

## **An Analysis of Algerian Arabic/Modern Standard Arabic Code Switching in Algeria. The Case of Algerian National TV Advertisements**

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### **Abstract:**

*The current study is an attempt at studying the spoken language of advertisements with special reference to Algerian National Television. Advertising may take many forms. Therefore, we should precise that this work deals only with what Leech (1966) has called 'commercial consumer advertising'.*

*Spoken language on television advertising appears much more frequently than the written one. This is due to the fact that the television screen is limited in size and also because the audience have no time to read lengthily the material. Moreover, television advertisements make use of all the spoken language possibilities relying on voice qualities, verbal dialogue and a lot of other types of interactions.*

*The choice of language to convey a specific message is vitally important in the field of advertisements. Thus, this study attempts to examine, from a sociolinguistic perspective, code switching between the two Arabic varieties existing in Algeria namely Algerian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. Its main objective is to study the effectiveness of language choice and its relationship to the situational context. Hence, Switching from a variety to another in Algerian TV advertisements is not done at random. It has as primary task persuade the audience and attract as much people as possible.*

**Key words:** advertising language, Algeria, Modern Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic, code switching

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising, as a form of mass communication, is a powerful tool for the spread of information from the seller to the buyer. It aims at influencing and persuading people to act or believe. Moreover, advertising is something which affects most of us in different domains of our lives. It reflects certain aspects of the values and structures of a given society. Different forms of advertisements might be used to announce a new product or service, expand the market to new buyers, reveal a modification or a price change, educate customers and challenge competition. In the process of creating advertisements for all these reasons, language, i.e. choice of expressions, is of crucial importance in the advertising process. For this, the way language is used remains an important influencing factor, which requires a systematic study.

The current study analyses the different choices made by copywriters to make the advertisement attractive, persuasive and highly effective.

## 2. CATEGORIES OF CODE SWITCHING IN ADVERTISEMENTS

### 2.1 Clarification

Some code switches in the data of this study appear to clarify what the advertiser is talking about. Thus, clarification is an important attribute which may lead to code switching. The aim behind clarifying a message is to resolve any ambiguity and avert incomplete understanding. In the corpus of this study, it has been noticed that in some advertisements the main register is Algerian colloquial Arabic, but a switch to MSA occurs to give

more details. A good illustration of this can be found in the commercial for “Hair Fantastic” shampoo. In this advertisement, two women are talking about the product using only Algerian Arabic; one of them finishes by saying:

mənha:r əstaʕməl ‘Hair Fantastic’ kulʕi tbaddəl  
(since he (her husband) has used ‘Hair Fantastic’, everything has changed.)

The commentator then says in Modern Standard Arabic :

bilʕiʕl maħlu:l ‘Hair Fantastic’ maʕnu:ʕ mina  
lmustaxlaʕa:t ənnaba:tia wa xa:lin mina lmawæd  
əlkimjaʕijja  
(effectively, ‘Hair Fantastic’ solution is made of plants’  
extracts and devoid of chemical substances )

To reflect a home situation, the two women in the first part of the advertisement are talking about the product as any other women may talk about it at home. Accordingly, the women’s use of AA is quiet conceivable since the variety used at home by most Algerians is Algerian Arabic. However, the switch to Standard Arabic can easily be accounted by the fact that the presenter is now reading the detailed elements of the body copy. An adherence to MSA phonology and syntax is, therefore, expected.

## 2.2 Personalization

This feature which has been a subject of study for various scholars (Gumperz (1967), McClure (1981), Scotton (1988) (quoted in Koziol, 2000:29) seems to be one of the most common types of code switching in advertisements.

An advertisement that fulfils the function of personalization contains a code switch element that is directly addressed to the consumer. It may simultaneously aim at clarification if the code switched element does clarify a point. In this study, it has been noticed that the function of personalization is achieved by using Algerian Arabic. The latter

is generally the variety preferred by copywriters to start the advertising message with, and then, they carry on their message using Modern Standard Arabic. An illustration for this may be found in the advertisement for *'La vache qui rit' cheese:*

li?annu ma ʃlabalekf waj mustaqbel awladek,  
tazmaʃ

'La vache qui rit' muraddija:t alhali:b alʔasa:sia,  
alkalisju:m,

vitamine:t wa pru :tine:t da :xil kul qitʃa taɗman  
numuw zajjid li ʔawla:dikum

(because you are not aware of your children's future, 'La vache qui rit' gathers all milk's fundamental nutrition , calcium, vitamins and proteins in each piece guarantee your children's balanced growth).

In this example, the advertiser begins his advertisement in Algerian Arabic (the underlined part) because, as stated before, this variety is used by most Algerians in daily conversations .

By starting with such a variety, the addressee feels more involved and listens to what is going to be said. Therefore, the element of personalization creates a more intimate atmosphere which helps in attracting people's attention. Worthy to note, in this example, that in addition to AA, the advertiser uses some persuasive words which may have a crucial effect. When he says, for example, 'mustaqbel awladek' (your children's future) a wide number of parents are going to listen to what is going to be said since it concerns their children's future

### 2.3 Untranslatability\_

One of the reasons for code switching between Algerian and Modern Standard Arabic is the untranslatability of a word. Sometimes, because he does not find the equivalent word in AA, the addresser switches to MSA for necessity. Examples of this can be found in an advertisement for 'le chat' washing powder:

marħba bi:kum fi maxabir ‘Henkel’... ‘le chat’  
power  
pearls wəlla aqwa məlli ka :n, əllu?lu?a:t  
alxadra:?  
tedxul fi: qalb əttafa:t wətfattatha w menbaʕd  
əllu?lu?a :t əzzarqa:? taqdi ʕli:ha  
tama :men  
(Welcome to ‘Henkel’ laboratories, ‘le chat power  
pearls’ has become stronger than before, green pearls  
enter inside stains and crumble them and then blue  
pearls destroy them totally)

In this passage, the advertiser is speaking Algerian Arabic but uses some MSA words such as ‘maxa:bir’ ( laboratories) , ‘əllu?lu?a:t’ (pearls) which have no exact equivalent in AA.

## 2.4 Mitigating Message

There are utterances in the language of advertising which could be classified as mitigating what is being said. Some researchers have classified this as ‘controlling the addressee’. Often in the case of mitigating messages, the advertiser tries to persuade the consumers that this product is less demanding. Mitigating utterances in Algerian advertisements are generally related to what concerns people most: the value and the price of the product. An example of this category is found in the following advertisement for ‘Force Express’ washing product. In this television commercial a formal level of Arabic is used to talk about the product, as the following excerpt shows:

‘Force Express’ tuzi:lu al?awsa:x wa  
dduhu:n mina  
l?awa:ni: wa ?a:la:t əttabx  
(‘Force Express’ clears dirt and greases from dishes  
and utensils )

The voice-over is then given in pure Algerian Arabic:

mʕa ‘force express’, ʕandek enqawa bla ʕqawa

(by using 'force express', you get cleanliness without any efforts)

Though the body copy in this advertisement is presented in a formal level of Arabic, the advertiser prefers to conclude with a slogan using Algerian Arabic. He attempts at reinforcing all what is said before by using a short sentence which stresses the effectiveness of the product.

Another example of mitigating messages could also be found in the following advertisement for 'Pampers' diapers. At the end of the advertisement, the voice-over claims mainly in Algerian Arabic:

'Pampers' bemja wətmani:n dina:r faqat  
(‘Pampers’ coast only one hundred and eighty dinars)

In this example, the advertiser has also chosen Algerian Arabic for his last message in which he tries to persuade people to buy the product by proposing a good price.

In the two examples given above, the copy writer is trying to use every tool he can in order to persuade consumers of the high quality and the good price of the product. One of those methods is by using Algerian Arabic which creates a more intimate atmosphere. By fostering such an atmosphere, he has a higher chance of having his wish realized than he would have if he continued to use the formal level of Arabic.

## 2.5 Topic Shift

During the analysis of the present data, it has been noticed that the topic, which is related in advertisement to the type of the product, plays an important role in determining the appropriate advertising code. Advertisers choose to advertise some products in AA and others in MSA. Therefore, in addition to the preceding categories, there are two types of advertisements in which no mixing of registers occurs. These are as follows:

- a) In advertisements where MSA is uniquely used all along the advertisement especially in what Leech (1966:81)

has called “prestige” advertisements like those advertisements for banks, television brands or cars.

- b) In advertisements conducted only in Algerian Dialectal Arabic containing a final slogan that generally appears on the screen in an Arabic writing script. Leech (1966:60) calls this form of slogan a “super” (Leech, 1966:60). The following advertisements are examples of this:

- c) An advertisement for ‘Aroma’ coffee powder advertisement with the following slogan:

‘Aroma’ bennetha hajla  
(‘Aroma’ is so delicious)

- 1) An advertisement for ‘Guallina Blanca’ soup powder with the following end line (and “super”)

‘Guallina Blanca’ dabbrat ʕli:na  
(‘Guallina Blanca’ found the solution )

- 2) ‘Mio bébé’ baby nappies: the whole advertisement is presented exclusively in AA. The end line (as well as the “super”) reads:

‘Mio bébé’ zawda kbi:ra w su:ma Sʕri:ra  
( ‘Mio bébé’ : high quality and low price )

It is important to note here that this advertisement could also be an example of a mitigating message which has been explained before.

On the basis of these and similar examples, it appears that the choice of register is determined to a certain degree by the type of product. All the commercials in category (b) are for non-technical products which are used or consumed on a daily basis. Therefore, the use of colloquial language is not surprising since the promotional aim would be to reach as wide an audience as possible.

### 3. FURTHER PATTERNS FOR CODE SWITCHING IN ADVERTISEMENTS

In addition to the patterns explained above, the present study reveals other constraints which govern language level mixing in Algerian advertisements. These are as follows:

1) Where the advertisement is conducted in AA, including interviews with consumers and the voice-over is also in AA, but the final piece of information about the product is given in MSA. An illustration for this type of advertisements is taken from 'Isis' washing powder commercial. In this example, the interviewers present the advertisement using Algerian Arabic and then a commentator adds the following:

wa lʔa:n 'ISIS' mutawaffir fi: əala:tət aħʒa:m  
muxtalifa

(and now 'ISIS' is available in three different packets )

What is noticed in this example is that the commentator has switched from Algerian Arabic to Modern Standard Arabic and even maintains the MSA pronunciations for the numeral (three) which is very unusual in commercials.

The switch to the formal language may be attributed to the fact that the advertiser seeks to create what Leech (1966:27) has called "attention value" by a sudden change in language level. Leech defines "attention value" as follows:

**one way of provoking the consumer's attention and curiosity is to present him with something surprising and unexpected, and this can be done as well by the unorthodox use of language as by any other means...perhaps a 'wrong spelling', or a grammatical solecism. Leech (1966:27)**

2) Where there is clear evidence of some retention of *iʔra:b* (case endings). This may be found in at least two contexts:



a) In a formal presentation of a product in which the advertisement is presented in MSA, as in the following one for 'Granca San Francisco' honey:

ʕasalu 'Granca San Francisco' almada:qu rrafi:ʕ wa  
lhala:watu lʔaki:da, wa liʔannahu Sihhijjun wa  
ladi:d fa huwa rida:ʔun ka:mil

('Granca San Francisco' honey, the good taste and the certain sweetness and because it is healthy and delicious, it is a complete (perfect) meal ).

b) Where the language of the advertisement is strictly AA but there are occurrences of '*isra:b*', either for the purposes of rhythm or rhyme . An instance of the latter occurs in the commercial for 'Loya' coffee milk:

'Loya' qahwa hli:b zdi:d  
( 'Loya' is a new coffee milk )

The word 'qahwa' (coffee) is a feminine word in Arabic . So, the correct form of the adjective in this context is 'zdi:da' instead of 'zdi:d'. However, the advertiser chooses the case ending 'd' instead of 'da' to have a rhyme effect between the words 'hli:b' (milk) and 'zdi:d' (new) .

3) Where foreign words or phrases are used. The main reason for using such foreign words is to create rhyme as in the following commercial for 'Holandia' margarine:

Margarine 'Holandia' lezi, əddawq əlli tahtaʒi  
(Margarine 'Holandia' light, the taste that you need )

In this example, a rhyme pattern is created by the adapted French word 'lezi' (light) and the Arabic one 'tahtaʒi'.

Furthermore, the advertising language function can be a sign in itself. It is not restricted to that of a sign system (Dyer, 1982: 140). In other words, some advertisements rely more on the style of the language than the actual content. An example of this can be found in the advertisement for 'Granca San Francisco' honey given previously. In this commercial, the use

of the English language seems to refer to both: the name and the Western nature of the product since an American town, 'San Francisco', is stated in this example.

Similarly, it has been noticed that some washing powders such as: 'ISIS', 'OMO' are associated with the foreign word "Henkel" which refers to the German Company which manufactures the products.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the present analysis that the Algerian advertisers often switch between Algerian linguistic levels. Such switches, as the study shows can be identified in many cases. A specific linguistic code is often chosen either for connotative or referential purposes, or to create a rhyme, for example, which might not have been possible without switching codes.

A lot of studies in the field of code switching have proved that code switching serves a purpose. Thus, the present work does not only confirm this view but also focuses on explaining and exploring the different functions that code switching phenomenon serves in Algerian TV advertisements. In addition, the study proves that the two Arabic varieties, namely AA and MSA, are not used at random. Yet, Algerian copywriters choose each variety to fulfil a special function. Ultimately, the current paper has demonstrated that though they are alternatively used, the two Arabic varieties are employed to fulfil advertising primary aim which is attracting consumers and persuading as much an audience as possible.

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