out of fashion] [you know] [IT IS NOT SOMETHING] [THAT’S GOING OUT OF FASHION]₂ [a s-ten] [IT HAS lace OR something simple]₃ [what it has] [IT HAS JUST the neckline LIKE THIS with a strap]₄

Here all bilingual CPs have Kabyle as a matrix language, since French words are content morphemes, or early system morphemes, or bridge late system morphemes, whereas Kabyle words are outsider late system morphemes. More precisely, agreement (subject affixes) are in Kabyle, and mostly verbal radicals too. Most morphemes (late system morphemes) are also in Kabyle. French is used for NPs (sometimes in prepositional phrases headed by a Kabyle preposition: we find di le coffre, ‘in the vault’ elsewhere), and bare forms (-dimodi-). Despite the pregnancy of French in the conversation, the ML in the great majority of bilingual CPs is Kabyle, and there are a lot of bilingual CPs.

What are the characteristics of CPs with French as ML as opposed to CPs with Kabyle as ML? The following examples show some characteristics of such CPs:

(5) [eh winna c’est pour pour montrer aux gens] [aql-ey on est on est riches]
Yes that is to show people that here we are we are rich

(6) [mais tura je n’ai aucun sou]
But now I have no money

(7) [kemmini déjà tu me l’as conseillée la chaîne-nni]
You did advise me (to buy) that chain
In those CPs, verbs are French, and arguments as well (NPs in general). Kabyle is used for deictic and referential markers (-nni, -agi, nekkini, winna, aql-ey, tura) (early system morphemes).

This corresponds to the findings of (Bentahila & Davies 1998): “within the mixed clauses, we do find switches of the insertion type, where French vocabulary is set into an Arabic statement (...) and of the leak type, where an Arabic filler is used (...). Arabic, the temporarily prior [=‘psycholinguistically dominant’] language seeps through the ‘cracks’ or pauses in the flow of French in the form of ubiquitous and relatively uninformative idioms, while French, a language of education and the wider world, is a convenient source of vocabulary” (1998: 46-47).

Those similarities may be attributed to the common typological features of Arabic and Berber (pronominal arguments, head-marking).

However, we must keep in mind that the Matrix Language changes regularly. Here is an exemple. As for the passage above, CPs have been bracketed, and bilingual CPs numbered. Monolingual CPs are underlined and not taken into account. For bilingual CPs, if we code ML in small capitals and EL in standard font, and Kabyle in bold and French in italics, we find the following organization:

(8)

Z: no [MI TMLAH la chaîne-NNI]1 (.) // kemmi déjà / [kemmini DÉJÀ TU ME L’AS CONSEILLEÉE LA CHAÎNE-NNI]2 //
N: ch [je te l’ai conseillée] / [d ssah] //

Z: no [IF IT’S BEAUTIFUL THAT chain]1 (.) // you already / [you ALREADY YOU HAVE ADVISED ME that CHAIN]2 //
N: yes [I have advised it to you] / [that’s true] //
Z: you already / [IT’S A CHAIN that’s beautiful]3 / [I decided] [I’d buy only one] / [so / at least THAT ONE IS BEAUTIFUL]4 // [because I WON’T BUY neither THOSE necklaces / nor nothing]5 (.) // normally we ha# / [I MUST BUY all those THINGS all]6 //
We can see that the passage is more complicated than the one analyzed before. In order for a CP analysis to be conducted, one has to eliminate various chunks and discourse-markers, thus excluding part of the linguistic material. Once this is done, we see that CPs numbered 1, 4 and 5 have Kabyle as ML, whereas CPs numbered 2, 3 and 6 have French as ML. Four CPs are monolingual.

CPs being units of syntactic analysis, it is difficult to see what motivates the switch from one Matrix Language to the other. We suggest that prosody may help our analysis, as stated in Shenk (2006).

3. A prosodic approach to CS


The main cues that are involved in identifying IUs include (Chafe 1994 & DuBois et al. 1993):

- Changes in fundamental frequency (pitch reset) at the boundaries,
- Lengthening at the end, and anacrusis (acceleration) at the beginning of an intonation unit,
- Changes in intensity (loudness)
- Pauses of different lengths
- Changes in voice quality (creak)

We have segmented the whole conversation into intonation units according to those cues, thanks to the software Praat\(^3\). We have paid particular attention to the passage under close scrutiny, which has been reviewed by native speakers of Kabyle on the basis of perception. Major boundaries are those where boundary phenomena are salient (longer pauses, higher pitch reset, higher amplitude in boundary tones, etc.). Minor boundaries are less salient.

The analysis of codeswitching according to prosody, and more precisely to prosodic boundaries, yields slightly different results than the analysis in CPs. Here is for example the excerpt analyzed in part 2 under (4), with intonation units indicated by slashes, and arranged in column:

\(^3\) Conceived and developed by Paul Boersma and David Weenink (IPS, university of Amsterdam), and downloadable from [http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/](http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/)
IU1 = [MACCI quelquechose]1 [qui va se démoder] / 
IU2 = [tezrid ] / 
IU3 = [MACCI L'HAGA]1 TTdimodi[N]2 {a s-ten} [TESCA la dentelle NEF] / 
IU4 = quelque chose de simple]3 / 
IU5 = [d acu tesca] [TESCA KAN / 
IU6 = le décolleté AKKAGINI avec un bretelle]4 / 

Here we get less bilingual IUs (2: IUs 1 and 3) than bilingual CPs (4), the tendency is for IU boundaries to correspond to language switch. But this tendency is not necessarily always realized, as shown in the other excerpt under scrutiny, analyzed under (8) into CPs.

IU1 = Z: non [MI TMLAH la chaîne-NNI]1 (. ) / 
IU2 = kemmi déjà / 
IU3 = [kemmini DEJA TU ME L'AS CONSEILLE LA CHAINE-nni]2 // 

IU4 = N: eh [je te l'ai conseillée ] / 
IU5 = [d ssah ] // 

IU6 = Z: kemmi déjà / 
IU7 = [C'EST UNE CHAÎNE imelhen]3 / 
IU8 = [j'ai décidé] [hala viwet kan ara d-ayey] / 
IU9 = [donc / 
IU10 = au moins TINNA TELHA]4 // 
IU11 = [parce qu'UR D-TTATET ni les sautoirs-NNI / 
IU12 = ni rien du tout]5 (. ) // 
IU13 = normalement il # / 
IU14 = [JE DOIS ACHETER akw LES TRUCS-nni yakw]6 // 

In this exchange, 9 IUs are bilingual, compared to 6 CPs. If we exclude the chunks ('kemmi déjà'), 7 IUs out of 12 are bilingual, as compared to 6 CPs out of 10: exactly the same proportion. Of course the whole conversation should be thus statistically analyzed, but in any case, the results are certainly not as clear as the ones obtained by Shenk in her Spanish-English codeswitching data: “The largest category, comprising 58% of the data, is monolingual English IUs. [...] The next largest category, comprising 38% of the data, is monolingual Spanish IUs. By far the smallest category, bilingual IUs, comprises a mere 4% of the data. What this means is that speakers are producing monolingual IUs 96% of the time, supporting my
claim that the most robust boundary correlating with codeswitching is prosodic in nature” (Shenk 2006: 189).

However, Intonation Units allow us to see other factors than syntactic ones at play. For instance, the tendency is for (bilingual and monolingual) IUs to start consistently in the same language as the beginning of the preceding one, with occasional switches that are pragmatically motivated: in (4), such a switch allows focus on quelque chose de simple, and le décolleté AKKAGINI avec un bretelle, which are also prosodically prominent in that excerpt. The speaker emphasizes her own view of what is a good choice.

In the second excerpt, the first IUs consistently begin with Kabyle words. IU7 is a turning point, and then we get a series of IUs beginning with French (some of them bilingual, others not). This second series corresponds to a focus on the chain as a choice of the speaker as opposed to other types of necklaces she considers too gaudy.

A full pragmatic analysis of codeswitching, in relation to intonation-units, is needed in order to complement the insights of syntactic codeswitching theory. We hope this paper, although just a preliminary case-study, is a first step towards suggesting that this might be an interesting thread for Berber studies on contact.

**Conclusion**

Codeswitching is a complex interplay between languages, which has syntactic constraints, and is linked to the typological features of the language (pronominal argument, head-marking). The syntactic approach of codeswitching is very important, in that it allows us to link the dominant, or matrix language, not to statistical frequency of words, but to different levels of linguistic structure. In this case-study, the findings were that although French was very pregnant statistically, the matrix language was most of the time Kabyle. This is consistent with the background of the speakers, and also probably with the fact that the recording took place in Kabylie, and not in France, where the grammar of Kabyle is influenced by the linguistic structure of French.

As far as prosody is concerned, monolingual intonation units appear to be slightly preferred to bilingual ones, as is shown by the existence of a mapping of languages on intonation units, and of language switches over intonation unit boundaries. However, this tendency is very slight in the data. What appears more regular in our data is the consistency of intonation unit beginnings: they are either in French or in Kabyle for whole series of
intonation units, with occasional switches.

More pragmatic studies on codeswitching in Berber are needed if we want to fully understand the motivations of language-switch along the conversation, from a non-aprioristic viewpoint. Although we have noted tendencies (French in bilingual CPs provides mostly content morphemes or EL islands, whereas Kabyle is really at the commands of the syntactic structure, and most of the stance adverbials and particles), those tendencies still have to be investigated as a dynamic process, as the conversation unfolds. And more, and more extensive, case-studies have to be conducted in order to understand the cognitive processes underlying such complex interplays between two languages.

References


