Abstract: Studies in language and gender are barely known in Morocco and the Arab-Islamic world at large. This paper highlights the empowering use that Moroccan women make of the languages available to them. The significance of this use is enhanced by the fact that Morocco is a multilingual country where languages do not have the same social and political status and where the choice and use of a language is part and parcel of negotiating the power related to gender-making and gender-creating in Moroccan society. Mono- or bilingual women use oral genres to assert themselves and literate (often multilingual) women use code-switching for the same purpose.

Introduction

This paper falls within the postmodernist feminist approach to language and gender in Morocco. The analyses provided are related to feminism by focusing on the daily language use and oral female genres in Morocco not from the perspective of victimizing women, but from the perspective of highlighting ways in which women both sustain and subvert the gender roles that the larger power structures of their culture dictate. The choice and use of language by Moroccan women is part of negotiating the power related to gender making and creating. Up to now, linguistic issues in Morocco have been largely subordinated to broad historical and cultural discussions, and it is high time we looked at them in terms of how Moroccan women make use of the linguistic resources available to them in order to assert themselves.

Moroccan Feminism

The Moroccan pre-independence anti-colonialist protest gave way to a collective awareness that the country needed to create its own identity after Morocco obtained independence in 1956. This shift was occasioned by the confusion and disillusionment that Moroccans experienced as they realized that the "modern" West would not go away after independence. In fact, long into the postcolonial era, Moroccans have continued to struggle with the heavy impact of colonization. This materialized at the intellectual level in a spectacular flourishing of social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, economy, law, political science, and linguistics, focusing on Morocco. Some Moroccan political leaders and intellectuals, most of them men, such as Allal Al-Fassi (1966) and Mohamed Hassan El-Outazzani (1987; 1994), started to pay attention to the status, role, and expectations of Moroccan women in this transitional phase and focused on the need to educate girls. While Allal-Al-Fassi was heavily influenced by the Arab-Islamic culture and wrote in Arabic, Mohamed Hassan El-Outazzani was influenced by both the Arab-Islamic culture and Western culture and wrote in French. It is important to note that this interest in women was not dictated by a genuine will to improve women’s condition as women, but was part of the larger ‘modernizing’ process which viewed women's illiteracy as a cause of Morocco’s backwardness (Maaninou, 1996).

It is also during this period that the first Moroccan women journalists and writers such as Fatima Mernissi (1975) and Leila Abu-Zeid (1979) appeared on the public scene. In addition, genres other than the usual written literary ones emerged in the public sphere. Folklore and oral histories in the form of popular songs and poems, story-telling, radio sketches, etc. attracted not only writers, but anthropologists and filmmakers. This period, which roughly corresponds to the 1960s and 1970s, witnessed the birth of Moroccan feminism.

It is difficult to give a comprehensive and accurate definition of the term ‘feminism’ given the many types of struggle that this term covers (Badran, 1995; Basu, 1995). Indeed, although all feminisms are basically ways of deconstructing the power relations between women and men and share the political edge of ‘struggle’ for more rights and better conditions for women, the reading, import, and evaluation of this struggle is deeply culture-bound. Consequently, the term ‘feminism’ acquires various meanings within various socio-cultural contexts. In Morocco, feminism has not generally taken the form of a direct struggle against men given the fact that Moroccan social organization is based on the family (and not the individual), and given the deep-rooted collective self which underlies the socialization process (Sadiqi, 2003; Schaeffer-Davis, 1979). Women do not compete for status with men; they function in a different system (Schaeffer-Davis, 1979). Indeed, even in everyday interactions, woman-man confrontation in speech is considered ‘improper’ behavior. Feminism in Morocco is more perceived as an endeavor to empower women at the level of decision-making in the so-called public spheres. Moroccan feminism has affinities with Middle Eastern/Third World and Western feminisms, but its own historical, cultural, and social conditions make it different from both. For example, unlike mainstream Western (Euro-American) feminisms, Moroccan feminism did not grow from militant feminist movements, and unlike Middle Eastern feminisms, it did not emerge from nationalism (Badran, 1995). In Morocco, feminism is a result of the encounter of the Moroccan indigenous culture/civilization and ways of life with Western culture/civilization and ways of life. This encounter is often referred to as ‘modernism’ in the mainstream official discourse (Belarbi, 1993; Bourqia, 1997; Sadiqi, 2003; Taarji, 1991).
Moroccan feminism was mainly instigated by the State, political parties, and civil society (Moulay R’Chid, 1987). This feminism has had to establish its agenda vis-à-vis five strong prevailing forces, namely (i) Islam, (ii) local political authority, (iii) local civil society, (iv) Western feminism, and (v) international nongovernmental organizations. Morocco is a constitutional monarchy and since independence, kings have played a crucial role in promoting women; Islam is a State religion and constitutes a strong component of culture (Sadiqi 2003); civil society and international organizations have become a powerful reality from the late 1980s onward as a prerequisite for success in dealing with powerful Western economic partners. In its inception, and given the general political atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, Moroccan feminism was liberal (i.e. secular), but from the 1980s to the present, and due to the changing political atmosphere locally and internationally, this liberal feminism has co-existed with a religious (conservative) feminism, which has mainly stemmed from conservative political parties and associations. Whereas liberal feminism is secular and takes universal human rights to be its major reference, conservative feminism is religious and takes Islamic law to be its major reference (Badran, 1995; Bennani & Maadi, 2000; Sadiqi 2003; Taarji, 1991). The two feminist trends differ in their readings of modernity. Liberal feminists associate modernity with an opening on universal values such as gender equality and human rights and use both Arabic and European languages to disseminate their thoughts, and religious feminists read modernity as a return to ‘authenticity’ and stress al-fiqh; ‘Islamic law’ and Arabic as fixed icons of this authenticity. Although both trends condemn customary practices as anti-women, only the liberal one condemns the prevailing discourse as reinforcing the status quo. Within each of these two trends, there are ‘sub-trends’ of varying degrees of ‘feminist intensity’. Each trend has its own discourse and uses specific means of communicating ideas through language and dress. However, the hotly debated 1999-2000 Plan for the Integration of Women in Development seems to have gradually blurred the boundaries between the two feminist trends and made them more complex because both are in one way or another compelled to define themselves vis-à-vis the five major forces alluded to above (Bennani and Maadi, 2000; Sadiqi 2003; Taarji, 1991). In so doing, each type of feminism managed to make room for the other type and, significantly, each trend has started to use the other’s jargon (Bennani & Maadi, 2000, Sadiqi, 2003). The rapprochement between the two feminist trends coincided with the fact that dress, especially the veil, is loosing its political and religious edge by acquiring various meanings, ranging from reaction to street sexual harassment and a search for recognition and freedom of movement in the hostile public sphere, to reaction to exclusion from mainstream international modern culture (Rafea, 2000).

**Linguistic Space and Gender in Morocco**

Morocco is a multilingual country; four major languages are used: Standard (written) Arabic, Berber, Moroccan (spoken) Arabic, and French. Two of these languages have written forms (Standard Arabic and French) and two are spoken (Berber and Moroccan Arabic). Only the latter are used as mother tongues. These languages compete for symbolic prestige in the linguistic market (Boukous, 1995; Elbiad, 1985; Emnaji, 1991). This competition is inevitable as the four languages vehicle culturally meaningful social, ethnic, and identity values.

Given that this paper deals with women’s use of language to negotiate power issues, I will contextualize the use of Moroccan Arabic and French as they both fit better the analysis of how women use code-switching between these two languages.

**Moroccan Arabic**

Moroccan Arabic is the lingua franca per se in Morocco; it is used by both Arabs and Berbers in their everyday life. Moroccan Arabic is used in both private and public contexts; for example, it is used in trade transactions, on the radio and television, in the written media, in documentaries and in plays. Being genetically related to Standard Arabic (a High language), Moroccan Arabic is culturally perceived as ‘more civilized’ and more ‘prestigious’ than Berber (Boukous, 1995; Emnaji, 1991). The values that Moroccan society attributes to specific contexts may both empower and disempower the users of Moroccan Arabic; for example, in mixed-sex settings, this language may be used by women in either an empowering or a disempowering way: while in a rural public setting such a the suq (weekly public market), the use of Moroccan Arabic by women vendors is empowering as it leads to more clients in their business transactions, the use of the same language may be disempowering for a Berber educated woman in a university setting where she needs to use Standard Arabic, French, or English to explain concepts. In the latter case, the use of Moroccan Arabic is generally interpreted as indicating a lack of competence. In both examples, it is the physical settings (the suq and the university), and not gender, which play a crucial role in language choice (Sadiqi, 2003).

The mother tongue and lingua franca status of Moroccan Arabic are created by the nature of topics which may be discussed as well as the wide number of situations in which it is used. This means that as linguistic codes, languages are equal in importance in the sense that they are grammatical systems with equal grammatical potentialities, but as ‘means of communication’ within specific communities, these linguistic codes acquire social values in proportion with the values a society attaches to the situations in which they are used (Bourdieu, 1982; Labov, 1972). Therefore,
although both Berber and Moroccan Arabic are unwritten mother tongues, they are not socially perceived as equal because the situations in which they are used are not socially perceived as such. The fact that Moroccan Arabic is used more in public domains than Berber means that the topics that are discussed in this language are more versatile and public space-related than the ones discussed in Berber. Again, the nature of the situations, as well as the social values and the type of power attached to these situations, have a direct impact on language choice and social meaning (Sadiqi, 2003).

French

In Morocco, French is generally perceived as a superordinate second language that is socially linked to modernity, open-mindedness, and job opportunity (Boukous, 1995; Elbiad 1985; Ennaji, 1991; Hammoud, 1983; Youssi 1995). This place of French in Morocco is mainly due to the key role that this language has been playing in Moroccan pre- and post-colonial politics, economy, and business. Even today, French is still extensively used in the business and administrative sectors. In fact, it is impossible to function effectively in these two domains without a command of French (Sadiqi, 2003).

French is a typically urban and elitist language in Morocco. Urban upper and middle class men relate more to the ‘business’ and ‘administrative’ aspects of French, whereas urban upper and middle class women relate more to the everyday use of this language (Sadiqi, 1995). Men exploit the ‘masculating’ aspect which usually characterizes colonial languages more than women in higher administrative and military positions (Rashidi, 2000). Women use the social prestige aspect of French which is often linked to their ‘men’s’ higher positions. In urban centers such as Casablanca, Rabat and Fes, upper and middle class women use French more than men (Sadiqi, 1995); they code-switch between Moroccan Arabic, and French more than men. Indeed, Moroccan women are socially more expected to use French in the middle and upper classes because it is prestigious to expose children to French in these milieus (Sadiqi, 2003). This is a stereotype that women ended up internalizing in their linguistic behavior. Women generally aspire more to social prestige as they need it more than men. As French is the symbol of enlightenment, open-mindedness, and modernity in Morocco, women, more than men, derive social power from being ‘civilized’ and ‘modern’, and, thus, adopt French more readily than men. This use of French is also linked to the fact that women gain socially in identity assertion and negotiation when they use French in specific contexts (Lahlou, 1991; Sadiqi, 2003).

The association of Moroccan urban women with French is related to class. Apart from upper and middle classes, the majority of Moroccan women do not have easy access to French and, thus, have fewer chances to use the socially empowering aspects of French. Women’s tendency to display proficiency in French more than in Standard Arabic is influenced by men’s attitudes: men are more favorable to women’s proficiency in French than in Standard Arabic; they often consider this proficiency as a guarantee that children will learn French easily. However, the mainstream attitude toward French in the Moroccan context is deeply paradoxical: whereas the attitude toward women speaking French to their children is generally positive and is encouraged, the attitude towards women ‘acting’ French, that is dressing and adopting French ways of speaking, is generally negative (Hammoud, 1983; Elbiad, 1985; Ennaji, 1995). The use of French by mothers with their children is perceived as a ‘modern’ way of bringing up children; women here are perceived as ‘servants’ of society; they are preparing useful future citizens. However, when women use French ‘for themselves’, they threaten the status quo and become ‘too independent’, ‘too bold’, ‘too dangerous socially’ (Sadiqi 2003). It is mainly in relation to this latter use of French by women that the arguments of women using French as perceived as ‘being inauthentic’ and ‘alien’ are brandished. Although this is a paradox, it makes sense in a heavily patriarchal and sexist culture (Elbiad, 1985; Lahlou; 1991; Loulidi, 1990).

Moroccan Women’s Communicative Strategies

Generally speaking, Moroccan women may be categorized into two major classes in terms of the way they use speech genres. On the one hand, lower class rural and urban monolingual illiterate women use folktales, songs, and gossip to express their inner selves and voice dissent and dissatisfaction in a heavily patriarchal context. On the other hand, semi-literate and literate, urban, middle or upper class women use code-switching for the same purposes (Lahlou, 1991; Loulidi, 1990). This ‘blunt’ division does not automatically apply in all situations of language use, but it is useful in showing how Moroccan women use the linguistic choices that their socio-economic status and culture offer them. Although the two types of women, as well as the myriad of sub-types that everyday situations create, do not have the same chances of self-expression and self-assertion, they have the power to express the self and resist patriarchy in specific ways. The differences between the two types of women are attributable to the values that society and its battery of historical, economic, and political institutions dictate.

Women’s Oral Genres

Oratory in general is a type of political language in the sense that it expresses deep human feelings and emotions (Bloch, 1975; Slymovics, 1987; Abu-Lugl, 1986). Within the Moroccan culture, female oral genres include poems/songs, folktales, halqa (market place
oratory), and gossip. Illiterate, poor, and mostly rural women, fight marginalization and express their agency through these genres (Al-Fassi, 1957; Euloge, 1959; Kapchan, 1996). The languages in which these genres are expressed are the mother tongues: Berber and Moroccan Arabic. Female oral poetry is usually sung by female poets. This genre is an example of Moroccan women’s creativity and dexterity in language use. An outstanding example of illiterate Berber poets is Mirrida N’Ait Atiq whose poems were translated into French and published in 1959 by Rene Euloge. Mirrida N’Ait Atiq used to improvise her poetry and sing it in suqs (public markets) (Sadiqi, 2003). The following is an example of Mirrida’s poems; it is called ‘Affront’. This poem was translated from Berber into French by Rene Euloge (1959), and then translated from French into English by the author of this paper, who happens to originate from the same area as Mirrida.

**Affront**

You are wrong, mother of my ex-husband,
If you think that I am suffering,
Say to your son who repudiated me
That from my memory and my heart
Are gone the good and bad days
Of our once shared life
They are gone
Like strands of straw in the wind ...
Not the smallest souvenir I have kept
Of my exhaustion from work in the fields,
Of the loads that bent my back,
Of the pitchers that left marks on my shoulder,
Of burned fingers from making bread,
Of the leftover bones that your son
Used to give me on feast days ...
He took back my jewels,
Did he ever give them to me?
Were not blows what he gave me?
Did he ever take me in his arms?
Not the smallest souvenir do I keep
Tis as if I never knew him,
You who once were my mother-in-law,
Say to your son that
Even his name I do not recall.

This poem is rebellious in many ways; the poet voices her dissent and condemnation of a husband who exploited her and stripped her of her dignity. Her divorce from this husband is depicted in the text as regaining freedom. The fact that Mirrida addresses her mother-in-law, another woman, attests to the notorious power that mothers-in-law used to have. This is strong woman-to-woman language. In the text, the poet speaks of the jewels given by the groom to the bride upon contracting a marriage; these jewels remain the property of the husband who takes them back in case of divorce. ‘Did he ever give them to me?’ asks the poet; a simple question that raises the whole issue of Moroccan women’s legal rights.

In present-day Morocco, women often sing in groups while working in the fields or weaving. Professional women folk singers are usually referred to as ḥiyat (feminine of ḥiyat, both meaning ‘folk singers’) (Bendjaballah, 1999; Naamane-Guessous, 1990).

As for folktales in Moroccan culture, they are mostly narratives. This type of oral discourse is a typical female occupation, especially in rural areas where older illiterate women easily indulge in storytelling. Although the contents of women’s narratives are full of stereotypic associations, they often empower women and help them construct gender and class from their own point of view and within the environment in which they live, allowing them to extend the limits of socially assigned gender roles; for example, older women often manage to stress the social power and utility of old women in the household. They often create worlds of their own and use the linguistic resources that are available to them to express women’s (their own) intelligence, wit and victory over men in stories (Bendjaballah 1999, Sadiqi 2003). In this way, storytelling may be perceived as a reaction to marginalization which is used by Moroccan women to stretch the boundaries of acceptable gender roles in Moroccan culture (Sadiqi, 2003).

Another example of women’s oral genres is halqa (market place public oratory). halqa is a site where gender is performed in the literal sense of the word (Kapchan, 1996). halqa usually takes place in specific public rural and urban marketplaces. Although the halqa oral genre of literature is dominated by men, women have started to appropriate it. Like female poets and storytellers, female market place orators are survivors in a socio-cultural context which denies them rights. They fight exclusion in the alien public sphere and assert themselves by having and holding attention in contexts such as the public market which call for a great amount of courage, self-confidence, and self-control. In so doing, these women transgress the gender roles that Moroccan culture assigns to them and endeavor to make their voices heard, albeit at the price of facing more marginalization (Bendjaballah, 1999; Kapchan, 1996).

Moreover, as a female speech genre, female gossip, like their poetry/songs and folktales, is a site of contestation and subversion in the sense that gossipers play out and reorganize power and domination from their own perspectives. This is in line with Abu-Lughod’s (1986), Badran and Cooke’s (1990), and Mills’ (1995) views that speech genres constitute sites where dissent is voiced. It is also in line with Tapper and Tapper (1987) who consider speech genres as means of creating and maintaining community and tradition. Although the Moroccan religious code of ethics forbids lying and considers it haram (taboo), lying is socially accepted and even ‘encouraged’ in gossiping, especially if the participants in this activity hold the same attitude towards the persons/topics about which they are
gossiping. Through gossiping, women release social and personal tension and constantly redefine themselves in relation to their family and social surroundings (Kapchan, 1996; Sadiqi, 2003).

Code-Switching

While monolingual and presumably illiterate Moroccan women use oral genres as creative strategies of self-expression, multilingual women use code-switching for the same purpose. Code-switching is a systematic and rule-governed way of language use (Gumperz, 1982; Meyers-Scotton, 1993). Studies have shown that code-switching requires competence not only in two linguistic codes, but also in appropriately manipulating the two codes according to contexts of language use (Clyne, 1987; Bokamba, 1988; Heath, 1989; Meyers-Scotton, 1993). In implying choice on the part of the code-switcher, code-switching is a linguistically skillful practice which is motivated by individual intention. As such, code-switching indicates social attributes and composite identities.

Both women and men use code-switching in their everyday conversation in Morocco, but code-switching is more associated with women than with men (Sadiqi, 2003). In fact, urban women of any social class are more likely to speak French and engage in code-switching involving French than men from the same social background. As for men’s code-switching, it seems that it differs from women’s in the sense that it is the presence of educated women which may trigger it. Men may use code-switching, for example, to impress these women. Code-switching is not likely to occur in all-male settings (Lahlou, 1991; Sadiqi, 2003).

One of the main reasons women use code-switching is a search for prestige. In urban areas, little girls are often more encouraged to use French than little boys. This practice is carried on to adolescence where female teenagers use French more than male teenagers. The practice of code-switching is later encouraged by husbands, who often lay the responsibility for speaking French to children on their wives. In this way, code-switching in the Moroccan context may be seen as a female language skill (Sadiqi, 2003).

Three gender-sensitive types of code-switching are attested in the Moroccan context: (i) the switching of Berber and Moroccan Arabic, (ii) the switching of Moroccan Arabic and French, and (iii) the switching of Berber and French. The first type is both a rural and an urban phenomenon, and involves literate and non-literate speakers, as Moroccan Arabic and Berber are non-written mother tongues, whereas the latter two types are typically urban and involve educated speakers only. Furthermore, the first type of code-switching is attested in all social classes, whereas the latter two types are more characteristic of middle and upper classes (Elbiad, 1985; Lahlou, 1991). In what follows, I illustrate only the second type, as it is the most appropriate for analysis of women’s effective use of code-switching in the sense that it exemplifies the tension that exists between the values attached to the use of a Moroccan and a non-Moroccan language in a Moroccan context.

Code-switching of Moroccan Arabic and French is the best studied type of code switching in the Moroccan context (Lahlou, 1991; Nortier, 1989; 1995; Saib, 1988 among others). Although some of these studies include the gender factor, none of them presented code-switching as an empowering linguistic device for Moroccan women. Most of the studies on code-switching between Moroccan Arabic and French focus on the structural aspects of code-switching by women and men (Lahlou, 1991; N’Ait M’Barket & Sankoff, 1988; Nortier, 1989; 1995). In so doing, these studies have not really emphasized the sociolinguistically complex and fluid nature of code-switching, as well as the central importance of interlocutors, rhetorical purpose and self-interest in determining the nature of code-switching.

When women and men use words or expressions from French, men would be more likely to ‘mold’ the loans in the general morpho-syntactic structure of Moroccan Arabic, whereas women would tend to pronounce the loans as they are pronounced in French (Lahlou 1991). Thus, whereas educated women would be more likely to use veste (jacket) men would say fista where the sound /v/ is devoiced and becomes /f/ and the Moroccan feminine gender morpheme /a/ is added to the word. Note also with respect to this loan the vocalic change from /e/ to /i/ as Moroccan Arabic does not contain the former sound. The most probable reason for this difference in women’s and men’s speech may be due to women’s ‘greater’ care with the way they speak, given the higher social pressure on them to look and speak in a “prestigious” way. The same is true of the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French words</th>
<th>Female version</th>
<th>Male version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>camion</td>
<td>camion</td>
<td>kaniu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>télévision</td>
<td>télévision</td>
<td>tilesfiun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jupe</td>
<td>jupe</td>
<td>jjippa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mécanicien</td>
<td>mécanicien</td>
<td>lmkianisian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autoroute</td>
<td>autoroute</td>
<td>lototot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>village</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>lfilaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bière</td>
<td>bière</td>
<td>lbira</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, whereas Moroccan men would generally say Šrit imakina d SSabun (I bought a washing machine), women would generally use the French counterpart as it is used in French and say Šrit la machine à laver (washing machine). It is important to note that this gender difference is not attested in the case of Berber women’s use of loans from Moroccan Arabic (Sadiqi, 2003). The reason may be that in the latter case, being unwritten mother tongues, the two languages are socially closer, whereas in the case of Moroccan Arabic and
French, the two languages are clearly demarcated socially. Note also that the ‘I’ which precedes the male loans originates from the definite article ‘al’ in Standard Arabic and has become part and parcel of the structure of Moroccan Arabic loans in which it does not express any grammatical idea of definiteness. The phonological adaptation of French words to Moroccan Arabic morphology is more attested in words that are borrowed relatively recently. Borrowed words that have become part of Moroccan Arabic lexicon are pronounced in the same way by women and men. Examples of the latter category are bala for ampioule (bulb), simana for semaine (week), and linaljina for train (train). Women who mold French words in Moroccan Arabic morphology are generally perceived as “uneducated”, “rural”, etc. (Elbiad, 1985; Ennaji, 1995; Youssi, 1995).

Although Moroccan women tend to use the type of borrowing which ‘molds’ foreign words in the morphosyntactic structure of the host language less than men, it is important to note that this does not mean that women always and only use French phonology or embed phrases from French whereas men never do. Daily observation leads one to believe that the actual situation is more complex: code-switching depends on the interlocutors, the rhetorical purpose, the context and the speaker’s immediate interest (N’Ait M’Barket & Sankoff, 1988; Nortier, 1989). In a mixed setting, for example, men often use French phonology. However, in the same approximate contexts, women have less recourse to the ‘molding’ strategy than men.

Beyond the word level, Moroccan women often insert whole sentences in French in their Moroccan Arabic conversations. Here are examples; the italicized strings are in French:

(2) a. ?ana j’ai pris une décision u ma-nqdar-j intaxella qliha.
   I took a decision and not-can-not give up on it
   I took a decision and I cannot give it up.

f naDarí hâdi c’est la meilleure décision qu’il faut prendre lhaaqqa [ila ma-jrift-j lharbol daba, yadi yeyllaw.
   In my opinion, this is the best decision to make because if I do not buy a satellite dish now, its price will go up.

yadi n-ji, je vais faire mon possible, c{T}-ni cing minutes.
   will I-come I will do my possible give-me five minutes
   I will come, I will do my best, give me five minutes.

ma-bqaw-j drari kayxedm-u bhal zman, ils sont de plus en plus gâtés.
   Children no longer work hard as in the past, they are more and more spoiled.

In the examples in (2) above, whole sentences in French are inserted in the Moroccan Arabic ones. These sentences are said in their French version. The parts that are given in French are usually the ones that are focused upon by the speaker. In (2a), the speaker is keen on stressing the fact that she (and not anybody else) took the decision. She reinforces this in (2) by asserting that the decision taken was the best move to make. This repetition is needed for self-assertion and for justifying the buying of the satellite dish. In (2c), the speaker stresses her willingness to go, and in (2d), she emphasizes the fact that children are being more and more spoiled. Women who adopt these code-switching strategies are generally perceived as “educated” and “modern” (Elbiad, 1985; Ennaji, 1995; Lahlou, 1991; Sadiqi, 2003).

Moroccan women use code-switching as a primarily empowering linguistic device (Sadiqi, 2003). The empowerment aspect of Moroccan women’s code-switching is clearly seen if placed within the overall sociolinguistic status of Berber, Moroccan Arabic and French as stated above. Moroccan women manipulate the various values that are attached to each language such as education, modernity, prestige, ethnic identity, and intimacy in specific contexts, in order to score ‘gains’ in conversations. As code-switching is conscious and involves choice, it denotes women’s agency in everyday all-female or mixed interactions. The empowering aspects of women’s use of code-switching are attested in a number of facets that are summarized in the following paragraphs.

To start with, in all-female and mixed groups, Moroccan women use code-switching as a means of attracting and maintaining attention in conversations (Sadiqi, 2003). The deliberate mixture of two languages has the effect of breaking the stream of thought and forces the interlocutors to pay attention to what the speaker is saying. Women also use code-switching to create liveliness in conversations (Sadiqi, 2003).

Similarly, Moroccan women, especially in urban settings, use code-switching to impose themselves by ‘snatching’ turns in conversations (Sadiqi, 2003). The use of French in such contexts is often perceived as ‘aggressive’, and many males are ‘put off’ by this way of communication and prefer to ‘step back’ and let women talk (Sadiqi, 2003). As men usually monopolize the turn-taking part of conversations, women’s use of code-switching in such contexts is a method of self-assertion.

Likewise, Moroccan women’s use of code-switching is a linguistic device of power management and power negotiation in mixed urban settings where educated women are ‘overridden’ by less educated men in conversations (Sadiqi, 2003). Through code-switching,
these women transmit their level of education and ‘tell’ interlocutors that men need to take women’s educational ‘advantage’ into consideration.

Code-switching is also a linguistic marker of in-group solidarity as the case of Berber women shows (Sadiqi, 2003). The high class status of the upper-class Berber women who were observed and interviewed does not diminish the cultural significance of Berber forms and practices. The meanings associated with Berber allow these women to use the language symbolically both to construct an identity and to manifest opposition to the exclusion of Berber in the larger public discourse. The use of Berber in such situations marks in-group membership, especially in contexts involving out-group members. The use of code-switching for reasons of in-group solidarity is also exemplified by the urban female adolescents’ frequent use of code-switching to demarcate themselves from male adolescents (Sadiqi, 2003).

The use of code-switching by women is also a type of linguistic innovation. Seen within the overall Moroccan socio-cultural context, urban women’s code-switching constitutes a ‘new style’ of speech. This style indexes ‘modernity’, ‘will’, and ‘determination’. It is an answer to women’s exclusion from the sphere of public powerful languages. Code-switching is also a means of restructuring speech situations. Subversive moves such as questions, deixis, and backchanneling, in a second code often result in the speaker restructuring the speech situation and offering an alternative to the dominant institutional conventions (Sadiqi, 2003). This is congruent with the fact that strategies and potential strategic moves are not disparate sociolinguistic practices because they find explanation in the overall Moroccan socio-cultural context. These strategies and strategic moves challenge the power differences that inhere in institutional and subject positions. Moroccan urban women use code-switching as a means of subverting the institutionalized relationships between them and the interlocutor; this type of code-switching is attested in the case of an interview for a job (Sadiqi, 2003).

Moroccan women’s use of code-switching may be considered a way of stripping everyday speech from the moralizing database of language use that excludes women. This is seen in the mixing of Moroccan Arabic (which is related to Standard Arabic) with Berber or French. As the latter languages are not imbued with religion, they lessen the effect of religion on everyday speech (Sadiqi, 2003). Religion plays a significant role in everyday life in the sense that using religious language is a means of securing respect. Religion is also used as a moralizing means of securing ‘good’ social behavior.

Code-switching is part of Moroccan women’s repertoire of language styles and constitutes a powerful communicative device that empowers women in a heavily gendered-society. Like oral genres, the skillful use of more than one language, each establishing, setting in motion, characterizing, and engendering a specific world view, illuminates ways in which Moroccan urban and rural women respond to contextual changes and allows insight into the dimensions of self-fashioning and the politics of everyday events as they affect Moroccan women. Language is crucial in both shaping and challenging power relations; according to Butler (1990), the categories of sex and gender are constructed through culturally discursive practices. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) relate the local and the global via practice which both produces language in situations and constructs social realities from language. In the Moroccan socio-cultural context, the fundamentally marginal location of women within predominantly male institutions, such as the mosque, the academy, and the media, triggers reactions on the part of these women and these reactions are indexed in language (Rashidi, 2000; Sadiqi, 2003). Moroccan women make appropriate usage of code-switching with the aim of exploiting the position of the marginalized for strategic purposes and this is seen in the analysis presented above. For example, the use of Berber constructs an ethnic identity for women and marks them as simultaneously inside and outside the dominant discourse. As such, the relationship between identity and interaction is mediated by linguistic practices which acquire meaning only in the context of particular local sites and only with reference to other linguistic practices like genre and communicative norms.

Through their creative communicative strategies, Moroccan women do not consistently identify with the same social groupings that the Moroccan superstructure powers, such as history, Islam, social organization, and economic status, impose on them. These institutions are powerful in the sense that gender roles and behavior are defined in relation to them (Sadiqi, 2003). Rather, women exploit the symbolic values of specific languages and language uses to score social and personal gains. Monolingual women use oral genres as empowering communicative strategies, whereas multilingual women use code-switching with the same aim. Moroccan women use communicative strategies that allow them to secure a place in the linguistic ‘arena’ of everyday conversations and to index their agency in language. Moroccan women’s speech genres are important in allowing a re-reading of Moroccan social history and traditions, as well as supplying means of contextualizing historical and present-day events that highlight gender relations. As such, these speech genres are arenas where identities are constructed, deconstructed, and negotiated (Mills, 1995).

Finally, the analysis in the above sections clearly demonstrates the limits of essentialist theories like the work of Lakoff (1975) and de Beauvoir (1949) who set women up as ‘deviant’ or ‘other’ in relation to the (male) norm. The Moroccan community’s ideology may be that women are schizophrenic in the sense that they have to adapt to both their own and the French ways of speech, but a postmodern analysis assumes that while there are ideologies of authenticity out there in the world, there are no ‘authentic’ Moroccans (or every Moroccan can potentially be) because an upper- or middle-class
woman who switches between Berber, Moroccan Arabic, Standard Arabic, French and English can be just as Moroccan as a monolingual Berber speaking woman. It is just that they are Moroccan in different ways and language plays different roles in the ways they perform their (always gendered) identities.

Notes

* The ideas in this paper are based on sections of Chapters 4 and 5 of my book Women, Gender and Language in Morocco (2003). I wish to gratefully acknowledge the help of Deborah Ballard-Reisch in reformulating these ideas.

1 This Plan was officially proposed in 1999 by former Secretary of State for the Family and Childhood, Mohamed Said Saadi. The purpose of this Plan was to integrate women in economy and ensure their civil rights.

2 The statements made in this section are based on observation and interviews with various types of Moroccan women. The statements about Berber women in this paragraph are based on interviews of upper-class Berber women. The purpose of these particular interviews was to catch the tri-language code switching which is mainly found in cities (cf. Sadiqi, 2003).

References


Doctoral Dissertation, Amsterdam, Netherlands, University of Amsterdam.


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Women and Language, Volume XXVI, No. 1, Page 43