Code Mixing among Tunisian University Students: Types and Motivations

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Abstract

The study sheds light on the phenomenon of code-mixing among Tunisian university students and the factors motivating it. The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach by describing and analyzing the forms of code mixing used in everyday conversation. Muysken's (2000) code-mixing framework is used to classify and analyze the data. The findings showed that code-mixing reflects the Tunisians' awareness of the bilingual and multicultural nature of society. Code mixing is also a way of gaining social prestige. Mixing codes among friends, in school, in everyday encounters, and even at home is also attributed to the speakers' innate expectation to use more than one code to communicate and interact.

1. INTRODUCTION

People use language as a medium to communicate their ideas and feelings. Language, then, ensures delivering meaning and referring to the ideas, events, or elements around individuals. Language and society are intertwined. Language performs almost all the functions in any society. It is the primary key for communication purposes and for reaching goals. Sociolinguistics aims at investigating all the aspects of the relationship between language and society (Crystal, 2008; Hudson, 1996). It explains the way language is used to communicate and how social meanings are conveyed. Code mixing is one of the phenomena that can be brought under sociolinguistic scrutiny. Crystal (2008) defines code mixing as the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another. This phenomenon is a common practice among individuals in bilingual societies, where two languages or language varieties are spoken. In Tunisia, where Tunisian Arabic (a variety

of Arabic) is the first language, French is considered the second language of the country. Apart from the use of French in everyday informal encounters, it is used as the second official language in Tunisia. Administrative and official governmental documents and even web portals support this claim. The present study uses Muysken's (2000) categorization of code-mixing to classify the data the role play elicited. Muysken (2000, p. 1) asserts that code-mixing refers "to all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence". Code-switching consists of three main strategies: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization (p. 32). Muysken's model is used because it helps the researcher classify and analyze the different strategies of code-mixing. The study relies on role plays as a data collection method. The utterances used for analysis contain instances of code-mixing. The utterances are classified using Muysken's (2000) typology.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. The linguistic situation in Tunisia:

The Tunisian constitution declares clearly that Arabic is the first and official language of the country. Yet, the reality is totally different in that the 'Tunisian tongue' reflects a complex linguistic situation or what Bahloul (2001) calls a mosaic of languages, where many language varieties coexist and enrich the 'linguistic profile of Tunisia' (Aouina, 2013, p. 31). This linguistic complexity and dynamism have historical underpinnings (Daoud, 2001) but also ideological, geographical and even political grounds (Kammoun, 2006). The linguistic situation in Tunisia is both diglossic (classical standard Arabic is used along with other regional Arabic dialects) and bilingual (Arabic and French) (Bouzemni, 2005, p. 17).

2.2. Modern Standard Arabic

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the official and national language of Tunisia. MSA is used in news broadcasts on radio, TV, and newspapers. MSA is the language of instruction in humanities and arts from primary school to university[1]. It is also used in official documents and formal speeches. It is the language of formality in spoken and written forms.

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1 Starting from secondary school, scientific subjects are taught in French.

2.3.Tunisian Arabic

Tunisian Arabic (TA) known also as 'Derja' (vernacular or dialectical Arabic) represents the variety or varieties[2] of Arabic Tunisians use on a daily basis in their speech and media programs. It is "a spoken form with a variety of mutually intelligible regional dialects (Daoud, 2010, p. 1). Thus, TA is the native language and mother tongue of the majority of Tunisians. TA is a spoken dialect that has many accents that refer to phonological variation across the country. For instance, the pronunciation of /q/ differs from one region to the other. /q/ is pronounced /q/ in the large cities of the northeast, the east, and the southeast (mainly the city of Sfax). In the west and the south /q/ is realized /g/. There are also some lexical and morphological variations depending on the region and its geographical location. Some Berber[3] terms are easily recognizable in the speech of Tunisians. These Lexical items are mixed with Tunisian Arabic. For example, the words ممّي /mimi/ (baby), /mgharfa / مغرفة / (spoon), and فكرون /fakrun/ (tortoise) are used in everyday conversations among Tunisians.

Surprisingly, most Tunisians use these terms without knowing their origins. French terms are equally used and mixed with Tunisian Arabic as shall be discussed below.

2.4.French

For colonial and historical reasons, French is the second language in Tunisia and it is widely spoken. This European language has a strong and clear influence on the Tunisian dialect. French terms and structures are present in everyday discourse. French influence is (1) *lexical*: c'est pas vrai (I can't believe it), impossible (impossible), ça va (I'm/fine), Bien sûr (of course); (2) *syntactic*, where the verb-subject object (VSO) word order in Arabic is substituted with the subject verb object (SVO) used in French. The result, as the example below illustrates, is a statement in Tunisian Arabic with a French structure.

e.g.,

رئيس الجمهورية يشرف على اجتماع مجلس الأمن القومي

Le Président de la République supervise la réunion du Conseil National de Sécurité

(The president of the republic leads a security meeting)

French terms might also witness (3) *morphological* transformations and give birth to a new word with a new function in Tunisian Arabic. The word /mkastim/ (well-dressed) is

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2 Tunisian Arabic slightly varies from one region to another across Tunisia without affecting comprehensibility.
3 The standardized version of the Amazigh languages.

borrowed from French (costume). The result is an idiomatic expression in Tunisian Arabic. The new word is used to refer to a person wearing smart or elegant clothes.

(4) *Phonetic* influence: some French morphemes are adopted. The consonant 'v' is not listed in the Arabic Alphabet, yet it is used in Tunisian Arabic. The word يريڥز /jriviz/ (reviser in French) means to prepare for an exam or revise one's lessons.

2.5. Code Mixing

Before giving an in-depth definition of code-mixing, a distinction should be made between code-mixing and code-switching. While the former involves the use of more than one language within the same utterance or sentence (intra-sentential), the latter stands for moving or switching from one language to another between sentences (inter-sentential). Trudgill (1992, p. 16) considers code-mixing "the process whereby speakers indulge in code-switching between languages of such rapidity and density, even within sentences and phrases, that is not really possible to say at any given time which language they are speaking." For code-mixing to occur, the speaker must be momentarily unable to access meaning in another code or when they lack a vocabulary item in the original code they are using and find its equivalent in the other code (McClure, 1977; Mohammed, 2020). Crystal (1997, p. 66) proposes a more comprehensive definition, whereby code mixing "involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another." Gumperz (1968, p. 381) states that bilingual speakers employ chunks of speech (clauses, phrases, words…) from a foreign language, while the other language functions as the base language. Therefore, the foreign language serves as a gap filler for the items deliberately or undeliberately (depending on the speaker's goal) left missing.

2.5.1. Types of code-mixing

Muysken (2000, p.3) distinguishes between three types of code mixing: insertion, alteration, and congruent lexicalization.

a- Insertion

Insertion consists of incorporating lexical items or phrasal constituents from one language into the structure of another. In this case, code-mixing happens when the speaker inserts constituents smaller than a sentence or a clause. The following sentence is an example of code-mixing, where the French adverb is inserted into a Tunisian Arabic structure.

عجبتني الحكاية **pourtant** قصيرة

I liked the story **although** it is short.

b- Alternation

Alternation occurs when the speaker switches codes between utterances in a turn or between turns. Alternation can be grammatical or lexical.

je pense صاحبك ينجم يعاونك

I think your friend could help you

c- Congruent lexicalization

The last type of code mixing Muysken (2000) proposed is congruent lexicalization, which refers to situations where two languages share the same grammatical structure. Language users fill their talk with grammatical elements from either language.
e.g. It is a single English word in a Dutch utterance.
Weet jij (whaar) Jenny is?
"Do you know where Jenny is?" (Dutch: waar Jenny is)
(English-Dutch; Crama and Van Geldere in Muysken, 2000, p. 5)
As the example illustrates, the English word 'where' is similar to the Dutch 'waar' and 'Jenny' is a name used in both languages.

Possible reasons for code-mixing

When speakers mix codes, there might be reasons that motivate them to do so. When speakers fail to find appropriate expressions or equivalents in the language they use, they mix codes and rely on the language that offers them alternatives, in the time of speech. Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) assert that a number of factors intervene when speakers mix codes. The participants' background, the topic, and the time/ and place where speech acts are produced affect the choice of codes.

Grosjean (1982, p. 149) quotes a Greek-English bilingual, who comments "I find myself code-switching with my friends who are all Greek. They know English very well and nobody gets offended… I don't switch with my parents as I do with my friends."

Participants and the relationship that joins them have an impact on code-mixing. Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) stress that language attitudes and dominance play an important role in perceiving code-mixing positively or negatively, in a particular society. While Poplack (1980) claims that mixing codes fluently is a sign of proficiency among bilinguals, Weinreich (1953, in Muysken, 2000) postulates it is rather a sign of a lack of proficiency.

Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) report that the majority of hold negative attitudes towards code-mixing. It is considered a sign of 'laziness' and 'impurity' that threatens their linguistic performance.

In the Tunisian context, Daoud (2001, p. 22) asserts that "in everyday conversation, French is used extensively by the middle and upper classes in urban areas, and by women in particular, as it still confers upon its users a high degree of sophistication and prestige." Accordingly, educated bilinguals (those holding a university degree) in Tunisia code mix to show class differences. Khammari (2022, p. 231) found that Tunisian responses in their native language contained instances of code-mixing, where French terms were embedded in the informants' utterances in TA, which shows the openness of Tunisian Arabic on other languages and indicates the degree of prestige, high

status, and solidarity among its users.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1.1. Instruments and participants

The study focused on the use of code-mixing among Tunisian graduate university students. Students were asked to respond to a list of everyday scenarios in their first language (Tunisian Arabic). Ten students participated in the study. Recording was the data collection technique used. After the recording process, the audio files were transcribed. Qualitative analysis was conducted to investigate the different types of code mixing following Muysken's (2000) taxonomy of code-mixing.

3.1.2. Research questions

This paper attempts to find answers to the following questions:

a. What are the types of code mixing identified in the data?
b. What are the reasons behind mixing codes among Tunisian university students?

5. RESULTS

This section deals with the analysis of the use of code-mixing among university students.

The data is classified and explained based on the types of code mixing abovementioned. The researcher gives examples for each type of code-mixing.

5.1. Types of Code-Mixing

5.1.1. Insertion

The informants inserted French words and phrases into Tunisian Arabic sentences. The data contained 12 instances of insertion. The following sentences provide examples of insertion identified in the data.

a. **compréhensif** عجبني **sujet** الي اخترتو و نتمنا تكون

(I liked the **topic** I chose and I hope you **understand that**)

b. بسيط **changement** تننجم تعمل

(You can make minor **changes**)

c. **logique** شوف الي تقول فيه موش

(Look what you are saying **doesn't make sense**)

As the examples show the French terms are inserted within the sentence. The examples are categorized as insertions.

5.1.2. Alternation

The informants mixed French clauses and sentences within Tunisian Arabic sentences in some instances. The data contained 10 occurrences of alternation. The informants provided full grammatical units containing subjects, verbs, and objects.

a. **j'ai travaillé nuit et** jour خدمتي بالطبيعة **a votre avis**

(**What do you think**? It's my work of course. **I worked hard on it**.)

b. خير ما لبسة نلقاو تو **Ne te fais pas de souci mon ami**

(Don't worry, we will find something better)

c. وطمان تهنى **Papa J'ai fait mon choix t'inquiète pas**

(Dad I made my choice don't worry nothing bad gonna happen)

5.1.3. Congruent Lexicalization

The third and last category in code-mixing identified in the data is congruent lexicalization. The following examples illustrate this phenomenon.

a. **travail mon pour revision** نعمل توا **mais bon** هذي موش داخلة مخي **histoire**[4]

(**Well I don't believe this story, but I'll revise my work**)

5.2. Reasons of Code-Mixing

The use of code-mixing shows the openness of Tunisian Arabic to other languages and the bilingual situation in Tunisia. Daoud (2011, p. 15) noticed that the phenomenon of

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[4] This utterance should be read from right to left.

code-switching and code-mixing "depends on the background and language mastery level of the individual user, his/her cultural affiliation and attitude toward these languages and related cultures, as well as communication, needs as determined by the social or professional context, audience, and topic at hand." Jabeur (2000) investigated teenagers' attitudes towards the three main languages in Tunisia: Arabic, French, and English. He found that Arabic ranked first as the language of identity, French rated number one as the language of high status, and English rated number one on affection (Jabeur, 2000, p. 199).

According to Daoud (2001, p. 22), "in everyday conversation, French is used extensively by the middle and upper classes in urban areas, and by women in particular, as it still confers upon its users a high degree of sophistication and prestige." Lawson and Sachdev (2000, p. 1356) investigated Tunisians' attitudes towards Code Switching/Mixing and found that "it is a variety for in-group communication, connoting both status and solidarity simultaneously." This indicates the degree of prestige, high status, and solidarity among its users (Daoud, 2001; Jabeur, 2000; Lawson & Sachdev, 2000). Self-pride and prestige are, therefore, other probable factors of the phenomenon of code-mixing (Hymes, 1962; Kashru, 1978).

6. CONCLUSION

The study showed that a historical and cultural heritage explains the phenomenon of code-mixing in the Tunisian context in general. There is also a social reason that accounts for this behaviour. The informants used French to claim modernity and introduce themselves as the educated group in society. Code mixing is a prestigious and unmarked form of language choice that allows them to express themselves in daily encounters. Educated speakers avoid using pure Tunisian Arabic in their speech in order not to sound strange. Code mixing, then, ensures the expression of group identity. It reflects a subconscious operation that expresses a shared identity. It is a form of group solidarity. This paper is a preliminary study that needs more research to unravel the complexity of the phenomenon of code-mixing.

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