On the Nature of the French Verbal Forms in the Code-Switching of Songhay, Bamanan and Fulah Speakers of French

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ABSTRACT

Code-Switching is a process of bilingualism that involves the alternation of two languages in the course of a single conversation as a result of language contact phenomenon. This paper is about the conjugation of the verbal forms in the switches of bilingual Songhay-French, Bamanankan-French and Fulfulde-French speakers as pointed out in several studies by I. Abdoulaye (2013, 2016), M. Minkailou and I. Abdoulaye (2016, 2018), I. Abdoulaye and M. Minkailou (2017, 2019). The main objective of the present paper is to describe the verbal paradigm in the switches of these three different groups of francophone speakers according to the existing theories and models on Code-Switching and Code-Mixing constraints. Based on the Matrix Language Frame Model of C. Myers-Scotton (1993a, b), the paper aims at proposing and analysing a francophone alternative of grammatical constraint in code switching. The study uses secondary data collected from the research works cited above in which spontaneous and fresh conversations have been recorded, transcribed and translated into English in an oral corpus. The population of these three different investigations is heterogeneous consisting of bilingual Songhay, Bamanan and Fulah civil servants and university students. Examining the nature of the switches, the study purposely focuses on the intra-sentential code-switching, in which the participants alternate the two codes, inserting words from French into their respective native languages. Analysing the inflected forms of the French verbs embedded in Songhay, Bamanankan or Fulfulde codes, the study has revealed that all the switched verbs belong to the same verb form, the French past participle of the three verb groups (first, second and third). So, the study has concluded that this way of conjugating verbs in Code-Switching is typical to francophone second language leaners. This approach in Code-Switching that the authors are proposing as the Francophone Model of Switching Verbs is a result of linguistic transfer of L2 learners of French.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mali is a francophone multilingual and multicultural country where several languages are in competitive use. The government has recognized and elevated thirteen of them to the status of national language: Bamanankan, Bomu, Bozo, Dogoso, Fulfulde, Hasaniyya, Maninkakan, Mamara, Soŋay, Soninke, Syenara, Tamasheq and Xaasongaxanon (Skattum, 2009c). These languages hold no true official function save for their use as media of education concomitantly with French in early primary school (M. Minkailou, 2017). In secondary school and university, they are only studied as school subjects. Contrariwise, French continues to fulfill its prestigious function especially among educated people; it stands as the official language used in education, court, media, and by the government.

In Africa, the diglossic relationship between the ex-colonial languages (French, English, Portuguese and Spanish) and the native languages leads to many phenomena of language change and variation. These phenomena are mainly characterized by a transfer of phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic patterns of the local languages into these European languages. In return, the local languages receive and adapt new lexical items from the foreign languages that express concepts or ideas the native speakers most often do not have in their language (I. Abdoulaye, 2013, 2016; M. Minkailou, 2015, 2018). The result is generally the emergence of a new form of language which is basically made up of the native language as the base code which sets the framework and French as the embedded language which provides the lexical items for insertion. It may also consist of alternations of the two codes. Li Wei (2000, p.17), very keen on the role of each of the two codes involved in the process, underlines that, One important aspect of the code-switching grammar is that the two languages involved do not play the same role in sentence making. Typically one language sets the grammatical framework, with the other providing certain items to fit into the framework. Code-switching is not therefore a simple combination of two sets of grammatical rules but grammatical integration of one language in another.

This point of view is in line with E. Ennamalai (1989, p.48) who points out that "in many situations of languages in contact, constituents of one language can be found with the constituents of another language in a number of linguistic phenomena, namely lexical borrowing, transferring, interference, calquing, diffusion, relexification, code-switching and code-mixing, etc." Most of such phenomena are observable in the code-switching instances under analysis. In general, Songhay, Bamanankan and Fulfulde (in this study) provide the base code in which constituents (verbal switches) from the embedded language, French, are inserted.

The phenomenon of code-switching between French and other African languages has been studied by several researchers with varied methods and findings. Literature on the verbal paradigm in this area is not so abundant. For instance, W. Wolfram (2006), referring to a grammar of language, states that researchers such as W. Labov (1969), H. J. Cedergren and D. Sankoff (1974) considers variation to be inherent within a language system and part of speaker competence, and therefore should be integrated into the grammar. Focusing specifically on the grammar of code-switching, W. Labov (1971, p.457) asserts that "no one has been able to show that such rapid alternation is governed by any systematic rules or constraints and we must therefore describe it as the irregular mixture of two distinct systems." This question on a grammar of language is worth being mentioned here considering the fact that all language systems are governed by a set of rules. And code-switching, as an independent system, also involves some rules or constraints that govern its functioning (I. Abdoulaye, 2013, p.32).

Indeed, the present paper is a synthesis of six research works on the phenomenon of code-switching (and code-mixing) in the Malian sociolinguistic landscape. Basically, the works involve I. Abdoulaye (2013, 2016) on code switching and code mixing of Songhay speakers of French, I. Abdoulaye and M. Minkailou (2016) on Bama-

nankan-French code-switching, M. Minkailou and I. Abdoulaye (2017, 2019) on (the phonology of) Songhay-French code-switching and M. Minkailou and I. Abdoulaye (2018) on Fulfulde-French code-switching. These three major local languages (Songhay, Bamanankan and Fulfulde) represent three basic language zones of Mali where Bamanankan is dominant in the southern and western parts of the country, Fulfulde in the central part and Songhay in the northern and eastern parts. However, there are no clear-cut linguistic boundaries between these language zones. Rather, there are linguistic continua which allow speakers of one zone to use the language(s) of the other zone.

The main purpose of the present study is to analyse the nature of the French verbal forms switched into the Songhay, Bamanankan and Fulfulde codes. More specifically, the paper focuses on the French verbal forms switched in the intra-sentential switching among francophones as a grammatical constraint resulting from the impact of French on African learners of French. For that purpose, the research question formulated stands as: What is the nature of the French verbal forms switched by Songhay, Bamanan and Fulah speakers of French in their respective native languages?

In order to examine the linguistic forms of switching among Songhay, Bamanan and Fulah speakers of French, the theoretical framework of the six studies mentioned above has been adopted. It is based on the models of constraints formulated by S. Poplack (1980, 1981) and C. Myers-Scotton (1993a, 1993b).

S. Poplack (1980, 1981) proposes an influential model of code-switching in which the Free Morpheme constraint stipulates that code-switching cannot occur between a lexical stem and bound morphemes – a constraint which distinguishes code-switching from borrowing; as to the Equivalence Constraint theory, it predicts that switches occur only at points where the surface structures of the two languages coincide, or between sentence elements that are normally ordered in the same way by each individual grammar. For the purpose of this paper which strictly focuses on the insertion of verbal switches, the model of C. Myers-Scotton is presented.

In the Markedness Model of C. Myers-Scotton's (1993b, 1993c) work on Swahili/English code switching in Kenya, the researcher has proposed several related principles that she has called maxims for code-switching phenomena among which three are the following:

a) The Unmarked Choice Maxim which requires the speaker to switch from one unmarked code to another on the basis of situational changes during interaction such that the unmarked code changes.

b) The Marked Choice Maxim which applies when the speaker chooses to negotiate the rights and obligations balance for such purposes as increasing social distance or creating an aesthetic effect.

c) Finally, The Exploratory Choice Maxim which occurs when an unmarked choice in accordance with community norms is not obvious from situational factors. It applies, the author explains, in cases where, for example, there is a clash of norms and role relationships as in the case of a conversation between a brother and a sister at the brother's place of business in the presence of other customers, as opposed to home, their usual place of meeting. The sister uses *Lwidakho*, their shared mother tongue, which signifies solidarity. The brother, on the other hand, speaks in *Swahili*, the national lingua franca, to let his sister know that she is being treated as a customer." (C. Myers-Scotton, 1993b, pp.144-145).

Interpreting these words, the authors of this paper agree with E. Boztepe (2005) who assumes that participants engage in code-switching because, after conscious assessment of costs and benefits, they find that the rewards of code-switching will be greater than those of maintaining a monolingual pattern of interaction.

However, in C. Myers-Scotton (1998, 1999), C. Myers-Scotton and A. Bolonyai (2001), the Mar-

kedness Model has been re-modified as an *extended version* in which the researcher argues that "CS is best explained by the optimal use of speakers' resources in their linguistic repertoires."

These principles reveal the social and psychological factors that justify the selection or the 'choice' (as used by C. Myers-Scotton above) of the codes to be switched in the appropriate situation of speech events. But, in this analysis, these factors are not going to be taken into account. From this angle, the study aims at pointing out how the switched verbal forms all inflect the same way in Songhay, Bamanankan and Fulfulde codes, three typologically different languages. As a matter of fact, this verbal construction appears as a grammatical constraint in code-switching typical to francophone code-switchers.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

2.1. Instances of French verbal switches inserted into Songhay

In the analysis of the findings, the French verbal forms inserted into Songhay constructions are presented in bold characters; the extract translations appear between parentheses in italic; and the participants' codes begin each conversation turn.

In I. Abdoulaye (2013, 2016) and I. Abdoulaye and M. Minkailou (2017, 2019), several extracts have been displayed where speakers insert the past participle of the French verbs in a Songhay-based code. The verb forms in the following extract illustrate:

1B3: Bari, war **gagné** wala? (*Bari, did you win?*)

2B1: Le programme-là ka damndi, à la mairie de Goundam-là, i n'a **reconduit** (*The programme that was planned, at the town hall in Goundam, they renewed it*).

2B8 : Non! A mana **fini** deh! (*No! It's not finished deh!*)

In the above instances, speaker **1B3** inserts in his speech the past participle of the French verb *gagner.* The action of the verb is stated in a past tense corresponding to the French *passé composé.* It can be noticed that the full form of the

French *passé composé* which should be *avez gagné* is not used. The first part of the verb which is *avez* is omitted. This is so because the use of *avez* is not congruent with the grammatical structure of Songhay language which requires placing the infinitive form (without *ka*) of a verb before the subject to express past actions, as shown in the two examples below:

Ay kaa (I have come / I came)
Ali koy (Ali has gone / Ali went).

Speaker **2B1** also uses the same form of the verb, the past participle of the verb *reconduire* at the end of his speech, i n'a **reconduit** (they *renewed* it); in full French, it will give: *Ils l'ont reconduit.* Likewise, speaker **2B8** (just like **2B1** and **1B3)** makes use of the same form of the verb, the past participle of the French verb *finir*.

However, it appears that the verbs used in these three examples are from different groups of verbs in French: *gagner* belongs to the French first group verbs, *reconduire* to the French third group verbs and *finir* to the French second group verbs. It therefore appears that whatever the group of the French verb, the embedded verb takes the form of the past participle in all the instances of the six studies where a single word is embedded as a verb. But, when there are more than two verbs embedded, only the first verb form is in the past participle; the other forms follow the grammatical rules of the embedded language, like *commencé à voler* in this extract:

2B3 […] Iri mana ti kala un petit oiseau. Misa kaŋ iri goo, iri ga sinti ka **commencé à voler** […] (*We are like **a little bird**. We are just trying to start flying*).

To support the current claim that Songhay speakers of French use the past participle of the embedded verb in the intra-sentential switching, the authors of this study have observed the speech of language teachers and communicators to find out if other forms of the following verbs like *gagner, reclamer, coller, finir, fournir, reconduire, repondre, atteindre* (found in the data for this study) can be used in an intra-sentential switching of a Songhay speaker of French instead of the past participle. From these

observations, it can be stated that the past participle of these verbs is generally embedded in an intra-sentential switching of a Songhay speaker of French. Other forms of these verbs do not work in this kind of switching because they will not be congruent with the grammatical system of the Songhay language used as base code in switching practices with French. For example, in this extract:

2B1: Han kaŋ war **décollé**… (*The day you leave…*)

If the subject *war* (second person plural) is substituted with other subjects like *ay* (first person singular) or *iri* (first person plural) or even *Ali nda Muusa (Aly and Moussa)*, the switching will always work with the same verb form *décollé*:

- Han kaŋ ay **décollé** (*the day I take off*)**.**
- Han kaŋ iri **décollé** (*the day we take off*)**.**
- Han kaŋ Ali nda Moussa **décollé** (*the day Ali and Moussa take off*)**.**

But, if the verb form **décollé** is substituted with other verb forms like **decolle** (first or third person singular) or **decollons** (first person plural) or even **decollent** (third person plural), the switching will not work with the grammatical system of the Songhay language. For instance, none of the constructions below is congruent with the Songhay grammatical structure:

- Han kaŋ ay (ga) **décolle**.
- Han kaŋ iri (ga) **décollons**.
- Han kaŋ Ali nda Moussa (ga) **décollent**.

Likewise, if *décollé* is substituted with other verbs like *fournir* or *atteindre*, the switching will always work with their respective past participle forms, and other verb forms will not be congruent in this kind of switching:

- Han kaŋ war ga I **fourni** hari … (but not: Han kaŋ war ga I **fournissez** hari …);
- Han kaŋ I ga hondoo **atteint** … (but not: Han kaŋ I ga hondoo **atteignent**.

From this standpoint, if the verbal form in the extract below is considered, it can be noticed that the embedded verb *collé* is preceded by a Songhay verb *kaa* which is conjugated in the present tense with the help of the Songhay modal verb *ga*:

2B2: Hey, w'a kottu war ma nga bagaa noo a se; iri ga kaa k'a **collé** (*Hey, cut it and give him/her his/her share; we will **stick** it after*).

In fact, in French, when two verbs follow each other, only the first is conjugated and the second must take the infinitive form. This rule is violated in Songhay-French code-switching. *Collé*, instead of the infinitive form, takes here the past participle form because of the switching phenomenon (yet, in the mind of the switcher, it is in the infinitive form because of the use of *ka*, the Songhay infinitive marker). The infinitive form *coller* is not congruent with the Songhay internal system in the switching. This phenomenon is not a serial verb construction. Research needs to be done to find out if it is a case of vowel harmony. The phenomenon becomes more obvious when *coller* is substituted with *reconduire* or *fournir*, two verbs of the second and third groups:

Iri g'a **reconduit** (*We will renew it*) instead of: Iri g'a **reconduire**;

Iri g'a **fourni** … (*We will provide him/her with ….*) instead of: Iri g'a **fournir**…

So, from this point of view, the embedded verb in an intra-sentential Songhay-French switching takes the form of the past participle of the verb, whatever the group of the verb is.

Other examples of embedded verbs of the first group like *gagner*:

G9: Sanda, boro no a na dam a ra kaŋ g'a **géré**. (*Well, he engaged someone who **managed** it*).

FG2: Wani nka **joué** hõ? (*Has Wani **played** today?*)

G1: I nee Ha-Ko ka **gagné** un à zéro**.** (*They said that Ha-Ko **won** one to zero*)**.**

G1: Ayyo! Baa hanoo kaŋ ngi nda Maza borey **joué** là, i yenje. (*Yes! Even the day when they **played** against Mazaa people, they quarrelled*).

T7: Afrique du Sud goo nda ngi joueur foo kaŋ sa kul a ga **marqué** contre son camp**,** macin ti maayoo? (*There is a player in the football team of South Africa who always **scores against his team**, what's his name?*).

T14: Waloo hasara ay ga da. Ay baa ay ma **racheté. (***Honestly, I lost the game. I want **to redeem my honor***)**.**

Other examples of embedded verbs of the second group like *finir*:

G14: […] Jina, nda a sinti ka couroo tee ma ne, nda ni si effort **fourni** deh a ga ni couroo kayandi. ([...]. *Moreover, if he begins your course, and you don't **make** any **effort**, he stops your course*).

T14 (0.2) Mais iri mma **choisi** haya kaŋ iri ga hin ka dam […] (***But** we should **choose** something we can do*).

Other examples of embedded verbs of the third group like *reconduire*:

3B1: […] (0.2) Agay hunday nda cimi, ay si hin ka nee kaŋ ay n'a **repondu** quoi. (**[...]** *Really, I cannot say that I am able to **answer** it*).

3B18: […] woo din kaŋ iri n'a **reconnu** ti, c'est-à-dire [...] **([...]** *the only one we **recognised** is, that is* […]).

G3: […[(.) Deh ni ma ni objectifoo **atteint,** c'est ça quoi! **([...]** *Anyhow, you have to **achieve** your **objective, that's right!**).

G14 : [...] Mais Sam, nga mo a nka dixième **repris,** [...] ([...] ***But** Sam also **repeated tenth form** [...])

2.2. Instances of French verbal switches inserted into Bamanankan

Following the same principle uncovered in I. Abdoulaye (2013, 2016) and M. Minkailou and I. Abdoulaye (2017, 2019), the data in Bamanankan have showed once more that it is the past participle form of the French switched verbs which is advocated, regardless of the French three verb groups. Several illustrative examples can be used as evidence:

7. Il me demande, ale yɛrɛ de bɛ ka ne **accéléré** (transcript2) (***He asks me**, it's he himself who **is accelerating** me*).

11. U b'a **essayé** k'a kɛ (*They will **try** to do it*) (transcript1);

16. Mɔgɔ, mɔgɔ ši ma i **porté** volontaire fɔlɔ, quoi, fo a waati (*Nobody, nobody has yet **endorsed your candidacy**, till the right time*) (transcript 4);

In these first three examples, the French switched verbs *accéléré, essayé* and *porté* are all verbs from the first group. The expected forms

in these constructions are rather *ale bɛ ka ne accelere; U bɛ a essaie,* etc. But it is rather the infinitive form which is advocated by the speakers in their switches.

The French second group verbs used in the instances below look more convincing in that they offer no possibility of confusion between the infinitive form and the past participle, two forms of the verb completely different.

14. Ko a bɛ na a di n bɛ ta a **saisi** (*He says he will give it to me to go and **type** it*) (transcript 2).

15. I tɛ formulaire **rempli**, i yɛrɛ (*You do not **fill** the form, yourself*) (transcript 8).

It therefore clearly appears that the use of *saisi* and *rempli* supports the authors' view that Bamanan speakers (just like the Songhay ones) have a clear preference for the French verb past participle form as the base form of the verb in their switches.

Further supportive evidence comes from the participants' use of *suspendu* and *inscrit* (in the extract below), two French third group verbs; Bamanan speakers adopt these verb participial forms as the base form of the switched French verbs and consequently to apply them the grammar rules of Bamanankan. None of these verbs undergoes inflection following the French verbal inflectional system.

13. Ulu ta **suspendu** ra (*Theirs **has been suspended***) (transcript1);

12. I bɛ sɛ k'i **inscrit** (*You can **register***) not "I bɛ sɛ k'i **inscrire**" following the French grammar rule that when two verbs follow each other, the second takes the infinitive form (transcript 1).

As pointed out earlier with the studies on Songhay-French code-switching where it has been revealed the use of the past participle in all the French verb-switches regardless of the verb group, the participants involved in the study of Bamanankan-French code-switching also switch only the past participle form.

2.3 Instances of French verbal switches inserted into Fulfulde

Fulfulde-French code-switching is the third investigation to test the claim being made by I. Abdoulaye and M. Minkailou that francophone 'code-switchers' prefer to adopt and use the

French verb past participle form as the base form of the verbs in their native language-based code-switching. In other words, Fulah speakers of French also insert the past participle of the French verbs into the Fulfulde-based code. The extract below display four French first group verbs (*organisé*, *marché*, *lancé* and *postulé*) and one second group verb (*investi*):

A.S: So a waɗi **organisé** festival culturel, ko watta **marché** ko ana mawni de; kamɓe tan ɓe publicité non (*If you **organize** a cultural festival, you will make more profit; they themselves are ads*).

V.C: Na o non ngaɗi di mo **lancé** ? C'est vrai a waɗi **investi** kaalisi (*Did you **start** it together? **It is true** that you **invested** your money*).

A.S: Enquete gooto waɗa Uwaru, min ngadi **postulé** quoi (*They needed people for a **survey** in Yuwaru and we **applied** for it, that's it*).

As obviated from the authors' different works, the data collected for Fulfulde-French code-switching have also demonstrated that the past participle of the French verb is the only form that Fulah 'code-switchers' use. As a matter of fact, it is evident that francophone 'switchers' prefer the French past participle form in their switches as it has been demonstrated with studies on both Songhay-French and Bamanankan-French code-switching.

In fact, the full forms of the French *passé composé* which could have been used in the above Fulfulde instances are *as investi*, or *avez lancé*. The auxiliary parts (*as* and *avez*) of the verbs have been dropped just because the use of these grammatical structures are not congruent in the Fulfulde code which rather requires the placement of the verb infinitive form before the subject to express a past action.

Shortly put, the French past participle forms *organisé*, *marché*, *lancé, postulé* and *investi* are all switched into Fulfulde as the base forms of the verbs. Therefore, it appears that this verbal construction is a code switching grammatical constraint, typical to francophone language users switching languages. The approach the authors of this paper are proposing is *the Francophone Model of Switching Verbs*. In plain words, in addition to the existing code switching theories, an alternative grammatical constraint in code switching is proposed. All the French verbs, regardless of their group, are switched through the form of their past participles (considered in the matrix language as the full form of the switched verb).

CONCLUSION

The findings for these studies have all demonstrated the way the French verbal forms are switched in intra-sentential switching by francophone speakers of these three native Malian languages which are typologically different (Songhay, Bamanankan and Fulfulde). The data have displayed and successfully tested an outstanding element in the field of code-switching which looks typical to francophone speakers: the French past participle switch as the base form of the verb. This kind of verbal switch appears therefore as a francophone alternative of grammatical constraint in code-switching; and this paper attempts to claim it as *the Francophone Model of Switching Verbs*. The authors of this paper definitely believe that it is an approach which results from transfer impacting French L2 learners. Still, this claim needs to be taken with caution as further research is required for confirmation. Thus, this study has tested the claim made in I. Abdoulaye (2013, 2016), M. Minkailou and I. Abdoulaye (2016, 2018), and I. Abdoulaye and M. Minkailou (2017, 2019) that bilingual French speakers choose to switch the past participle form of the imbedded French verb in intra-sentential switches. To put it plainly, they consider and take the form of the French past participle of the verb as the base form of the verb to switch and apply it the rules of their native language.

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