



Language-related Comments in a Moroccan Video Blog

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ABSTRACT In this paper, general linguistic characteristics of comments in a Moroccan video blog were viewed through the prism of Moroccan language situation. Accordingly, linguistic realia of modern Morocco and tendencies in linguistic education in this country were revealed. For this purpose, a corpus of comments to one of the popular Moroccan video blogs was built. Moreover, the genre features of the video blog were briefly outlined. Using methods of applied linguistics, language-related comments were then singled out. Besides, particular attention was paid to the language of comments, their graphic and lexical peculiarities, as well as linguopragmatic aspects of online communication. It was discovered that English had caused dissatisfaction in Moroccan audience of the given video blog. In spite of this fact, the commentators were quite insistent in their language choice and they were also using French while persuading the blogger to speak Arabic.

INTRODUCTION

Video blog or vlog is one of the popular genres of the Internet communication, representing a rich field for linguistic investigations which require conceptualization, as stated by Couldry and Hepp (2013), as well as language teaching, as Alikberova argues (Couldry and Hepp 2013; Alikberova et al. 2017; Narcy-Combes et al. 2019).

Arabic is also within the focus of attention of many specialists in the field of computational linguistics, because, as Pasha et al. (2014) states, "Arabic is a complex language that poses many challenges to natural language processing". Particular features of vlogs such as spontaneous, almost unprepared way of narration, use of slangs, and unrestricted video length have been thus described by Frobenius (2013).

Most of vlogs can be also found on the YouTube website, which allows users to watch videos, follow channels (that is, personal pages), and leave comments on them. In the present paper, comments in a Moroccan vlog reflecting both peculiarities of a complex linguistic situation in Morocco and of the Internet comment genre were used. Moroccan and modern standard Arabic, Berber (Tamazight), French, and Spanish are also present in Morocco. Sadiqi (1991), Ennaji (2009), and Chakrani (2011) have also written about the growing importance of English. But, how is this situation represented on the Web? (Hung 2016)

Objectives

Lack of academic works on functioning of the Internet genres in Arabic determines the relevance of the present paper. The aim of this study was to find and describe particular features of language-related comments and also reveal the reasons that cause these peculiarities (Sauro and Sundmark 2019).

METHODOLOGY

For this study, all the comments from a YouTube vlog administered by Wafi Abdouss called "Wafi Abdouss official" constituting more than two thousand comments were taken. Then, the codes employed for the comments by Moroccans and how these codes had been expressed in written forms was described (Smari and Navracics 2019).

Today, quantitative methods are also of relevance in linguistic research, as stated by Subich et al. (2015). Moreover, corpus-based analysis plays an important part in this approach (Subich et al. 2016). To single out language-related comments in this study, Lexicon 5.1.2 was used. Moreover, it was pre-supposed that the language-related comments could contain the word 'language' or (Ar. - language), and the names of languages in all of the languages used in comments (Noguti 2016; Risager 2018).

Comparing the results of this study with previously revealed sociolinguistic data also led to several conclusions about the specific traits of comments and possible processes standing behind them as well as some assumptions on the Internet communication in general (Johnson and Ensslin 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The vlog considered in the present paper is moderately popular where videos get about 15 thousand to 324 thousand views. The vlogger whose name is Wafi Abdouss (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-hfemTG5_cpwK_7j3ooAOpA>) is a student of Al-Akhawain University, considered to be the richest and the most expensive university in Morocco. Thus, it is supposed that he represents the upper-class youth. The vlogger discusses news, politics, and other social issues currently or generally discussed in the Moroccan Internet media. He also speaks in Moroccan colloquial Arabic, his mother tongue, often switching the code into English which is the language of his university. The use of Moroccan variety of Arabic is determined by usually informal character of vblog genre, while the use of English might result from his perception of modernity and open-mindedness, as Chakrani argues that English represents both of these qualities along with French for a great part of upper-class citizens. What is of utmost importance is that they are setting linguistic trends for the middle class.

In the comments considered, various codes had been employed; in addition, they had various graphic representations. Accordingly, several groups of non-mixed codes, with attention to their graphic aspects, can be distinguished:

1. Moroccan colloquial Arabic written using Latin alphabet (ML)
2. Moroccan colloquial Arabic written using Arabic alphabet (MA)
3. Modern standard Arabic written using Arabic alphabet (MSA)
4. English (EN)
5. French (FR)

Several mixed codes can be also singled out:

1. ML+FR
2. ML+EN

3. MSA+MA
4. FR+ML
5. FR+ML+EN
6. FR+EN

As observed, the codes are mixed, but only those using the same alphabet; and doing so, the user have no need to switch the keyboard. However, there are several examples of English (or French) translations of the terms provided in brackets in comments written in MSA or MA.

According to their contents, comments can be divided into several groups: commenting on the topic of the video, commenting on the vlog and a subgroup of comments which consist of verbal insults addressed to the vlogger. The first group usually uses only one code; whereas in the second and the third, the mixture of three codes can be found. The insults are mostly written in Moroccan dialect, but may also include English and French phrases (Narcy-Combes et al. 2019).

A particular attention is also paid to comments where the language of the vlogger is commented. According to Efremov (2016), the Internet is a sphere where groups of non-professionals who fight for “the purity of the language” so-called “grammar-nazi” appear and form groups for communication. No similar groups have been so far observed in the Arabic Web; but in the comments considered in this study, a tendency towards correction of incorrect speech is certainly traced. The noticeable number of these linguistic comments might be also explained by the character of communication. For the vlogger, who performs an almost unprepared speech act, it is an oral communication which is spontaneous and usually characterized by a greater number of mistakes. At the same time, for the audience, there is a time reflection on what they have seen and heard, and what they are going to write in a comment and a possibility to watch the video again. The imperfections of the informal speech of the vlogger and the complexity of the Moroccan linguistic situation even cause more negative reactions (Hung 2016).

‘English’ was mentioned in these comments by 22 times, while ‘anglais’ (Fr. - English) was mentioned 33 times. Only 3 comments were positive about English (both English as a language in general and the vlogger’s English). The rest fall into two categories: either the users blame

the author for his English and recommend speaking Moroccan, or they generally discuss why English is important. It is noticeable that none of the commentators opposed English to French. Also, they used French and English when recommended to speak Moroccan. Other language-related comments mentioned language by 10 times, langue by 4 times, and 12 contained

(of which 2 used the word metaphorically). These comments were not positive about Wafi's language, as well as 10 comments that contained 'darija' (Ar. - dialect), claiming that it was hard to understand which languages Wafi uses and it is not a clear Moroccan dialect, in addition to previously mentioned type of advice. Thus, it becomes clear that a larger audience prefers Moroccan dialect to English, and they are not ready to accept this mixed code.

The vblogger Wafi Abdouss uses a mixed code of Moroccan dialect and English in his speech acts. He represents the upper-class youth of Morocco which acts as a trend-setter for the Middle class. Due to the informality of the vblog genre, he mainly uses Moroccan dialect, but sometimes switches the code and starts to speak English, the language of his university. His speech is mostly unprepared and it naturally causes minor mistakes and imprecise phrasing. At the same time the writing act is prepared, the commentators also have a chance to watch the video several times and revise their comments.

While many users have a tendency to correct others' speech and writing all around the world, the situation in Morocco is particularly problematic due to the complexity of the linguistic situation and changing priorities in the sphere of foreign language learning.

The blogger's usage of English causes particularly negative reactions because French remains as a widely-influential foreign language. It also becomes clear that Moroccan users often mix codes while employing different graphic representations for all the codes, for example, Moroccan colloquial Arabic written using Latin alphabet, Moroccan colloquial Arabic written using Arabic alphabet, modern standard Arabic written using Arabic alphabet, English, and French. The codes are majorly mixed according to the alphabet used, so that the users do not need to switch the keyboard. Users generally blame the blogger for using English, and while

not opposing it to French, they recommend speaking Moroccan Arabic. They are also critical about blogger's Moroccan speech.

CONCLUSION

For a comment section in a Moroccan vlog, code-switching and code-mixing as well as use of foreign languages is typical. But the audience, despite the growing popularity, cannot accept that the vlogger speaks English. This causes a relatively large number of language-related comments. The critical language-related comments can be also explained by a trend of correction and fighting for purity of language in the Internet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the current study, general linguistic characteristics of comments in a Moroccan video blog were viewed through the prism of Moroccan language situation. In order to obtain general results for future studies it is suggested that general linguistic characteristics of comments in different blogs analyze.

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