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LEBANON AND ITS LINGUISTIC WANDERING: ON THE ROAD TO LANGUAGE DE-ESSENTIALIZATION

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Abstract

With the present paper I would like to explore the modalities through which contemporary Lebanon's linguistic variants are used, deliberately manipulated or unconsciously modified by their speakers, in a bid to express multifaceted cultural, political or merely individual *egos.*

Lebanon is well known as a country of rich migration history: the major flows of migrants left for Australia, Canada, West Africa and Europe in the 19th and 20th century, where they mostly followed the settlement and housing patterns of their community members.

On the other side, migration flows also occurred within the country, predominantly from the South to Beirut's southern suburbs and its surrounding areas, since the Israeli Occupation (1978-2000) and the chronic state neglect since the years of the French Mandate (1920-1943) had caused further impoverishment.

The migration towards other countries is named *hijra*, which means "migration" in Arabic, whereas it is called *nuzuh* in the case of migration within the same country.

Lebanon has been mostly home to Iraqi, Sudanese and Palestinian refugees from the 1948 Palestinian *Nakba* onwards, despite its refusal to become signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention for Refugees, which classifies Lebanon just as a transit country for these forced migrants. Armenians and Kurds, wandering beings and victims of regional repression and violence *par excellence*, are also largely present in today's Lebanon.

The historical legacies of Lebanese transnationality have been engendering throughout the years interesting linguistic phenomena that are worth being delved into. The linguistic super-structure characterizing Lebanon, as a result, turns out extremely layered, hybrid and articulated, insofar as it reflects the wandering dimensionality of Lebanese society.

The methodology used to unravel the way local trilingualism plays out draws on ethnographic data that have been collected by the author throughout four stays in Lebanon – periodically from 2005 to 2012.

While aiming at analyzing the role of the performative Lebanese speaker in communicative phenomena of code switching and code mixing, the present research sheds light on the wandering essence of language itself, as a mirror of its inhabitants' mobility.

The ungraspable essence of migration gives birth to a highly complex formation of local languages and begs the question for still unexplored dynamics of linguistic affiliations to community, social class and ideological stance.

By using an anthropological lens, an attempt to analyze Lebanon's identity performances and the mobility stories of local speakers will be carried out.

Key words: Migration, transnationality, Code Switching, Identity Performance, Everyday Life.

Introduction

My great interest in ethno-linguistic research lies in the firm conviction that language and the ways it is used and conceived by its speakers guides us to the cultural core of a people.

Everyday conversations constitute primary material aspects of our daily life. From Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's perspective, language has been viewed instead as an abstract entity. We situationally play the role of the addressee and the addresser, the speaker and the listener, the receiver and the agent, the so-called "native" and the outsider. In our life of speakers, there is nothing but language in action that is able to make us protagonists of our existence.

A further reason that pushed me to start such a kind of research is that language has often been largely ignored in its cultural dimension: the structuralist bias towards languages, according to which they are closed systems of stable grammar separate from each other, is hard to die. The linguistic research potential of transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries in the human sciences should be further materialized.

As a result, this research aims at addressing to a lesser extent ideological processes of speech community members, and, rather, focuses on the utility of language in action in order to understand community members' actual practices, and, subsequently, their symbolical and material conflicts, particularly relevant in the Lebanese reality.

Throughout the present study, a long series of open-ended questions has come up. The level of freedom that the speaker feels to have while switching from a code into another one is an open issue, as well as how politically deliberate is the reason behind an event of code switching.

The most appropriate means to represent linguistic and cultural realities is through situated presentations of people's everyday activities and practices.

After giving a brief overview of Lebanese society, and after recalling the blurredness of ethnicity and the heterogeneity of identity processes, I will illustrate the head knots of my methodology, the instruments I used, the research limits and the personalized categorization of the empirical data I diachronically collected during my fieldwork.

Ethno-pragmatics: a Holistic Research Instrument

In October 2007 I attended the lecture of a Professor of Economics at the American University of Beirut, who spoke of the urgent need to modify the monetary and financial system in Lebanon: "Lebanon is like a car driver with one foot on the brake and the other on the accelerator". In such a contradictory context it is hard to extrapolate conclusions in the strict sense of the word.

Lebanon is a multi-confessional society, constituted by 18 different religious communities, which, in great part, are not ethnically different from each other. In such a heterogeneous picture, Lebanon represents the microcosmic impossibility of a monolithic identity. Multifaceted identities, however, do not necessarily imply conflict, as it has been theorized (Huntington 1996). The act of epitomizing the boarder that connects different cultures and languages continuously recreates identity in an original synthesis, as Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf (2000) and Italian anthropologist Vincenzo Matera (1999 and 2006) had already noticed in much of their work.

The confessional and ethnic communities, and their supposedly correlated communal identities, have been portrayed as essentialized realities separated by clear-cut lines. This tendency has heavily influenced a great deal of anthropological and social studies on the Middle Eastern region. As a result, the Middle East is still conceived as a patchwork formed by communities speaking their own language, bearing their traditions and beliefs, chronically at odds with each other.

According to Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969), members should feel unified by material interests in order to feel part of the same community: without material benefits, a common culture, a common ethnic root, common beliefs or a common language seem not to be sufficient yet in shaping a single social entity. Provided that Lebanese communities are not homogeneous Weberian ideal-types, I tried to eschew a community-oriented methodology while conducting my research.

Ethno-pragmatics is the discipline that embraces the methods I drew upon to conduct the present research. It can be defined as the study of communication that tries to integrate the discourse analysis with the ethnographic method through a socio-historical approach (Duranti 2007), focusing on the *poietic* function of language (from Ancient Greek *poiéo* = *to do/to make*). Specifically, I look at what language *does* in the socio-cultural context in which it is used, thereby refreshing the political and cultural role of grammar.

Everyday speech does not merely imply the language of daily conversations, yet any linguistic code that makes us think of everyday life. In fact, while a great deal of speech types are used in daily frames, such as sports commentaries, news reporting, advertising language, and so on (Delin 152-153), yet they do not contribute to the

linguistic anthropology's scholarship. What all these communicative events must have in common, in order to be salient in my research, is the evidence of some linguistic difference produced by a speaker in *talking* – that is to say in *acting* - as a migrant or non-migrant community member, and, by doing so, in conveying her/his own identity within Lebanese society.

While ethnography is aimed to describe, in general, the "nature" of those who are studied through writing, it paradoxically allows us, at the same time, to "denaturalize" this nature. Specifically, ethnography relies on the direct subjective experience of the researcher among the field companions: that is why participation, in addition to mere observation, is one of the key-tools of the process I got through.

Ethnographic studies are tendentially holistic, founded on the idea that humans are best understood in the fullest possible context. Therefore, every language represents the *Weltanschauung* of its speakers. The conceptual systems represented in different languages or codes, in turn, guide their speakers to different aspects of reality. This is the reason why without a de-familiarization of facts and views, social and linguistic orthodoxies and heresies, political transformations and social behaviors, the ethnography of everyday life risks becoming a mere jotting down of what is directly observable.

Identity in relation to Nationhood and Language

The theoretical bedrock of this research draws on the idea that identities are essentially evolving narratives, forever open to reinterpretation and revision, and well away from essentialization. In this regard, Margaret Somers forwarded the notion of "narrative identities": "one way to avoid the hazards of rigidifying aspects of identity into a misleading categorical entity is to incorporate into the core conception of identity the categorically destabilizing dimensions of time, space and relationality" (Somers 606). The Lebanese narrative identity is being continuously constructed by its components, some of whom went back to the home country after long migration experiences. In this dynamic production of the Self, Lebanese also have to deal with the non-Arab perception of them outside of Lebanon. This side of the coin is still integral part of nationhood, that is to say contribution to common narratives, sense of belonging and multilateral identification through a country, which are all factors transcending *de facto* citizenship and official acknowledgement of membership to a given community.

On this purpose, the words of Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir, murdered on June 2 2005 in Beirut, help us understand the external determinism sometimes disguised behind the labels imposed by the Otherness:

> "But the Arab malaise is also inextricably bound up with the gaze of the Western Other - a gaze that prevents everything, even escape. Suspicious and condescending by turns, the Other's gaze constantly confronts you with your apparently insurmountable condition. It ridicules your powerlessness, foredooms all your hopes, and stops you in your tracks time and again at one or other of the world's border-crossings. You have to have been the bearer of a passport of a *pariah state* to know how categorical such a gaze can be. You have to have measured your anxieties against the Other's certainties - his or her certainties about you - to understand the paralysis it can inflict" (Kassir 12).

What I witnessed to, therefore, is a proliferation of historical and social perspectives within each confessional setting, in turn internally variegated.

I met F., 37 years old, in a café of Hamra, a mixed district of Beirut. From her perspective, Lebanon represents something different to everyone on an individual level, and she believes there is still a trend nowadays to support and rely on one's own community.

On the one hand, marriages are increasingly mixed; on the other, divorce rate is higher than in the past. "This is due to communal cultures remaining deeply different from one another", F. said. The social behavior of every Lebanese, as well as their linguistic behavior, are therefore markedly influenced by the acknowledgement of the other's communal *belonging,* according to F.

Therein, it is quite easy to find out about the birth community of the interlocutor through her/his name and surname, as kinship patterns still reveal their territorial belonging, which local people turn into somewhat of a geographical ownership. This can also happen through recognizing the interlocutor's accent and (un)conscious lexical choices while speaking. For example, even though there is no remarkable dialectal difference within the country, a Lebanese Druze living in the Chouf Mountains pronounces the Arab letter *qaf* [q], generally aspirated in the Lebanese dialect. Notwithstanding, I met Druze people living in the capital also pronouncing *qaf,* with the clear purpose of being recognized as Druze, as they specified themselves. This is the case of a speaker that desires to reaffirm her/his original geographical and confessional belonging. When keen on achieving this, the speaker intentionally alters the code used in the bosom of the everyday linguistic community: in this specific case, the hybrid urban environment of Beirut.

This is a meaningful example of how a linguistic code and its phonology can be manipulated and can become a powerful instrument of identity-building on a symbolical level.

During my third stay in Lebanon – April 2009 – I used to ask "native" speakers what was in their viewpoint the main unifying factor in the country. Despite the different

answers they gave me and their different age, social class, religion and gender, they all somehow agreed about a lack of homogenous unifying factors in their society.

I met B., a Lebanese guy, who skeptically argued that Lebanon has been unified just for *Realpolitik* reasons*,* that is to say practical interests of each community, which would be politically and economically weak without a central State power.

I also interviewed J., 23 years old, Lebanese-Armenian middle class girl, who dithered for a while before answering my question: what interestingly unifies Lebanon, to her mind, was "people's love for the Country".

Identity has become a crucial concept in the present research in that to gain voice means to stamp language with your own identity, that is a way of populating the language with your own values, meanings and intentions (Clemente and Higgins, X).

A Phenomenological Focus on the Methodological Approach: Performativity and Research Limitations.

The data collection method used to conduct this research can be defined *abductive*, and it was advanced by American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, who is known as the "father of pragmatism" (Paavola 2004). Borrowing from a brace of concepts of Aristotle, Peirce underscores that the abductive method constitutes a mixture of *induction* and *deduction*, as it takes into account the already existing knowledge of the ethnographer and her/his past experiences, while living the research field and collecting empirical information.[1]

Hence, the present research is based upon my periodical linguistic experiences in Lebanon between August 2005 and March 2012; passive observation of events and active participation in them allowed me to draw a linguistic picture of the country. The research also utilizes quantitative research methodology by incorporating in-depth interviews with the native speakers, aware or unaware of the research aims. At this point, it is a must to specify that the unawareness of speakers would lead to more reliable results in what I would dare to name "linguistic spontaneity". In fact, a sort of "natural" linguistic behavior is sometimes disguised by the speaker's will in the attempt to show linguistic skills or reveal one's own education background to the *Outsider*. This may be considered an ethical justification for occasionally omitting the explicitation of my research methods to some of the respondents. What I perceived as an "unnatural" linguistic attitude can be therefore classified as "performance". Performances provide speakers with the means to

[1] Peirce in the Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism (1903) argued that "Deduction proves that something must be; Induction shows that something actually is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something may be." In his methodeutic or theory of inquiry, he portrayed abduction as an economic initiative to further inference and study.

explore various identity locations that demolish, once for all, the hegemonic idea of native-speakerism (Holliday 2005).

I used in-depth interviews to collect endemic interpretations of events, while tailoring the questions to the emotional and social status of the informant.

In October 2007, I resorted to questionnaires as well to explore how respondents talk of their unconscious or deliberate choice of switching and mixing linguistic codes in conversation. I used to amend or expand the questions according to the education background, the individual experiences, the level of social and civic awareness, the life style and the individual character of the informant. The questionnaire consequently used to be just a draft to start from. I therefore partially resorted to quantitative analysis, using a combined method: even so, the present research does not purport to be scientific, as it aspires to be neither omni-explanatory for the phenomena at issue nor acting as a universal reproducible paradigm; rather, through an ethno-pragmatic prism of interpretation, it aims at enlarging knowledge on the linguistic and cultural realities of today's Lebanon, and on how such internal differences have chronically been categorized in a hierarchical order.

Another research tool I used is the conversational analysis of the everyday speech, as the latter is grounded in people's social life. Indeed, some aspects of the everyday social life can be used to symbolically index ethnic or religious affiliation, such as food or accent (De Fina 237).

Nevertheless, in all research stages, it has been quite difficult to distinguish the reiteration of a particular linguistic behavior owing to one's own cultural pattern, from when, instead, the reiteration was merely due to the material social circumstances in which the communicative event occurred.

I termed *performative dimension* the deliberate use of different linguistic codes in the speaker's performance. On the other side, I christened *constitutive dimension* the event in which the speaker seemed to me more spontaneous in switching to another code, speaking and interacting with others regardless of my presence. In most cases, I personally had the insight that "linguistic spontaneity" was greater when people were unaware of my research aims. The boundary between the constitutive and the performative dimension, however, is evidently blurred. I mostly lived in the field the *performative dimension* of the speaker's linguistic production, as I mostly participated in daily frames as an outsider.

In order to give a tangible idea of these two dimensions of the speaker's linguistic performance, I will now provide a couple of examples.

I stayed for some time with a francophone Lebanese family living in the Beirut district of Tariq al-Jadideh. The parents encouraged their kids to introduce themselves in French, although I had approached them in Lebanese dialect, in a bid to create a more

familiar atmosphere. The parents, in turn, used French to accomplish their duty of educators. This choice reveals the symbolical and political value they assigned to the French language with respect to their local dialect, in addition to the fact that they lived the presence of an intermediate French speaker as an opportunity to play the role of bilinguals and show their high command of a foreign language. Thus, their use of a foreign language instead of Arabic, despite my command of it, was not a way of keeping formal distance from me, as I was suspecting instead at an early stage.

To corroborate the use of French in formal daily frames in some middle-class well-educated Lebanese families, I will now report a further anecdote of a family setting similar to the previous one. I was carefully listening to a mother explaining in French the content of a poetry to her daughter in a bookstore, fulfilling her role of educator and relating it to the French language, as it happened in the previous communicative frame too. When the daughter threw a tantrum and started crying, the parents switched from French to Lebanese to chide her. This event, not conditioned by my presence - as I was a detached passive observer - seems to represent what I decided to call *constitutive* dimension of linguistic performance.

According to my findings, English is increasingly widespread throughout the country, and it is gradually acquiring, yet overcoming, the high position that French used to hold in the past for political reasons. I interviewed a few students from the American University of Beirut (AUB), who had been raised in English speaking countries and went back to Lebanon with their families at a later stage of their life. These students were not able to speak Standard Arabic and not even to understand it. Therefore, in order to have access to everyday news and cultural events, they said to resort to the English speaking media. Even though some English speaking TV channels and cultural or political journals have a branch in Beirut, it is noteworthy that an external perspective of domestic historical events is more likely to be adopted in the news-making process, given that a language that is not the official one usually pushes readers and listeners to enter a new cultural and conceptual universe. On the other side, in extreme cases, external perspectives in domestic cultural production and in the news-making may contribute to alienate people from the endemic reality. This tendency is commonly interpreted as a postcolonial remnant.

In conclusion, I have put forward the constitutive and performative dimensions of language use with the mere purpose of explaining the phenomenological interaction between the linguistically creative speakers and the non-Lebanese ethnographer, namely myself. I do not argue instead that a constitutive and a performative linguistic production, constituting the local dialect, can ever be ontologically thought.

I would like to illustrate the main limits that such a methodology presented once in the field. Firstly, an ethnographer who has already familiarized with the everyday life of

the research subjects will necessarily struggle to de-normalize the field. Furthermore, the *meta-observation* techniques meet huge limits: whenever I took part in communicative events I necessarily had to abstract myself from the context I was living, in order to observe my interaction with the interlocutors and the way they were differently behaving owing to my physical presence. Similarly, while actively participating in communications, it was not feasible to jot down notes at the same time, that would be instead a valuable instrument to remember minimal but important social and paralinguistic cues. It is well known that the emotional and cognitive involvement of the ethnographer in the events temporarily weakens her/his skills of observer.

Besides, the increasingly intimate connection with the local people makes the *entextualization* process of the everyday experience - as anthropologist Elizabeth Mertz called it (Duranti 2001: 26) - more difficult to be written and told. The writing process requires temporary emotional extraniation.

A further difficulty in representing the communicative events as something objective, occurring regardless of the ethnographer's presence, was the attempt of some speakers to drag me into the ongoing conversation at any cost, by altering the spontaneity of the language tone and accentuating body gesture, by repeating keywords and concepts several times and incrementing the use of demonstratives while speaking. All these cues are typical of the *foreigner talk*[2], widely studied by socio-linguists (Duranti 1992).

Nonetheless, conditioned linguistic behaviors are extremely meaningful, insofar as the ethnographer can decode the reasons and the modalities of deliberate alterations. Alterations still constitute a fundamental research outcome, although the speech community is sometimes willing to modify an event and render it linguistically "less spontaneous" than initially hoped, according to the ethnographer's perception. On this purpose, I will illustrate further how research participants, aware of the research aims, often used to linguistically alter communicative events.

I met A. on a typical Syrian "servis" – tiny and fast van - from Damascus to Beirut in December 2007. She convinced me to change my plans and join her in Borj Shimaly, Palestinian refugee camp few kilometers away from Tyre (South Lebanon), to meet her husband and her kids. I was having ma'lube[3] at her place, when A. asked me about my studies. After explaining in detail to the whole family what linguistic anthropology is about, as an expression of friendship, they spontaneously turned themselves into research participants in order to enlarge my research sample. In order to better analyze linguistic differences between the Palestinian and the Lebanese variants, I decided to

[2] The so-called "foreigner talk" is sometimes adopted due to the interlocutor's age rather than the interlocutor's command of a language (in Scarcella and Higa 1981).
[3] In standard Arabic the word for the typical Palestinian rice is "maqlube". In the Levantine linguistic variants the letter "qaf" is usually aspirated. The fall of this letter is signaled in linguistics by an apostrophe ['].

record their daily conversations. While talking of a wedding that would have taken place the week after, the mother of the family asked her son to speak louder – she said in dialect "aally sawtak"[4] - in order to be easily heard in my tape. During the family conversation, A. tried to stress the words that Palestinians more frequently use, in a bid to draw my attention to those terms and facilitate my comprehension of the whole linguistic event. For instance, personal pronouns[5] were used by them in their Palestinian variant rather than in the Lebanese, as well as honorable ways of calling respectful family members, such as "martaamme"[6], here referring to the mother-in-law, with an accent ascendingly stressed in Palestinian.

The feeling of taking part in an artificially constructed communicative event, produced with the clear purpose of widening my linguistic knowledge, entered me.

Ethnographic Trust Building: Interlocutors between Wariness and Cooperativeness

In some cases, to gain the speakers' trust is not easy. Throughout my field research the contribution of upper class respondents was usually remarkable, because of their high education level and, likewise, owing to their high level of awareness about the kind of research I was conducting. Nonetheless, their reticence to be treated as *objects* of analysis was quite tangible: the upper class informants used to be more suspicious about the aims of my study, and wanted to find out in detail what my real intentions were. Such mistrust, typical of the *bourgeoisie* in Pierre Bourdieu's viewpoint (qtd. in *Review of Cultural Studies* 94-95), in this particular case led me to clearer results, since the well-educated informants, fully capable of self-representing their own linguistic behavior, were far more cooperative in the urban areas (mainly the capital Beirut, Sidon and Tripoli) than in the rural ones (surroundings of Tyre and Zahle).

Nevertheless, once the ethnographer gains the informants' trust in rural areas, it becomes easy to get it from other people in the same territory, due to collective mutual reliability among community members. Whereas, in urban contexts, I often had to start from scratch in terms of trust building.

An emblematic example of middle class reticence is contained in the following anecdote: I used to visit some guys at the Evangelical Abundant Life Church in Beirut, in the predominantly Armenian district of Borj Hammoud. I used to ask them about idioms

[4] For the sake of simplification, I have not adopted in the present paper the Official Arabic Scientific Transcription Standards, with the purpose of writing the terms as close as possible to the way they are orally pronounced in dialect.
[5] In the Lebanese dialect "nehna" means "we", whereas Palestinians use "ehna", as in the Egyptian dialect. This also interestingly expresses the importance of geographic proximity in determining linguistic changes.
[6] I would like to specify that I have opted for the commonly used morpheme [aa] to morphologically indicate the sound of the Arabic letter 'ayn [ع]. "Maartaamme" would literally mean "the wife of my paternal uncle".

and proverbs utilized among the youth in the area, particularly related to shared beliefs and cultural humor across communities.

The second time I went to the Church a guy I met the first time asked me: "Mmmh, you're already back! Are you still looking for proverbs?". This tangible and sharp irony was an indirect sign of non-cooperativeness and reticence to contribute to my research, and, moreover, it seemed to me an ethical reproach of my research aims and means.

Multi-ethnic Lebanon and "Problematic Nativeness" of its Components: a Bogus Issue.

The abused notion of "native" is probably as relativistic as linguistically inappropriate in Lebanon and elsewhere. In the specific sample of the students from AUB, most of them were born in Lebanon but grew up in English speaking countries - mainly Canada, Australia and the US. How should we establish which is the criterion entitling us to define a speaker as "native"? Should this criterion be their place of birth or the place where they spent most part of their life? In other words, the question should not be whether native and non-native speakers in Lebanon speak differently – as there are often more differences within categories than between them – but rather how they linguistically deploy their nativism or non-nativism (Cameron 1997).

Palestinians have gradually spilled into Lebanon since the 1948 *Nakba*, in the aftermath of the foundation of the state of Israel. In this period thousands of people were forced out of the country. Palestinians are currently 400,000 people in Lebanon, with no legal right to naturalization, which condemns most of them to human and financial hardships. Armenians flowed into Lebanon throughout the last century owing to Turkish persecutions, and they mostly settled in the areas of Borj Hammoud (eastern suburb of Beirut) and Anjar (next to the Syrian border). Big numbers of Shiite Lebanese went back from West Africa to Lebanon with a differentiated linguistic baggage, as well as a small number of Lebanese Maronites and Sunnis returning mostly from Australia and Canada, but also from many other countries (France and Germany currently count a high percentage of Lebanese).

According to my interviews with Lebanese migrants returned to Lebanon in the '90s[7], most of these linguistic communities tend to maintain to some extent the language acquired abroad, while continuously creating new phenomena of code switching and

[7] In August 2005 I conducted in-depth interviews with one family based in Wata, Beirut, returned to Lebanon from Brazil in 1997. They currently use a mixed code of Lebanese and Brazilian Portuguese. In October 2007 I conducted another interview with a family based in Tariq al-Jadideh that spent twenty-three years in Florence and returned to Lebanon in 1999. The parents still use some terms in Italian when speaking to their kids. Nonetheless, in case of relatively brief migration experiences, the acquired foreign language, once back in Lebanon, gradually fades away in the everyday family conversations. In April 2009 I met W., Lebanese English educated that spent 24 years in France: the migration experience totally changed his linguistic background, deeply modifying the oral linguistic code, enriched by French lexicon.

mixing between the foreign language and the family spoken Lebanese dialect. I will provide here e brief example of how language behaves in such linguistic settings: A., 22 years old, spent seventeen years in Brazil and went back to Lebanon in June 2005. I met him in Hamra just two months after his arrival. During his life overseas, he used to speak the Lebanese dialect with his parents and rarely with his siblings, born and bred in Brazil. This is an excerpt from a causal conversation I attended that he had with another Lebanese-Brazilian friend, exemplifying the phenomenon of code switching[8]:

> A.'s interlocutor: Kifak, *tudo bom*? Btigy maae aala'l party al aashiye? (English translation: "How are you, everything's alright? Are you coming to the party tonight"?)
> A.: Mafrud… ma baref baad, *trabalhei muito oje*. Yalla bhakkik baadeyn (English translation: "Maybe… I'm not sure yet, I worked a lot today. I'll talk to you later").

A. constitutes an exception among Lebanese migrants, as his religious beliefs and the readings of the Holy Koran help him maintain and improve Classical Arabic too, that is usually forgotten or never learnt by young migrant generations. Grown up overseas and migrated to Lebanon at a very late stage of their life, later generations barely speak the local dialect and therefore benefit from the plurilingual cultural production that has been flourishing in Lebanon for decades. However, the frequency of visits to Lebanon during the migration years definitely contributes to maintaining the language, which should not be arbitrarily defined as their "native" one.

The notion of "linguistic community" does not reflect in every case that of a specific "religious community" or "ethnic community". A Lebanese linguistic community can be formed by speakers affiliated to different confessional groups and be politically or ethnically variegated. Indeed, linguistic communities are usually created in common public or private spaces in which different members cultivate their *koiné,* use of loan words and way of handling code switching and mixing – for example in universities, schools, cultural centers, religious spaces or street markets. Thus, Lebanese migrated to English, Portuguese or French speaking countries and then returned to Lebanon are linguistically influenced in great measure by the acquisition of a foreign language, even though they continue to use the local dialect for everyday communication.

In the abovementioned case of the students interviewed at AUB, both the English and the Lebanese linguistic variant contributed to forge the speaker's identity. To deliberate where the linguistic nativeness lies would consequently be just an arbitrary convention. The discursive oppositions of the "native" and the "non-native" should be theoretically overcome in the name of fluid performativity, which allows us to understand that, if something like the "production of identity" ever exists, it undoubtedly lies in the

[8] Italics used for the Brazilian linguistic variant.

doing and not in the *being* (Pennicook 14).

In light of these considerations, there should be wonder for how advancing theories on linguistic nativeness can be intellectually productive, considering its ungraspable nature. All linguistic communities equally contribute to the perpetual change in the language use across the country, despite the fact of being born outside of Lebanon, or having recently returned to Lebanon, or not even having a good command of Lebanese and standard Arabic (called "fosha", and "nahawe" in Lebanese dialect).

A Patched Reality of Arbitrarily Tattooed Identities

The Lebanese, as any other people, continuously create overlapping layers of identity. Whenever Lebanon is called into question as an organic unity, it is necessary to bear in mind that this is just a product of simplification.

According to Lebanese economist Georges Corm (67), Lebanese communities are to be considered ideological deviations, whose identities are artificially fed by different material interests. Nonetheless, mere artificial constructions end up existing for real, as Pierre Bourdieu noticed. The communities may regard themselves as real distinguished social entities, even if their common ground is just fictive. Indeed, mental representations do condition social behaviour.

The factor that gives rise to an ethnic, linguistic or confessional group is mainly the sense of community among its members, a "we" feeling, a sense of *peoplehood*, which the late Wittgenstein used to call "Wir-subjectivität" (qtd. in Duranti 1992).

The *we-feeling* of ethnic groups ordinarily leads to ethnocentrism or community-centrism, which often implies the tendency to judge the other groups by one's own values and standards, and a view of oneself as superior to others. The construction of in-group and out-group perceptions is a universal practice, starting from language.

On the one hand, conflict can stem from ethnocentrism/community-centrism;[9] on the other hand, conflict often strengthens group identity and cohesiveness. Besides, conflict in multiethnic and multi-confessional societies is actually induced by differences in how groups are seen and evaluated.

A perfect case in point of how in-group perceptions build and essentialize the Otherness is my emotional experience of perceived mistrust and suspiciousness among different community members.

In the district of Borj Hammoud, predominantly Armenian, both Lebanese and Armenians pointed out that the few Kurds inhabiting the area are regarded as the worse-

[9] I would distinguish between ethnocentrism, based on the belonging to an ethnic group, and community-centrism, where beliefs and values are products of a religious or cultural community, not ethnically different from other communities across a country.

off and the marginalized *par excellence* – in Lebanese dialect "al-maazuliyyn"[10]. The Lebanese who live in the Eastern suburbs of Beirut, a mainly Christian area - although increasingly mixed - used to talk of Armenians, in turn, as "metkawtriyyn"[11], so to speak, all "concentrated" in Borj Hammoud. Middle class Shiites in the southern suburbs of Beirut[12] used to warn me both against the Kurds living in Borj al-Barajneh, portraying them as sneaky people. By a similar token, they used to warn me against the other Shiites coming from the "mohafaza"[13] of Baalbek-Hermel, calling them "the district's thugs" – in Lebanese dialect "zaaran al-manta'a". M., 32 years old, Shiite Lebanese from Hay Silloum in Beirut's southern suburbs[14], pointed to Palestinians when I asked what was, from his perspective, the real problem in nowadays Lebanon. S., 39 years old, after a theatre show, asked her friend to drive me home as "Borj Hammoud is a religiously and ethnically mixed area, you can never know who you come across then". Hybrid realities, in all these cases, are perceived from the speakers as requiring a higher level of wariness.

To represent the mutually constructed "community Other", urban legends and stereotypes do not have to be proved or disproved to qualify as durkheimian *social facts*. Sayings, stereotyping jokes and proverbs have therefore been object of my analysis.

Language differences among communities can sometimes cause misinterpretation of concepts and behaviours. Thus, generalized constructions of identities can stem from the lack of comprehension of a different linguistic code while interacting.

The *emic* perspective of local people constantly differs from the *ethic* one, adopted instead by the ethnographer or any other outsider. For instance, the Druze I interviewed in Beirut[15] used to highlight that not all of them emotionally regard Druzism[16] as an offshoot of Islam, regardless of the historical roots of such a confession. This is likely to be index of ideological self-differentiation from the "Muslim Lebaneseness". On the contrary, I noticed that the other communities generally consider the Druze as closely affiliated to Islam, and justify the Druze "denial" of that by calling them "people with light

[10] Personal communication with a Syrian shop owner in Dawra, December 2011.
[11] Personal communication with R., 26 years old, Baabda, Beirut, January 2012.
[12] From September 2011 to March 2012 I used to do regular home visits to six different Shiite families living in the southern suburbs of Beirut (specifically in Haret Hreik, Rouess, Bir Hassan and Shyyah), in order to conduct my PhD research.
[13] Lebanon is divided in fact into eight different governorates called in Arabic "mohafazat" (recently approved Baalbek-Hermel and Akkar, Beirut, Baabda, Zahle, Tarablus, Nabatiyye, Saida).
[14] Personal conversations with M. occurred periodically from October 2011 to March 2012.
[15] Interview with D., August 2005 and November 2007, Gemmayze; interview with W. and R., November 2007, Aicha Bekkar; interview with M., April 2009, Hazmiyye.
[16] Druzism is a monotheistic religious community, found primarily in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan, which emerged from Isma'ilism school of Shia Islam throughout the 11th century. Theologically speaking, Druzism therefore began as a movement in the bosom of Isma'ilism, mainly influenced by Greek philosophy and Gnosticism. The Druze usually call themselves in Arabic Ahl al-Tawhid, "the People of Monotheism" or al-Muwaḥḥidūn "the Unitarians".

blue blood"[17], to sarcastically hint at their high self-esteem in considering themselves as "classy".

By neglecting the distinction between *ethic* and *emic*, the self-representation often turns to be jeopardized in official discourses. Stereotypes and prejudices have their deep roots in the ethic perspective, experienced by the outsider as objective and not even perceived as ethnocentric.

The Ongoing Linguistic De-Taxonomization: the Case of Arabness and Armenianness

In Lebanon, unlike other linguistic environments, it is not possible to unanimously distinguish a *bad* from a *good* language, as linguist anthropologist Alessandro Duranti was observing in his case study on a Western Samoa village (Duranti 1992) - where he respectively identified a *tautala leaga* and a *tautala lelei*. The first variant is tied with the "indigenous" and the traditional aspects of a culture; while the second would indicate the contact with the West, its official character and cultural prestige. In the case of Lebanon, to talk of a "pure" official code, equally evaluated by all community members, would be totally misleading. The linguistic codes currently holding the highest position are alternatively English, French or Standard Arabic, according to the education background and the cultural context of reference.

In this regard, I noticed no match between the high esteem a speech community has of Standard Arabic and its community faith. Nowadays, although the well-known nexus between Arabness and high value attribution to Standard Arabic is still alive, I experienced exceptions that are mention-worthy here.

I met O., 30 years old, Christian Evangelical[18], who expressed her pride to be represented by such a great language like Arabic. I will quote her here in full: "Arabic is *our* language. I'm proud of this, although we rarely use it in the everyday life. I'm really sorry the new generations don't treasure the value of this language as a matter of national pride". By the same token, three Lebanese Muslims from Mazraa (Beirut's district) in November 2007, and two from Haret Hreik (Beirut's southern suburb) in January 2012, did not greatly value Standard Arabic instead: they all said they did not believe that the classical variant is the most appropriate conveyer of their identity, as commonly believed.

In an attempt to portray the Armenian-Lebanese linguistic dynamic, I will resort to a theoretical comparison with Creole-Pidgin linguistic codes. In the case of Lebanon,

[17] In Arabic *aazm azraq* literally means "light blue bone". In my cultural imaginary I have preferred to translate this expression with "blood", since the term clearly refers to someone's nobility.
[18] Christians, in linguistic terms, are generally believed Arabic-phobic in Lebanon or, yet, emotionally distant from the Arabic linguistic identification, usually attributed to Muslims.

there is nothing like a process of creation of Creole and *pidgin*. The formation of a Creole language is in fact due to the coexistence and contact of two different linguistic and cultural groups having different mother languages. Owing to the lack of knowledge of the other's language and when lacking a common language, people tend to produce *pidgin*, usually defined as a "reduced language" (Biscaldi 70). Pidgin is created by the necessity to communicate and it turns useful, for example, in trade negotiations. In such a process of *koineization*[19] (Kerswill 669), there exist no native speakers: every speech community member inherits and innovates the hybrid linguistic variant. Pidgin languages are created, changed and doomed to die on a daily basis across diverse linguistic realities. Although Armenian is still widely spread and used on a daily basis by its speakers, the Lebanese school system imposes the teaching of Arabic, official language in the Lebanese national constitution. In this sense, Armenians created a mixed language – Lebanese dialect and Armenian – that they use themselves when speaking to each other.

Armenians are normally said to make many grammatical errors, according to what other Lebanese referred to me[20]: this "imperfect" Arabic, when verbs and gender marks of the subject are frequently incorrect in the oral production, is locally called "aarabiyya mukassara" – literally translated with "broken Arabic". According to what C. and A. told me[21], the Lebanese dialect can yet be considered their native language from an inner perspective, although these bilinguals still use Armenian in family and in some school classes, as well as in their rituals and religious ceremonies. The two codes seem to have melted together throughout the years, given that the vast majority of the Armenian youth I sampled in this research affirmed to resort to the Lebanese dialect whenever their supposedly "native" language lacks particular terms that can be able to fulfill their immediate communicative needs.

Their command of Arabic is undoubtedly diversified according to the education level, the family and individual social integration, year of migration to Lebanon[22], and frequency of contacts with the outside Lebanese reality. The later generations seem to embody by now a bidimensional linguistic identity, totally perceiving themselves as Lebanese and Armenians altogether, and perfectly handling both linguistic variants. This can be noticed independently from their level of personal satisfaction in terms of social integration.

While analyzing the collected empirical data *ex post*, I intentionally took into consideration the religious affiliation of the sampled speakers. To relate the historical, cultural and linguistic aspects to a particular religious community is not meant to support

[19] Also available at: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/linguistics/staff/kerswill/pkpubs/Kerswill2002KoineAcc.pdf .
[20] Interview with Bilal, November 17 2007, 'Ayn al Mreisse, Beirut.
[21] Interview with C. and A. conducted in on 19th December 2007 in Borj Hammoud.
[22] The vast majority of Armenians left for Lebanon after the Turkish conquest of the current South-East Turkey region of Hatay in 1939.

a confessional segregation of the country, let alone to believe that such differences are produced by speakers' belief in different theological tenets.

Indeed, to think that the religious belonging draws socio-political and linguistic differences between Lebanese communities would be highly misleading. In the earlier stages of our character building and development, it is education, transmitted both by family and school, that indicates to us the mainstream of our opinions, political and social ideas, religious beliefs, and sometimes financial resources - particularly in countries like Lebanon, which are widely built on nepotistic networks. The linguistic education background cannot be exclusively due to political and cultural factors that are in turn related to identity formation. There is also a political-economic component that is instead related to dearth of resources (Hanafi 295).

In other words, to shed light on the confessional diversification of contemporary Lebanon is not an expedient to further carve the boundaries between the communities using arbitrary classifications. Rather, it is a theoretical frame to start from in order not to slur over the huge economic gap within the country and not to silence the anti-egalitarian political system, still based on confessional privileges, which are sadly the most powerful elements of stability in the ever-changing Lebanese cultural setting.

To put it in a nutshell, there is no necessary connection between social class, religious community, political ideology and linguistic code. Notwithstanding, on the basis of my ethnographic research, I argue that there is still a general interrelation between some of these definition categories, as the political system, which has engendered people's disaffection throughout the years, remains legally confessionalist (that is to say parliamentary seats and political charges are currently attributed according to the confessional belonging of the individual)[23].

To draw a clear-cut outline of co-existing communities and their relationship with each other is neither feasible nor desirable, in Lebanon as anywhere else. Yet again, to overlook the abovementioned nepotistic trends would also mean to conceal the entrenched reasons behind Lebanese inequality and its heavy ties with the past.

Code Switching and Code Mixing in Lebanon: "Psycholinguistic Freedom" of the Speaker?

After analyzing the empirical data I collected in the field, some questions still remain unanswered: is code switching mostly deliberate and, consequently, able to

[23] The confessional system – *al-nizam al-ta'ifyy* in Arabic – was contained in the 1943 National Pact, when Lebanon got its independence from France. The post civil war Taif Agreement (1990-91) refreshed the confessionalist mould of the Lebanese political system, in which only Maronites can be appointed President of the Lebanese Republic, just Sunnis Prime Ministers and Shiites speakers of the Parliament. Such a political system used to reflect Lebanon's confessional demographic composition in the years of the French Mandate (1920-1946).

convey the speaker's ideology? This point raises anew the question about the unconsciousness or the intentionality of the act of switching from a linguistic code into another one in multi-lingual frames. In case of speakers' unawareness can we still talk of "ideology"? Or, rather, would it be more appropriate to call it "induced view"? The case of migrants do not greatly differ from Lebanese with no migration experience as it would happen instead in other settings. This is basically due to the very early exposition of Lebanese speakers to a foreign language (sometimes even at three years old, and often exposed to up to four different languages). The Lebanese, thus, are emotionally affected and torn between two different writing systems as well (Kottob 61). Some authors negatively estimate such methods, in that they contend that the imposed plurilingualism engenders confusion and cultural side effects of such a linguistic "anarchy" (Kottob 67).

Nonetheless, according to the local bilingual people, code switching or mixing are essentially due to changes of circumstances and interlocutors. For example, for the sake of simplification and immediateness, code switching easily serves pragmatic purposes, giving rise to the phenomenon of "linguistic accommodation"[24]. Code switching is in fact more and more frequent and instinctive, "producing an effortless and seamless flow of language that accommodates the variable levels of understanding" (Sultana 32). While renouncing to sketch out a universal etiology of code switching, what should be researched further is how it intertwines with intentionality. To try to answer these questions would help to shed light on how and to what extent language is able to express the mobile speaker's political *ego*.

As Myers-Scotton has contended, languages are rarely equally valued: even if we formally assign them equal status on a theoretical level, they are not linguistically experienced as such (Myers-Scotton 414). Examinations of language in use allow an understanding of how ethnic, religious and class differences are socially created and regulated through powerful semiotic resources. This is the reason why, throughout my research, I considered fundamental not to undercut the confessional dynamics along which Lebanese society has developed hitherto and keeps changing.

Once overcome the notion of native-speakerism in Lebanon, Bourdieu's interpretation of linguistic exchanges in terms of symbolic powers relations (1991) between speakers, their speech community and the whole country, loses, hence, its ontological foundation on an empirical level. Although speakers still maintain their linguistic ideal structures, the highly-valued official languages in Lebanon are practically losing ground: they are still able to fix and codify the appropriate means of verbal and written expressions, but, due to their decreasing use, they are no longer authoritative in downgrading the speakers who do not have a good command of them to "deficient users".

[24] The concept of "linguistic accommodation" was advanced by American linguist Howard Giles in the '70s.

In the hindsight of the entextualization process, the analysis of the empirical data renders myself, once again, an outsider, stranger to the described reality. Phenomena of code switching, code mixing and language as conveyer of political individuality, may be differently interpreted from another perspective. What objectifies this work is rather the effort to comprehend local constructions and values, and to share with the reader subjective hypotheses on how the former factors behave in Lebanese society.

As Charlie Galibert forcefully argued, "once the ethnographer has become outsider himself, he is no more the only master of *his* truth" (qtd. in *Ann. Rev. of Anth*. 516).

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