

## **Adapting French Loan Words into Tamazight: Case Study of Berberophones in the National School of Engineers, Tlemcen**

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### **Abstract**

The present study aims essentially at exploring the use of French loan words that are adapted into Tamazight in Algeria. It seeks to investigate the main factors that lead speakers to import words and items from French; showing how these are linguistically adapted into their native dialects. This exploration deals with a sample composed of all Berberophone pupils in the National School of Engineers in Tlemcen as a case study. It attempts, then, to check whether those pupils are aware of the etymological origin of these borrowed words in their Tamazight dialects or not. In order to find answers to the raised research questions, a mixed-methodology approach, based on both quantitative and qualitative methods, has been selected and; thus, two research instruments were mainly opted for: a questionnaire and a word list. The questionnaire was conducted to check pupils' attitudes towards French and is hopefully administered to unveil their personal motivating reasons to borrow French loanwords in daily life discourse at one hand. The word list, on the other hand, aims fundamentally at collecting a set of French lexical items that are part and parcel of Berberophones' day-to-day idiolects. It also attempts to show their nature and specify their contexts of use. A descriptive and statistical analysis was used to report the gathered data. The findings showed that French loanwords enjoy a considerable position in pupils'

linguistic system. They are linguistically adapted into their native tongues due to some historical and socio-cultural reasons. Yet, these pupils are not conscious of the origin of the French borrowed vocabulary in their Tamazight varieties.

## **Introduction**

The constant contact of languages in Algeria engendered an intricate multilingual situation to the extent that words from various languages co-exist together with both Algerian Arabic and Tamazight resulting in many language contact phenomena. French borrowings, for instance, occupy a tremendous position in both Algerian Arabic and Tamazight varieties. A careful observation of the Berberophones' speech attracts one's attention to the switching of codes according to different contexts, and mainly to the use of some French borrowed items in their utterances. This particular observation is the motive behind conducting this research.

To undertake this research work, three main questions have been raised:

- 1- What are the main factors that lead Berber speakers to import words and items from French?
- 2- Are the informants of this study aware of the etymological origin of those borrowed words in their Tamazight dialects or not?
- 3- To what extent are French borrowings adapted linguistically when used in their everyday interaction?

As an attempt to answer the questions raised, the following hypotheses have been suggested:

1. Berber speakers probably import words and items from French due to a lack of equivalents in Tamazight.
2. Since the members of this sample population are all educated, one may expect that they are conscious of the origin of the French borrowed vocabulary in their Tamazight varieties.

3. French borrowings are adapted phonologically and morphologically when switching back and forth to Tamazight in everyday verbal interactions.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review starts with a very brief overview of the history of Algeria which heavily influences Algeria's current sociolinguistic situation. Algeria witnessed many invasions whose cultures, civilizations and languages left their fingerprints clearly embodied in its speakers' linguistic varieties, both Arabic and Tamazight. The Berbers were the first settlers of the North Africa peninsula including Algeria. Then, the Phoenicians, Romans and Byzantines successively invaded Algeria. Hence, Berber, Punic, Latin and Greek were the most prominent and widely spoken languages during these periods. After Byzantines, the Arab invaders brought the Arabic language to the country. Later, the Spanish, the Ottoman Empire and the French have exercised a significant impact on the Algerian society at the social, cultural and linguistic sides. (Benrabah 2014; Gellner, E. 1973)

These different civilizations, that Algeria has known, contributed to the intricacy of the sociolinguistic situation of its population. They extremely transformed Algeria into a plurilingual speech community. The languages that currently constitute the Algerian linguistic repertoire are Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic, Tamazight and French as the main languages used by Algerians with varying degrees. They are in a constant contact resulting in many sociolinguistic phenomena such as diglossia and bilingualism. One of the salient outcomes of bilingualism is borrowing items for different languages into Arabic or Tamazight varieties in everyday conversations.

### **Borrowing**

Borrowing is a linguistic phenomenon that can be defined as "the introduction of single word or short, frozen, idiomatic phrases from one variety (i.e. language), into the grammatical system of the

borrowing language” (Gumperz; 1982:66). Borrowed words are, in fact, gradually adapted and become part of the lexicon of the recipient language; sharing its phonological and morphological system as well. The French language, for instance, contains many English borrowed words or phrases like “week-end”, “finish”, and “mail”. Thus, the French language, here, is known as the ‘recipient language’ whereas English as ‘the source language’. Any language may borrow foreign items due to a set of factors. This is why, lexical borrowing can be divided into two main types which are cultural borrowing and core borrowing that can be defined as follows:

- **Cultural Borrowing:** refers to “words that fill gaps in the recipient language’s store of words because they stand of objects or concepts new to the language’s culture” (Myer Scotton; 2006:212). Algerians, for example, borrow many foreign words that have no equivalents in the target language; mainly those related to technology and social networks such as: Email, LinkedIn, or Twitter.
- **Core Borrowing:** refers to elements which “are taken into the language even though the recipient language already has lexemes of its own to encode the concepts or objects” (Myer Scotton; 1993a:5). Moreover, this type of borrowing can be defined as “loanwords that duplicate or replace existing native words” (Haspelmath; 2009:48). It means that though the recipient language has got many words in its repertoire, its speakers borrow foreign equivalents of the same words either to show prestige or due to cultural pressure.

## **Research Methodology**

In this exploration, a mixed approach based on both qualitative and quantitative methods has been opted for. The informants were asked to fill in a questionnaire, a word list and a set of pictures to be named in their own Tamazight variety.

## **Questionnaire**

Pupils were given a questionnaire written in French to answer. The aim behind conducting a questionnaire was to check students' attitudes towards French and it was hopefully administered to unveil their personal motivating reasons to borrow French loan words in daily life discourse. The questionnaire involves two sections and each one combines a different number of questions. The preliminary section is about students' background information including gender, age, and place of birth and of residence. Its second section is further divided into 7 questions. The first question seeks to unveil whether informants live in a Berberophone entourage or in an Arabophone one. The second question attempts to uncover whether the informants are Arabs or Berbers. The third question checks whether they speak Tamazight or Arabic in everyday talk and why. The fourth question checks whether they mix French words with Tamazight or not. The fifth question endeavours to measure the frequency of mixing between French and Tamazight using a four-point frequency scale: very often, often, sometimes, and rarely, and it also tries to specify if informants speak French with literate speakers only or with illiterate people as well. By raising the sixth question, the researchers attempt to reveal the motivating reasons to use French words instead of Tamazight ones in those informants' everyday speech. The last question collects some instances of French words that informants usually use and which do not have equivalents in Tamazight.

## **Word List and Pictures**

The word list entails 14 words written in Standard Arabic. The informants were asked to give the usual uttered vocabulary item in their own dialect. The purpose is to reveal how French borrowings are adapted linguistically into Tamazight. The respondents were also offered 16 pictures and were asked to name them as usually used in their dialect for the sake of gathering more accurate, spontaneous, and objective data.

## **Sampling Description and Setting**

In the current investigation, the research population of this study involves 40 first year students enrolled at the School of Engineers in Tlemcen for this academic year. The participants were selected according to their ethnic belonging. They are 28 females (70%) and 12 males (30%). Their age ranges between 24 to 38 years old. The majority of them (80 %) live in Berber-speaking towns such as *Bejaia, Tizi Ouzou, Bouira, Boumerdes...* and 20 % of informants live in an Arabophone entourage.

## **Main Findings**

After collecting data, the data obtained have been analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

## **Questionnaire Analysis and Interpretation**

The first and the second questions' answers have been used to describe the sample population of the present study above.

### **Q3. In your everyday talk, do you speak Tamazight or Arabic? and why?**

When informants were asked about which variety they usually use in everyday talk, all their answers declare that they speak Tamazight with Berberophones and Arabic with Arabophones. As an instance, one informant said: "en réalité un mélange des deux. Dans la famille je parle en Tamazight mais au milieu de travail et au quartier je parle en Arabe" Another one claimed that "Au wilaya natale, je parle tout le temps en Tamazight mais à l'école à Tlemcen, je parle en Arabe". The majority of informants generally justified their use of Tamazight by saying that it is their mother tongue. For example, one of them asserted : "C'est ma langue maternelle... toute ma famille et mes amis sont des Kabyles et je suis à l'aise avec".

**Q4. Do you mix French words with Tamazight words?**

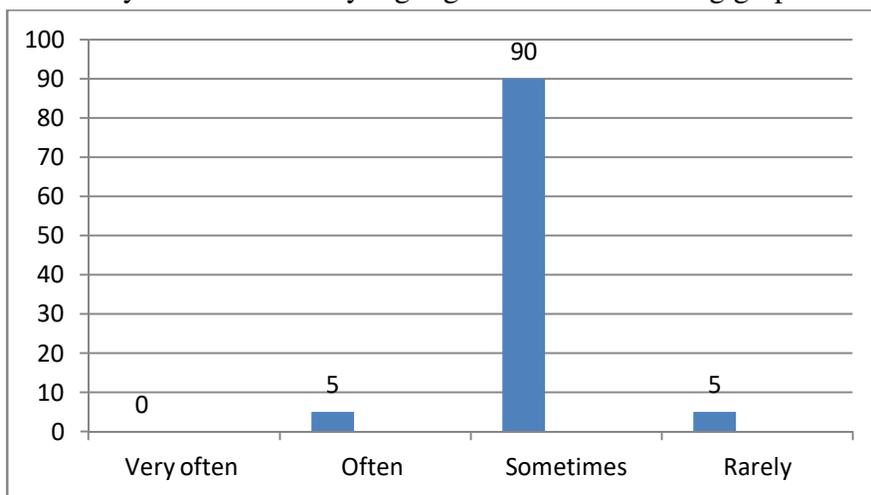
**Yes                      No**

Students were also asked whether they mix between Tamazight and French or not. All answers were ‘yes’.

**Q5. If yes, to what extent?**

**Very often    often    sometimes    rarely**

To know to what extent Berberophones mix between both varieties, the 4 points scale has been used to measure the frequency of French-Tamazight code switching, and the results showed that 90% of this study informants sometimes code switch back and forth to French, 5% of them often code switch between Tamazight and French, and 5% of them rarely do as it is clearly highlighted in the following graph:



***Fig.1. Frequency of Tamazight-French Code Switching***

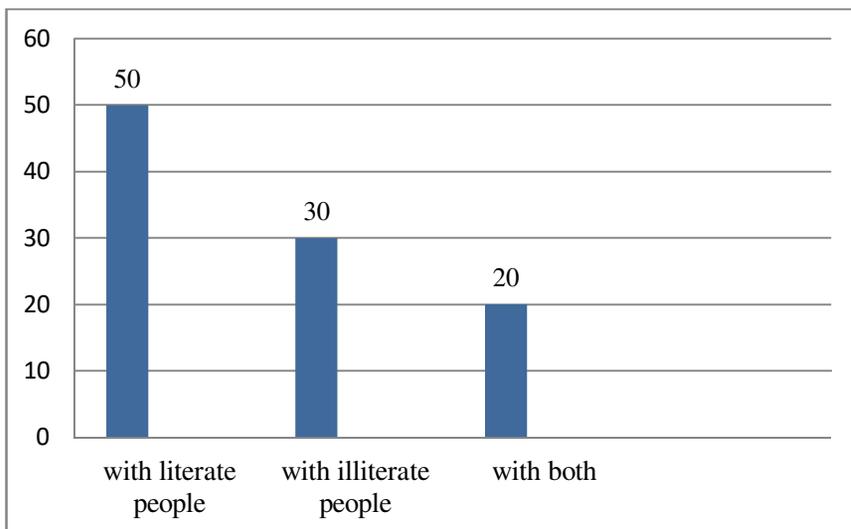
Within the same fifth question, informants were asked about with whom they speak French as well seeking to know whether they use it with literate speakers only or with illiterate people too. So, answers about with which category of interlocutors students use French with are presented as follows:

50% of informants claim that they use French with literate people only,

30 % use it with illiterate speakers

20 % claimed that they speak French with educated and uneducated speakers.

The following graph represents Tamazight use in correlation with interlocutors' educational level:



***Fig.2. Tamazight Use in Correlation with Interlocutors' Educational Level***

**Q6. State some of the reasons that you think they motivate you to use French words instead of Berber ones in your everyday speech?**

The reasons that motivate respondents to communicate in French are summarized as follows:

- It is used to fill in a linguistic gap because there is no equivalent in Tamazight or new words related to technology,
- French is seen as an offspring of colonialism,
- They find French more expressive,
- Finding words in French easily,
- French words are part and parcel of their spontaneous and habitual idiolect,

- Informants ignore some names or words in Tamazight.

**Q7. Are there any French words that you usually use which do not have equivalents in Tamazight?**

**Yes      No**

When students were asked to cite some French words with no equivalents in Tamazight, 75% of respondents stated that there are many words related to *technology, sciences, transport vehicles, school supplies ...* with no equivalent in their mother tongue. The other 25% of the sample asserted that thanks to teaching Tamazight in Higher Education, most, if not all, French words have approximately their synonyms in Berber.

The questionnaire analysis revealed that the majority of Berberophones borrow words from French in their daily life conversations. The informants mostly converse in a mixture of French and Tamazight at home, with friends, but they are obliged to shift to Algerian Arabic with Arabophones at work or in mixed neighborhoods to ease communication. As far as Tamazight-French code switching is concerned, the majority of informants switch mostly from their native tongue to French with literate interlocutors. Those who have asserted their use of the French language with illiterate people, they are not probably aware of the etymological origin of some French words as they are phonologically and morphologically adapted into Tamazight linguistic system. These findings obtained from the questionnaire as a first research tool employed in this study have infirmed the researchers' second hypothesis and confirmed the third one.

**Word List and Pictures Analysis and Interpretation**

The respondents were given 14 words in SA and they were asked to give their usual uttered vocabulary. This procedure aimed at examining to what extent Berberophones borrowed words from the French language and how these French words are adapted

phonologically and morphologically in the Berber language. The results are clearly shown in the table below (all French loanwords are written in **bold** while their adaptation appears using *italics*):

Words in SA	French Borrowing/ Berber Origin	Percentages	Phonological and Morphological Adaptation	Percentages
تذكرة الحافلة	<b>'ticket'</b>	75%	<i>/atiki/ /tikitet el bus/</i>	16.33% 8.67%
مستشفى	<b>'hôpital'</b>	45%	<i>/sbitar/ /svitar/ or /asbitar/</i>	55%
متأخر	<b>'retard'</b> <i>/yatel/ /iɣattal/</i>	75% 25%		
ورقة	<b>'feuille'</b> <i>/thawarqat/</i>	32% 68%		
مكتب	<b>'bureau'</b>	46%	<i>/albiro/ /abiro/</i>	45%
مصعد	<b>'l'assenseur'</b> <i>/aslluum/</i>	45% 25%	<i>/asasuur/</i>	
مضخة	<b>'la pompe'</b>	38%	<i>/pompa/ /thapompth/</i>	36% 26%
الفقر	<i>/miséria/ /lixsas/ /tizawla/</i>	30% 45% 25%		
تسجل	<b>/marki/</b>	22%		
مطبخ			<i>/thakuzinth/</i>	100%
مفتاح	<i>/clé/ /tassaruth/ /amftah/</i>	12% 80% 8%		
حنفية	<i>/robinet/ /thasabbalt/ /thavernint/</i>	25% 5% 30%	<i>/arobini/</i>	40%
علبة	<b>/boite/</b>	3%	<i>/thabbatat/ /thabwat/</i>	42% 55%
سيارة	<b>/automobile/</b> <i>/thakarrost/</i>	15% 23%	<i>/tomobil/ /tonobil/</i>	29% 33%

***Table.1 Phonological and Morphological Adaptation of French Borrowed Words***

The data collected from the set of pictures given to respondents to be named as usually uttered in their day-to-day speech are summarized in the following results. The findings noticeably appear in front of each picture (the phonological and morphological adaptation of French borrowed words appears in *italics*).

	• <i>/thaktabet/</i>
	• <i>/acahier/</i> • <i>/akorras/</i>
	• <i>/tabla/</i> • <i>/tavla/</i>
	• <i>/alvista/ /thjakit/</i> • <i>/thakabbot/</i>
	• <i>/stilo/</i> • <i>/lastilo/</i>
	• <i>/acartable/</i> • <i>/acartave/</i>
	• <i>thacravate</i>
	• <i>/thavioust/</i>



**Fig.3. Examples of Morphologically and Phonologically Adapted French Words into Berber**

The results obtained from the word list and pictures demonstrated that Berberophones; mainly educated ones, borrow many French words spontaneously. These words are adapted into Berber phonology and morphology as it has appeared in many instances such as the addition of the bound morpheme /a/ in many words like /acahier/, /acartable/, /astilo/, /arobini/ or /tha/ at initial position or /th/ at final position as in: /thavalisth/, /thaboite/, /thapompth/. Moreover, words which are associated with technology are borrowed from French as well and become part of the Berber language with no adaptation at either level such as: /portable/ or /télévision/. Borrowed verbs are adapted in the same way as Berber verbs like in /amarki/. This adaptation corresponds to Smeaton's (1973) view who maintains that borrowed words undergo modification of morphological structure to fit with the system of recipient language ( Berber); except words linked to technology which are kept as they are.

Strictly speaking, it can be said that Berber speakers do import many words and items from French in order to fill a lexical gap since the target language has no equivalents such as: 'téléphone' or 'facebook' and this is called cultural borrowing. Many instances of core borrowing exist as well either to show prestige or for cultural pressure as appeared in the following items: 'la clé', or 'le robinet'. Yet, many Berberophones are, in fact, unaware of the origin of the French borrowed vocabulary in their Tamazight varieties. These results then confirm the first hypothesis and infirm the second one respectively.

## **Conclusion**

To wrap it up, the issue of Borrowing French into Tamazight varieties remains an interesting topic of investigation. The present paper was conducted to unveil Algerian Berberophones' awareness about French borrowings and the motivating reasons to take over words. The Berber language is, in fact, characterized by a heavy load of borrowings from French and other languages due to the historical, political and socio-

cultural factors that Algeria witnessed throughout its history. Languages compete with each other, as each one having its linguistic market dominating certain domains. Yet, this competition does not engender the exclusion of any of them, but they take over from each other as they are in constant contact and interplay. Further reliable data could be obtained by employing recordings to get spontaneous speech in future investigations in Berberophone cities with a huge and stratified sampling.

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