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## The Use of Code Switching to Represent Social Class in Tunisian Television

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### ABSTRACT

Tunisia is a country with a long history and rich culture, causing its contemporary society to be multilingual. Every Tunisian person will be introduced to five different languages before the age of 18, making Tunisians more vulnerable to the phenomenon known as code-switching: the switching between two or more languages in one's same speech. It is known that according to Bourdieu, the language you speak represents who you are, and one's use of code switching, especially between Arabic and French, could be their way of assessing their own social status. This paper tested out this theory by analyzing the speech patterns of different characters in Tunisian TV shows, through both a sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic point of view. The goal of this practical analysis was to determine whether certain characters' use of Arabic/French code switching was purely coincidental or aiming at a demarcation of said character's social status. The analysis found that characters in Tunisian television will indeed use code-switching to affirm their own social status or try to make themselves resemble high social class individuals, meaning their use of French is calculated and holds a very particular goal. In retrospect, this shows that TV show writers will use Arabic/French code switching as a tool to expose social disparities and lay a foundation for social criticism.

**Keywords:** Code Switching; Represent; Social Class; Television; Tunisia

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### ABSTRAK

Tunisia adalah negara dengan sejarah panjang dan budaya yang kaya, yang menyebabkan masyarakat kontemporeranya multibahasa. Setiap orang Tunisia akan diperkenalkan dengan lima bahasa yang berbeda sebelum usia 18 tahun, membuat orang Tunisia lebih rentan terhadap fenomena yang dikenal sebagai alih kode: peralihan antara dua bahasa atau lebih dalam satu ucapan yang sama. Diketahui bahwa menurut Bourdieu, bahasa yang Anda gunakan merepresentasikan siapa diri Anda, dan penggunaan alih kode, terutama antara bahasa Arab dan Prancis, bisa jadi merupakan cara mereka untuk menilai status sosial mereka. Penelitian ini menguji teori ini dengan menganalisis pola-pola bicara dari berbagai karakter dalam acara TV Tunisia, baik dari sudut pandang sosiolinguistik maupun psikolinguistik. Tujuan dari analisis praktis ini adalah untuk menentukan apakah penggunaan alih kode bahasa Arab/Prancis oleh karakter tertentu murni kebetulan atau bertujuan untuk menunjukkan status sosial karakter tersebut. Analisis ini menemukan bahwa karakter di televisi Tunisia memang akan menggunakan alih kode untuk menegaskan status sosial



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mereka sendiri atau mencoba membuat diri mereka menyerupai individu kelas sosial tinggi, yang berarti penggunaan bahasa Prancis mereka diperhitungkan dan memiliki tujuan yang sangat khusus. Dalam retrospeksi, hal ini menunjukkan bahwa penulis acara TV akan menggunakan alih kode bahasa Arab/Prancis sebagai alat untuk mengekspos kesenjangan sosial dan meletakkan dasar untuk kritik sosial.

**Kata kunci:** Alih kode; Representasi; Kelas Sosial; Televisi; Tunisia

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## 1. Introduction

Tunisian television programs, especially sitcoms and dramas are famous all throughout the Maghreb area and even all the way to the Middle East. Tunisia is one of the Arabic countries that tends to release new dramas and sitcoms yearly during the holy month of Ramadhan, and it has now become one of the aspects of that month Tunisians look forward to the most every year.

However, Tunisian dramas have been criticized in the recent years for more and more explicit content and storylines, taking for example the 2023 hit “Falloujah” that focuses on drug use by high school teenagers and was wildly criticized by sociologist Mouadh Ben Nsir (Subject discussed in radio show “Romdhane Ennes” or People’s Ramadhan) on popular radio channel Mosaïque for promoting violence.

Prostitution, corruption, rape, criminal impunity, a number of issues considered “taboo” in the Tunisian society are themes that most dramas have been focusing on in the recent years, and more general social issues such as racism and classism have become recurring themes in Tunisian TV since the late 90s.

One of the most famous dramedies in Tunisian history “El khotab aal beb” (Courtiers at the door) is known for its main plot being the rich house owner’s uncle falling in love with the housemaid who rejects him and marries someone from her own social class, which added a sense of ridicule as this housemaid was stereotypically portraying lower class poor women who come to the city to work in houses as cooks and cleaning ladies, whilst the house owners were the complete other way around.

Simply said, the social class comparisons in Tunisian media have been a recurring theme for well over 30 years, and many different ways have been used to highlight the differences between classes: houses, cars, clothes, skin tones, food, jobs etc.

Another way we can use to distinguish between social classes is language, it has been known throughout Tunisian history that different languages and dialects illustrate different backgrounds and social statuses, with French taking a spot at the top of the food chain since 1881.

However, even the very elite community in Tunisia will unlikely speak pure French in their everyday life (aka non-official situations), but will rather incorporate a certain amount of French to their spoken Tunisian dialect.

The Tunisian dialect in itself is infused with French vocabulary, making it so that certain words do not have a Tunisian dialect equivalent, but rather an Arabized version (or pronunciation) of the original French word: for example, the only known word to refer to sneakers is “sbadri” which is an adaptation of the French word “éspadrilles”.

An example of direct use would be the word “lycée”, which means high school. In Tunisian Arabic the word for high school is the French word “lycée”, with no other dialectal equivalent. Therefore French is already mixed into Tunisian dialect by nature, which brings us to the phenomenon known as code switching.

## 2. Analysis and Discussion

### 2.1 *The Sociolinguistic and Psycho-Sociolinguistic Nature of Code Switching*

Gumperz defined code switching as “a common phenomenon in language contact and cross-cultural communication, generally refers to the alternate use of two or more languages or language variety in the

same communication segment, but generalized code switching also includes the choice between different languages or language varieties” (1982).

Code switching is directly related to the making of social identity, and largely indicates a person's national identity. Nowadays, immigration, cross-cultural communication, and language contact between countries are becoming increasingly frequent. People often encounter code selection issues in social interactions, especially when talking to people of different nationalities, ethnicities, and groups (Myers Scotton, 1993).

The process of constructing said identity is often related to social and psychological factors including the language attitude, psychological motivation, and language regulation orientation of the speaker and their language community (Chen Lei, 2017).

For example, the usage of “ain’t” in modern English usually indicates that their users belong to certain dialect areas, have little to no education or a low social status. Therefore, as a linguistic symbol system, a linguistic code can be an indicator of the speaker's socio-cultural identity and the socio-cultural characteristics of their speech community (Myers Scott, 1993).

Code switching plays a similar role when it comes to constructing national identity. One of the manifestations of code indicating an individual's socio-cultural identity is the indication of one’s national identity. So, in some cases, code selection, switching, and maintenance are closely related to the selection, development, and maintenance of an individual's national or in some cases, ethnic identity.

In general, the relationship between linguistic code and ethnic identity is static, meaning that the speaker maintains a state of using a particular code, and the ethnic identity defined by said code naturally remains unchanged. But when linguistic contact occurs, this static relationship is often broken and transformed into a dynamic relationship. Therefore, in this type of environment, code switching is inevitable, and involves switching codes between different ethnic groups.

At this point, the speaker's ethnic identity is likely to change along the code switching, especially when the speaker has already integrated themselves into a new ethnic environment and considers themselves a member of that ethnic group, the probability of their ethnic identity transforming or reconstructing is greater.

It is known that code switching is closely related to various socio-cultural factors, such as language policy, the linguistic environment of the mainstream society, linguistic contact, etc. But code switching is not solely determined by social and cultural factors. Humans are not only social people, but also individual ones. Their speech act depends on more than just social rules.

In some cases, social psychological factors can have more influence on code switching, and even make one’s language use deviate from social language rules in a certain context. In other words, speech act is not only based on the objective context, but also a speech selection process involving the social psychology of language.

In the field of social psycholinguistics research on code switching, Giles (1979) proposed the "Speech Regulation Theory", which has an important guiding role. This theory mainly includes two concepts: convergence and divergence.

Language convergence refers to the speaker adjusting their language or style to be closer to the language or style of the conversation object, narrowing the psychological distance between each other, establishing a level of cohesion, establishing a "group member relationship", belonging to the other party, and reducing the obstacles they may encounter in achieving their goals.

Language divergence refers to the speaker adjusting their language or style, intentionally highlighting differences and differences with the other party, mainly to maintain the speaker's own social identity and

group characteristics.

Speech communication is a dynamic process, and individual social psychology is closely related to it. Therefore, it needs to be analyzed through other theories of social psycholinguistics, such as language attitude and psychological motivation.

Language attitude refers to a value judgment made by people based on the specific identifiable characteristics of two or more languages or dialects. Language attitude can be mainly divided into two aspects:

- (1) Emotional language attitude is the speaker's emotional reactions and feelings when listening to and speaking in a specific language. It is often related to factors such as the speaker's mother tongue, their cultural background, and even their personal life experiences (such as long-term geographical settlement in a certain language region);
- (2) The rational language attitude is the rational evaluation of a specific language based on utilitarian or practical purposes. It usually reflects the actual function as well as the social status of a specific language in the society in which the speaker is located.

The language attitude that combines these two aspects often deeply affects the speaker's code selection and switching. As mentioned earlier, a linguistic code largely indicates a person's national identity, so it can be concluded that language attitude also indirectly constructs national identity.

Emotional linguistic attitudes can also be referred to as "language emotions", often manifested through people connecting a language with the country or ethnic group it is associated with, expressing loyalty and love for their own language. This is particularly evident in immigrant areas, as it reflects a sense of national consciousness and psychology.

On the one hand, members of a social group strongly feel the need to communicate with each other in their mother tongue in a social environment where their mother tongue is not popular; On the other hand, although they have mastered the language used by another social group, they still believe that only by using their native language for dialogue can they express emotions the most.

For example, when Singaporean Chinese need to express their national identity or express their identification and affiliation with their own ethnic group, they will switch from using English to using Mandarin (Chen Songcen, 1999).

The language attitude in terms of rationality may appear subjective, but in reality, it cannot be immune to the influence of public opinion. A rational language attitude of course mainly depends on the function of a specific language in use and the social status it may confer on the speaker.

This is particularly evident among immigrants who immigrate to the United States. Most of them, under pressure from political, economic, social status, and other realities, often give up their native language and switch to using English in order to quickly integrate into mainstream society and create conditions for their advancement in various aspects (Yang Shouxun, 2003).

Some code choices or conversions reflect the speaker's attitudes towards both emotions and rationality. As reported by Hidalgo (1986), a significant proportion of Juarez residents insist on loyalty to Mexican Spanish. One of the reasons is that this language variety is their mother tongue, which can arouse a strong sense of national identity in people's emotional world; Secondly, Mexican Spanish enjoys the undisputed highest status throughout the country, and the Delirez people see it as an effective means of expressing group unity and maintaining close ties with Mexico; Thirdly, in Mexico, the use of Mexican Spanish can enhance economic, educational, and political status.

When a language (usually the mother tongue) has potential solidarity with the people of a country or nation and the language itself has a high status, individuals and groups tend to use it to express emotions or achieve their own practical goals. It can be seen that for Mexicans, adhering to their loyalty to Spanish can

demonstrate their national identity and also gain recognition from others (Calteaux, Finlayson & Myers-Scotton, 1998).

But sometimes, emotional and rational attitudes cannot be balanced, and which one dominates depends on individuals and specific social groups, depending on which aspect of their attitude needs they are willing to sacrifice.

In the United States, “Black English” is highly discriminated against, mainly used by the lowest level of American society, and its grammar and pronunciation characteristics are often used by those who are uneducated or the poorest. However, despite this, some African Americans who have received a high education and have good jobs still advocate and enjoy using “Black English” because it indicates their ethnic identity (Rickford et al. 2000). Disadvantaged social groups often use their own unique language as a means of expressing their national identity, as a resistance to social norms.

Individual psychological motivation, in addition to language attitude, can influence the choice and conversion of language codes, affecting the construction of national identity. The driving psychology or internal motivation of a person to engage in a particular activity is referred to as human psychological motivation. Motivation is the subject's internal drive toward the goal and can guide behavior; necessity is the psychological source of motivation.

As indicated by the hypothesis of character conduct model proposed by Le Page (1968, 1975), an all-inclusive inspiration of speakers' discourse act is to make their own language as reliable as conceivable with the gathering language with which they need to recognize. Ethnic character is one part of a singular's social personality and furthermore one part of their feeling of having a place with a gathering.

At the point when a language turns into an image of a country, it includes issues of "national identity" and "language loyalty". For instance, every part condition of the European Association desires to involve their own public language in EU organizations, which is firmly connected with individuals' feeling of national identity (Wu Huiping, 2004).

Individuals characterize and depict their own reality using language, and language bunches lay out what is self and what is outsider using normal language, featuring their own public personality.

As referenced before, code exchanging can keep up with solidarity inside a language local area, and a particular method of code exchanging can likewise stay away from clashes and keep a well-disposed connection between the local area and the rest of the world. The opportune transformation of language codes can cause the speaker to seem well disposed, helpful, open, and charitable, which is helpful for laying out a typical position between the two players in correspondence, facilitating pressure, and decreasing relational struggles.

This is especially the case in certain social contexts where multiple languages and cultures coexist and racial conflicts are imminent, the flexible use and conversion of language codes is the key to streamlining interpersonal relationships (Finayson et al., 1998).

Bullock and Toribio (2009) divided code switching into five main and most common categories based on the function of the code switch under different contexts:

1. Reference: One of the functions of code switching is to directly quote someone else's speech presented in another code.
2. Emphasis: Resorting to code switching to attract attention and highlight key points.
3. Conversation: The use of code switching can change the role played by the speaker in a certain conversation, indicate their identity changes in different conversations, as well as identifying the role of the other speakers.
4. Restatement: Using code switching to restate previous topics mainly serves to strengthen the tone

and express strong emotions.

5. Interpretation: Using code switching to explain previous propositions, which is a commonly used method in bilingual teaching and is also suitable for addressing questions that arise in certain communications to clarify or interpret a concept to the other party.

Our analysis will be divided into two parts, one focusing on the sociolinguistic properties of code switching in Tunisian television, the other focusing on the psycholinguistic aspect of it. For the first part, we will be basing ourselves on Bullock and Toribio's five natures of code switching to see how those different types of code are used in different situations to relay different messages and serve different purposes. For the second part, we will use Giles's Speech Regulation Theory to determine between convergence, divergence, emotional and rational language, which linguistic markers can illustrate a psychosocial differentiation between characters using language as a main tool.

## 2.2 Code Switching as a Social Class Marker

This first dialogue is from a Tunisian sitcom called "Denya Okhra", which roughly means "Another world". The main plot revolves around a poor lower-class man winning the lottery jackpot and discovering a whole new world. The exchange takes place in a high-end coffee shop, where protagonist Sabri takes two friends (both also less fortunate low-class workers) of his to experience a luxurious person's afternoon:

*Sabri: شنية تحبي تشربي؟*

*Female Friend: liverpool بال إعطيني كاس banane*

*Sabri: Liverpool? اه يامة وخيتي*

*Female Friend: شيبك؟*

*Sabri: Liverpool? لاي اسمو Lait de poule, lait de poule!*

*و أنت شتشر ب؟ شيشة Arsenal؟*

*Male Friend: تسخايلني مصتاك كيفها هي نعرش نسمي أنا؟*

*مilkshik جيلي*

*Milkshi*

*[...]*

*Milkchfeyef milkcheyekh ... express*

*Translation:*

*Sabri: What would you like to drink?*

*Female Friend: I'll have a banana liverpool*

*Sabri: Liverpool? For God's sake*

*Female Friend: What's wrong?*

*Sabri: Liverpool? It's called Lait de poule, lait de poule (a drink made of blended fruits and milk)!*

*\*looks at the male friend\* and what would you like? An Arsenal hookah?*

*Male Friend: Did you think I was stupid like her and didn't know what things are called? I'll have a milkshik...Milkshi*

*[...]\*has trouble pronouncing the word milkshake\**

*Milkchfeyef milkcheyekh ... express (Originally derived from the Italian word espresso, refers to a pure shot of black coffee, called express because of how fast and easy it is to make. It is a very common order in Tunisia).*

It is important to note that the Tunisian Arabic spoken by these three characters has a strong “poor people accent”. Referring to the smaller city accents that those not from the capital speak, it was brought over to Tunis (Tunisian capital and most populated city) through poorer communities moving to the capital in search of mundane jobs such as maids and plumbers. It has now become a main marker Tunisians use to know one’s origin and therefore social class, as migrants are usually from a low social class.

In this dialogue, the French words used are: Liverpool, banane, lait de poule, Arsenal, milkshake and express.

The girl not being able to pronounce the word lait de poule right, and her now rich friend’s reaction to her mistake shows that not only is she uneducated, but he is educated enough to educate her and then make fun of her in a satiric way. By referring to Arsenal as a response to her saying Liverpool, he shows that he knows how to pronounce these words, but is also educated enough to understand their meaning and use them correctly.

The male friend originally made fun of the girl and insisted on the fact that he is different from her, calling her stupid and thus inferring that he is smart. But he then faced a similar problem, by struggling to pronounce the word milkshake and resorting to ordering an express coffee, which although is a very common word that most Tunisians know and use, is still technically French. He didn’t order a black coffee or just a coffee in Arabic, he used a French word.

In conclusion, we can see that this simple exchange has layers and a deeper meaning behind it. What one’s conclusion would be after watching this scene is that those lower-class people from a poor background cannot even pronounce the drink’s names properly, so they don’t belong there. But the newly rich friend who originally comes from the exact same background as the other two seems to have gained a new identity through his recent fortune and feels very comfortable and at ease in a “rich people’s shop”. His friends may try to match that level, but they will fail miserably and be called out on it, because at the end of the day they are not on the same level anymore, not only financially but also socially.

In this situation, the type of code switching used would be Emphasis, as only key words were said in French versus the rest being said in Arabic. But the emphasis failed on the friends’ end, making them seem illiterate and ‘stupid’, whereas it helped Sabri confirm his higher status and position in comparison to them.

A similar situation was seen in the Tunisian sitcom “Police”, where a policeman Rjab called his partner ‘hypocrite’ (Word is spelled the same in both French and English, we can tell he said it in French through his pronunciation), and when he was ironically asked where he learned that word (implying that it should be too difficult for him) he simply replied ‘Larousse’ (known French dictionary). In another instance that same coworker told him there was a jacuzzi in a victim’s house, which Rjab misunderstood as Sarkozy, which was the French president’s last name at the time. Same as Sabri’s friends, he was made fun of for his lacking French skills, although he was doing his best to speak the same as his peers.

This second dialogue is from another sitcom called “Happyness”, which is a word play on the word ‘happiness’ and the word ‘ness’ meaning ‘people’ in Arabic, “Happyness” can therefore be understood as “Happy people”. It presents the daily events and struggles of a mid-class Tunisian family. This scene is an exchange between their house maid and their daughter’s friend, who’s first time it is visiting. None of the house owners are present at the moment, and the maid offers a beverage to the guest to make her feel comfortable:

*Maid:* جي تحبي؟ *ji?*

*Girl:* شكون؟

*Maid:* جي تحبي جي؟

*Girl:* ياخي شكون بش بجي؟

*Maid:* Ji \*shows the juice\* ji! تحبي!

[...]

*Girl:* ميسالاش يعيشك jus d'orange كان فما

[...]

Maid: *Ji d'orange?*

Girl: *أي jus d'orange أي*

Maid: *أي كيفاش تحبو ji d'orange*

Girl: *موش قارس بارشة كان فما*

Maid: *[...] أي تحبو, jus d'orange fraise, jus d'orange banane, jus d'orange yananas?*

*Translation:*

Maid: *Would you like some juice? (Mispronounced the French word for juice, making the sentence sound like “do you want him to come”)*

Girl: *who?*

Maid: *\*repeats the sentence, emphasizing on the still mispronounced word juice\**

Girl: *who is coming?*

Maid: *Juice \*shows the juice\* do you want juice?*

[...]

Girl: *oh, if there is “jus d'orange” (orange juice) then sure*

[...]

Maid: *Ji d'orange?*

Girl: *Yes, jus d'orange*

Maid: *And how would you like your ji d'orange*

Girl: *Not too sour if possible*

Maid: *[...] But how would you want it, strawberry jus d'orange, banana jus d'orange, pineapple (mispronounced) jus d'orange?*

The main point of this scene revolves around a misunderstanding originating from the mispronunciation of a French word: juice. The word for juice in French is ‘jus’ [ʒy], but as the sound [y] doesn’t exist in Arabic, a lot of Tunisians with a lower level of French will replace it with the sound [i]. This is a known linguistic phenomenon with French speaking Tunisians, resulting in a few common mistakes such as the French word for skirt sounding like the Tunisian word for pocket. As said prior research has shown that at least a part of Tunisian people believe French denotes a certain social level, therefore someone who is unable to pronounce the sound [y] correctly would typically be thought of as lower class and vice versa. In Tunisian sitcom “Dar Louzir”, the private chef of a corrupt Tunisian minister’s most used phrase was “Quel Culôt!”, which he also mispronounced in a vain effort to match his boss’s social status.

In this case, the maid keeps pronouncing the word as [ʒi] instead of [ʒy], profoundly confusing the guest. It should be marked that throughout the entire exchange, besides the words related to the juice, nothing else was said in French, however the maid has the same Tunisian accent as the two friends from the first example, whereas the girl speaks in what is considered a very typical “capital accent”, with no notes of dialect in it.

Even after the misunderstanding was explained, it was made clear that the maid had no idea what ‘jus d'orange’ means, as she followed it by other types of fruits, meaning she thought orange juice actually only meant juice. The end of the scene showed the girl being shocked and her facial expressions having even a hint of disgust or disdain. Similarly, a scene in Tunisian sitcom “Choufli Hal” saw the wife of protagonist and high standing doctor refer to his mother as ‘une mère poule’, which in French translates to ‘hen



mother’, and its English equivalent would be ‘mama bear’, a mother who is very overprotective of her children. Her brother-in-law, less educated and smart than his brother, understood it as her calling his mother a chicken and made a fuss about it. This kind of instance shows that understanding some words of a language doesn’t necessarily mean you have the general knowledge and cultural background needed to avoid any type of misunderstanding.

The simplest way to interpret this juice scene’s dialogue is that the maid was unable to speak any French, but seeing as the guest seemed of a higher class and spoke in French to her, she tried to match her energy but failed miserably, making a mockery out of herself. This situation is very similar to the one shown in Denya Okhra, and the sociolinguistic conclusion is almost the same.

One thing differs however, and that is the type of code-switching used. In this case, it could be seen as Reference or Restatement, depending on one’s understanding of the exchange that occurred between both characters. The maid works for a family whose class is higher than her own, she will naturally pick up on their linguistic patterns and try to use them herself. This is the reason for which I believe the right type in this case is actually Conversation. The maid is simply trying to blend in with the people surrounding her, albeit ridiculous due to her lack of linguistic knowledge, having an opposite effect to the one she desires, demarking her even more and making her seem even less educated and “lower class” than speaking in a Tunisian dialect would have. French is the only foreign language that holds an actual social status in Tunisia, speaking it can “make or break” someone’s social identity.

A similar example can be found in Tunisian sitcom “Choufli Hal”, in which the patriarch of the family is a psychotherapy doctor, called in French ‘psychothérapeute’, but was referred to as a ‘psychopath’ by his mother’s love interest due to the man’s inability to pronounce such a long French word.

The two last dialogues are also extracted from the series “Denya Okhra”, in this first one we follow Sabri and his girlfriend to a Yoga session:

*Yoga coach: bravo محلاهم les faux ongles متاعك madame زهرة très jolis*

*Zohra: Merci ميشو merci*

*Sabri: السلام عليكم*

*Coach: سلام*

*Sabri: شنيّة اللي محلاهم؟*

*Coach: Les faux ongles*

*[...] \*Sabri punches the coach in the face\**

*Zohra: متاعنا ميشو coach صبري امان هذا ال*

*Sabri: يا بنتي scotch انا [...]*

*Zohra: ال coach ال coach*

*Coach: relaxe relaxe respire تنفس monsieur صبري*

*Sabri: [...] انا relaxe هدايا*

*[...]*

*Coach: ارخف روحك le maximum [...] relaches toi*

*Sabri: الرجال مترخفش راحة*

*Coach: نرخفو رواحنا yoga احنا فال*

*Translation:*

*Yoga coach: bravo your nail extensions look great madam Zohra*

*Zohra: Thank you Michou thank you*

*Sabri: Hello*

*Coach: Hi*

*Sabri: What looks great?*

*Coach: Her nails*

*[...] \*Sabri punches the coach in the face\**

*Zohra: Sabri please this is our coach Michou*

*Sabri: What do you mean scotch [...]*

*Zohra: The coach the coach*

*Coach: Relax relax breathe mister Sabri breathe*

*Sabri: [...] What do you mean relax*

*[...]*

*Coach: Relax yourself the max [...] Let yourself go*

*Sabri: Men don't let themselves go*

*Coach: In yoga we let ourselves go*

In opposition to the coffee shop scene, Sabri is in this case the one out of his comfort zone. His new girlfriend Zohra belongs to what we call in Tunisia “high people”, meaning she leads a luxurious and very westernized lifestyle. It is implied in the sitcom that she only likes Sabri for his money, and uses his money to fund her own lifestyle.

This scene is a perfect parallel to the coffee shop scene, as both have an exchange between a higher- and lower-class individual, the lower class trying to match the linguistic habits of the higher class one, and failing.

Yoga is not a typical activity in Tunisia, and the series illustrated that by having a very feminine male coach with a stereotypical name, Michou. This is also highlighted by the first line of the scene, in which Michou compliments Zohra's nails. Whilst Zohra is completely fine with Michou touching her to help her with the different yoga positions, as well as compliment her, Sabri has trouble understanding this concept as he is from a more traditional background.

He only sees a man being inappropriate with ‘his woman’. He reacts very aggressively to what he perceives to be an attack to his manhood, and in this situation the only two words he says in French are direct quotes from the previous sentences said to him. He mistakes the word ‘coach’ for ‘scotch’, which in Tunisia is commonly used to refer to sticky tape. The type of code switching Sabri uses is therefore Reference.

Zohra only says the word coach in French when talking to Sabri, we can hypothesize it is because she is trying to match his linguistic level, to make communication easier. The one word she says in French is the ‘keyword’ of their conversation, making the type of code-switching used Emphasis.

The coach, however, mixes French and Arabic almost to a word-by-word degree, falling into code-mixing rather than code-switching (while code-switching refers to switching language between sentences, or adding a foreign word or two to a sentence mainly in one language, code-mixing refers to a mix of two languages in one same sentence with no dominant one language). During his exchange with Sabri, he says a word in French then repeats it in Arabic or the other way around, like with the words ‘relax’ or ‘let yourself go’. This can be his way of insisting on the importance of these words, making this example of code switching an Emphasis, or it could be Interpretation, making sure Sabri understands the meaning as his French seems to be lacking.

The last segment is a breakfast scene between Sabri, Zohra, and Sabri's mom. Before they even start talking, we get a visual division of the table. Sabri is in the middle, with both women at each end. In front of his mother are plates of Tunisian food, like Shakshuka and boiled eggs. On the other side in front of

Zohra are fruit juice, toasts, coffee and jam, breakfast foods mainly considered European. They both each want Sabri to eat what they themselves are eating, and Sabri is trying to side with his girlfriend without upsetting his mother. The following exchange ensues:

Sabri: [...] راهي الناس الصباح تاكل ال... شياكلو عزيزتي [...] *Sabri: [...]*  
 Zohra: croissant, toast bel beurre وال confiture ياكلو ال *Zohra: bon, jus d'orange, vitamine c فيه ال اشرب*  
 Sabri: \*babbling\* *Sabri: c, d*  
 Mother: مش قتلايا نالي رابيتك والا *Mother: oui*  
 Sabri: اي انت اللي ربيتيني *Sabri: [...] زادا باهي طال*  
 Mother: اي مالا نعرفك واشنكل *Mother: [...] [Vitamin] B is good too*  
 [...] *[...]*  
 Zohra: باهي علاخر *Zohra: Well, drink orange juice, it has vitamin C which is great for you.*  
 Sabri: c, d *Sabri: C, D.*  
 Zohra: oui *Zohra: Yes.*  
 Sabri: [...] *Sabri: [...] [Vitamin] B is good too*  
 \*he chokes\* *\*He chokes\**  
 Zohra: سمالا عليك سمالا عليك *Zohra: Be careful my darling!*

*Translation:*

*Sabri: [...] In the morning people eat... what do they eat, dear?*

*Zohra: They eat croissants, they eat toast with butter and jam.*

*Sabri: \*babbling, unable to repeat what she said\**

*Mother: Didn't you say I am the one who raised you?*

*Sabri: Yes, you raised me.*

*Mother: Then I know what you usually eat.*

*[...]*

*Zohra: Well, drink orange juice, it has vitamin C which is great for you.*

*Sabri: C, D.*

*Zohra: Yes.*

*Sabri: [...] [Vitamin] B is good too*

*\*He chokes\**

*Zohra: Be careful my darling!*

The first thing to note is that the mother is a representation of what is considered the epitome of a Tunisian poor person: the way she is dressed, the makeup and Amazigh tattoos on her face, what she is eating, and most importantly the way she speaks. Her son is still trying to adapt himself to his newly acquired status, but fails again as he has to ask Zohra what those 'rich people foods' are called and is unable to repeat the words she just said to him.

When Zohra mentions that orange juice has vitamin C, Sabri mentions vitamins C, D and even B, saying they are good for one's health. He is trying to show Zohra that he does have some knowledge about that matter, and thus appear less ignorant than he actually is. The type of code-switching he uses here is Restatement, restating Zohra's previous statement and elaborating it.

Zohra on the other hand, uses French words as a direct opposition to Sabri's mother, who didn't say a word in French. She is trying to assess her status, making her use of code-switching in this case

Conversation. She wants to prove that she is on a higher level than Sabri's mother, and thus incorporates as much French as she can into her discourse, going as far as using the word 'chéri' instead of its Arabic equivalent which is equally endearing.

### *2.3 Code Switching as a Psycholinguistic Marker*

The two main concepts of Giles (1979) Speech Regulation Theory are "convergence" and "divergence". We can use the four scenes from the first part to illustrate different combinations of these two:

In the coffee shop scene, there are both instances of convergence and divergence, the two friend's use of French is due to the environment they're in, as well as the new status of their friend Sabri. They are trying to match his status by speaking in a manner they're not used to, using a type of language they don't master. This is a case of language convergence.

Sabri on the other hand, uses French to demonstrate that his level is superior to theirs, using sarcasm and a derogatory tone. He wants to "put them back in their place", make them understand that they're not on the same level anymore. He is trying to affirm his status, making this an example of language divergence.

In the juice scene, the guest's use of French seems to be more of a habit than a purpose, but similarly to the previous scene, the maid trying her best to speak French back to the guest is her way of making her comfortable, using a language she deems "easier to understand" for the girl. She is trying to match her energy, using a convergent type of language.

In the yoga scene, there is a linguistic opposition, as the coach uses code mixing to repeat the same words in Arabic and French, which he didn't do until he started talking to Sabri. His use of Arabic to repeat words he just said in French can be seen as language convergence, trying to make Sabri comfortable, calm him down and make sure he understands what is being said to him. In this case the language used to converge is then Arabic instead of French.

Sabri visibly disagrees with the way the coach presents himself, and although he does speak a bit of French he chooses to speak almost purely in Arabic, as a way of distancing himself from the individual he does not want to be associated with. This is then a case of language divergence using Arabic as a tool.

The last scene, the breakfast scene is the most "blatant" example of language representing a psychological stance, Zohra is very openly trying to assess her dominance over Sabri and her superiority to his mother. She uses French even when there is no need to, diverging from the mother who eats and speaks poorly in her eyes.

Sabri on the other hand tries his best to match his girlfriend's level, going as far as asking her to teach him about Tunisia's westernized culture and language, he is trying to use language to converge with her, making himself feel closer to the one he loves.

Another example of language convergence can be taken from previously mentioned Tunisian dramedy "El khotab aal beb", which had a character Layes come back home after living in France most of his life, and faced an identity crisis as he tried to speak Tunisian Arabic but went back to French naturally. A marking example of this would be when he tried to use famous French saying 'Quelle mouche t'as piquée?', which translates to 'what fly has stung you?' and roughly means 'what is wrong with you?'. He was thinking in French as it is a part of his identity, but tried to adapt to his environment by literally translating that saying to Arabic, causing a huge misunderstanding and leaving the person he was talking to utterly confused.

The existence of language convergence and divergence is usually depending on the speaker's relationship with the listener or receiver. The relationship of the speaker to the language he speaks in itself is how we can broadly define language attitude.

In the case of the yoga coach (example 3) or the house guest (example 2), we can tell that they speak French without a particular purpose, it seems to just be a part of their individual identity. It is therefore

their emotional language. Another example of a Tunisian TV character using French as an emotional language is Slimane, the psychotherapy professional from previously cited sitcom “Choufli Hal”. His famous catchphrase is “Très très bien”, which means ‘very very well’ in French. Rather than serving a particular purpose, it seems to be a part of his identity as he is a man with a reputable job and good social background who mixes French into his language as a second nature.

However, Sabri’s friends (example 1), the maid (example 2) and most importantly Sabri’s girlfriend (example 4) use French for a particular purpose, either to try to match the listener’s social status, or to affirm their own. This means that they might not necessarily have used the same type of language in another similar context, if the friends went to a regular café instead of a high-class coffee shop, or if Zohra was having breakfast with Sabri alone, they would probably have used a different way to express similar ideas. Seeing how their language holds a purpose, and moreover depends on the contextual situation they’re in, it is then rational rather than emotional.

### 3. Conclusion

Through a sociolinguistic and a psycholinguistic analysis of four segments taken from Tunisian TV shows, as well as appropriate examples all throughout said analysis, we have found that the presence of Arabic-French code-switching in Tunisian TV shows is not simply due to thoughtless scripting influenced by the writer’s own linguistic habits, as it does in fact serve a purpose.

TV shows are made by the people, for the people, and they are one of the biggest platforms for social criticism all throughout the world. Especially Sitcoms, that can exaggerate different social situations to the point of ridicule. Tunisia is no exception, and our analysis found that in Tunisian TV shows do use language to differentiate between social class, making characters from higher social classes speak a language with a high amount of French mixed into it, and lower social class characters unable to speak French properly. We can then conclude that French is a key to guessing a Tunisian TV show’s character’s background and social status through their speech.

From the screenwriter’s point of view, this is a sort of social criticism. All the dialogue is written by one same person, but there is a huge difference in the linguistic habits of different characters, going as far as making some of them look and sound like caricatures. Hatem Belhaj is a prime example of that kind of writer. He is also a journalist and a caricature cartoonist, and has claimed to use his screenwriting as a way to denounce the social and cultural inequalities between the different classes in Tunisia, especially through the use of French in dialogues.

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