

Language & grammatical gender in Moroccan Arabic and English codeswitching. A levelling phenomenon.

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Using Myers-Scotton's (1993a) Matrix Language Frame Model (MLF), this abstract concerns itself with the analysis of grammatical gender in examining switching between a modifier and a noun in both Moroccan Arabic (henceforth MA) and English codeswitching and how the gendered MA vs ungendered English dynamic allows accommodation for a form of convergent flexibility. Using a corpus of 15 migrant and British-born Moroccans that currently reside in the UK, all speakers I recorded are bilingual with variations in fluency and skill. Here, in MA and English bilingual utterances, if an English noun ends in an /a/ the speaker will assign an MA feminine marker /a/ in the adjoining adjective (Adj) as in *kæmera kbīra* 'big camera'. The same can be said if the English noun is devoid of an /a/ final sound as in 'coffee' which will then be marked for masculine in its adjectival gender in the MA as in *coffee zwīn* 'nice coffee'. Here, phonological shape accounts for grammatical concord and this is generally agreed upon by speakers in natural conversation. However, sometimes such phonological gender assignment is not always as transparently defined and MA speakers instead select a semantic frame application to nouns, irrespective of phonological shape and such semanticization is transferred across from the MA L1. Such assignment rules force the speakers in bilingual conversation to somehow 'agree' on noun assignment giving rise to either phonologically or semantically attributed MA adjectives and at times, there is feminine-masculine-feminine alternation until the end result is 'levelled' and agreed upon by both speakers. In this innovative analysis, the main criterion here is absolute grammatical agreement which is essential in MA discourse and it is found that code-switchers have strong grammatical intuitions of male or female-specific lexicality.

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