

Communicating Meaning through Translanguaging: The Case of Multilingual Interactions of Algerians on Facebook

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Abstract : Algeria is a multilingual speech community where individuals constantly mix between codes in spoken discourse. Code is used as a cover term to refer to the existing languages and language varieties which include, among others, the mother tongue of the majority Algerian Arabic, the official language Modern Standard Arabic and the foreign languages French and English. The present study explores whether Algerians mix between these codes in online communication as well. Facebook is the selected platform from which data is collected because it is the preferred social media site for most Algerians and it is the most used one. Adopting the notion of translanguaging, this study attempts explaining how users of Facebook use multilingual messages to communicate meaning. Accordingly, multilingual interactions are not approached from a pejorative perspective but rather as a creative linguistic behavior that multilingual utilize to achieve intended meanings. The study is intended as a contribution to the research on multilingualism online because although an extensive literature has investigated multilingualism in spoken discourse, limited research investigated it in the online one. Its aim is two-fold. First, it aims at ensuring that the selected platform for analysis, namely Facebook, could be a source for multilingual data to enable the qualitative analysis. This is done by measuring frequency rates of multilingual instances. Second, when enough multilingual instances are encountered, it aims at describing and interpreting some selected ones. 120 posts and 16335 comments were collected from two Facebook pages. Analysis revealed that third of the collected data are multilingual messages. Users of Facebook mixed between the four mentioned codes in writing their messages. The most frequent cases are mixing between Algerian Arabic and French and between Algerian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. A focused qualitative analysis followed where some examples are interpreted and explained. It seems that Algerians mix between codes when communicating online despite the fact that it is a conscious type of communication. This suggests that such behavior is not a random and corrupted way of communicating but rather an intentional and natural one.

Keywords : Algerian speech community, computer mediated communication, languages in contact, multilingualism, translanguaging

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