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The Emergence of a Linguistic Ideology in Malagasy: Language in Chat Rooms in the Cybercafés of Antananarivo

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Abstract

Recent research in linguistic anthropology has shown the importance of linguistic ideology as it provides a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk through the study of beliefs about language that can be either explicitly formulated or incorporated into speech practices (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). Having become a key issue in linguistic anthropology, linguistic ideology is widely documented in metapragmatic discourse produced during interviews as this type of situation is expected to be the locus of such beliefs. However, because this approach is *ex post*, we argue that it can only describe the gap between the speakers' beliefs about their language(s) and their practices. If we are to study linguistic ideology, we will need to scrutinize the interactions themselves and deal more specifically with their metapragmatic level, where the process of linguistic ideology is at stake. This is what this paper attempts to do. Based on a corpus of video-recorded computer-mediated interactions in the cybercafés of Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, we focus on the interactional problems that may arise when people use Instant Messaging (IM). These problems can be related to the forms of writing as well as to the languages used (Malagasy, French, or *Variaminanana*, a

1. I thank Professor Michel de Fornel for his critical remarks.

form of code-mixing of Malagasy and French). Although we take into account the metapragmatic discourse, it is not as central as in studies that address the issue of linguistic ideology.

Keywords: code-switching, linguistic anthropology, linguistic ideology, contextualization cues, Madagascar, Malagasy language, NTIC, *Variaminanana*

1. Introduction

Linguistic ideology has become a central issue in linguistic anthropology² because it makes it possible to analyze the link between social structures and ways of speaking by studying beliefs about language, whether these are explicitly formulated or incorporated within language practices. Generally speaking, linguistic ideology is documented through metapragmatic discourse produced in interview situations, which in theory allows for the gathering of beliefs and perceptions. However, this is an *ex post* approach that is at best informative about the gap between speakers' perceptions of their language and their practices. Instead, we opted for an approach that examines sequences of interaction where what is at play is situated at the metapragmatic level. To us, this is where the process of constructing linguistic ideology can be illuminated.

Based on a corpus of video recordings of chat interactions we collected in cybercafés in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, and which we analyze according to methods established in conversation analysis inspired by ethnomethodology (Sacks 1992; Sacks et al. 1974; de Fornel 2001), we will analyze moments of interaction in which a problem with comprehension emerges. Without entirely leaving aside the metapragmatic discourse produced in an interview situation, we will not accord it the central role it generally plays in studies dedicated to linguistic ideology, where it is reduced to a set of perceptions. We will thus show that linguistic ideology refers to reasons for behaving that are not explicit but rather implemented in a practical way and that are at the foundation of the ideological process itself.

2. Linguistic Ideology and Situated Practices

For the last fifteen years or so, the theme of linguistic ideology has been present in work in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and linguistics

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2. This study shares the theoretical framework of American linguistic anthropology (Silverstein 1976, 2004; Hanks 1993, 1996, 2005), in which focusing on the interaction itself is central, while an important place is nonetheless given to the anthropological dimension of exchanges.

(Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Schieffelin et al. 1998; Silverstein 1979, 1985, 1993, 1998a, 1998b; Kroskrity 2004; Hanks 1996) but without there being a shared definition of “linguistic ideology.” Silverstein defines linguistic ideology as: “The set of beliefs about language(s) constructed by speakers. These beliefs constitute generalizations about what they perceive about the structure or use of the language(s) through which they or others interact.” (Silverstein 1979, 193). This definition, which we will modify at the end of the paper, implies that without linguistic consciousness, speakers cannot develop beliefs about language and therefore influence its structure. Yet far from being a simple collection of beliefs, the notion of ideology represents, as Verschueren explains, a complex group of frames of interpretation, or “underlying patterns of meaning, frames of interpretation, world views, or forms of everyday thinking and explanation” (Verschueren 2010, 7). In addition, work in linguistic anthropology shows that linguistic ideology is the secondary rationalization, both deformed and deforming, of a practice (Silverstein 1979, 1985; Schieffelin et al. 1998). In studying linguistic ideology, it is therefore necessary to study the metapragmatic dimension of language practices in order to shed light on the process for constructing these ideologies that is explicitly at work in metapragmatic discourse.

By metapragmatic, we mean the possibility of characterizing and conceptualizing language acts and speech events (Silverstein 1993, 37). The process of interpreting an utterance in context depends on a set of metapragmatic signs – or contextualization cues – linking the structure of the message and the context of the utterance (Gumperz 1989, 77). These cues serve to relate what is said at a given moment in the interaction with knowledge acquired during past experiences (Gumperz 1989, 29). Contextualization cues do not have propositional content. Rather, they serve to illuminate and highlight words and utterances in relationship to other units. Because they are in the background (with the message in the foreground), contextualization cues are not immediately available for speakers. Yet they hold meaning. What they communicate is on the order of inference and is related to constraints on interpretation, independently of any propositional meaning.

We postulate that the real question is not about seeking causal links between linguistic ideologies and language practices but rather about capturing the logic characteristic of metapragmatic discourse as it is constituted in practice. The task is not simple, particularly because there is a limit to the metapragmatic consciousness of speakers. Interviews with chatters contain numerous evaluations of their practices and of those

of others, particularly regarding the type of writing they use to interact through chat, as well as language mixing (see below). However, when appearing in a particular type of interaction – namely the interview, with its question and answer format – these evaluations are presented in the form of generalizations, which must be contrasted with the form these evaluations take when they emerge during interactions that follow conversational difficulties. In the latter case, the characteristics of generalizations are lacking. It is thus essential not to confuse metapragmatic phenomena within interviews – an interactional system that invites speakers to produce generalizing pronouncements – and those realized in interaction (Mertz 1993; Coupland et al. 1998). We emphasize this point because we consider that ideological processes are not only the product of a generalization of practices but are also at work within the practices themselves. We will therefore seek to understand not the effects of linguistic ideology on practices but the ideological dimension inherent in the practices themselves.

3. The Emergence of an Interactional Difficulty in a Chat Sequence

To detect metapragmatic forms within practices, we opt for Gumperz' methodology, which privileges the situations of interactional problems (Gumperz 1989, 85). In using this methodology, we start by studying a chat sequence we filmed between two Malagasy-speaking chatters, where, following a comprehension difficulty on the part of one of them, we see a shift from Malagasy to French. Such code-switching (Woolard 2004; Myers-Scotton and Ury 1977; Myers-Scotton 1993; Poplack 1980, 1981; Sankoff and Poplack 1981) is initially difficult to understand. Why would two Malagasy-speaking individuals interacting in Malagasy resort to French in part of the interaction?

In the excerpt that follows, after several turns at writing in which the interlocutors <BenAflex> and <Bad_girl> chat in French, then in Malagasy, a comprehension difficulty emerges in Line 6 ("what? I don't understand," writes <BenAflex> in French) following a reply by <Bad_girl> in L5 ("that's life," which she writes in Malagasy). At left, we present a screen capture of the chat window used by <BenAflex> to chat with <Bad_girl>, with the transcription of the chat at right.³

3. The transcriptions shown in this article are to be read in the following way: the pseudonyms of the chatters written between the brackets <> at the beginning of each turn indicate the person whose writing turn it is; the first numbered line corresponds to the exchanges by chat; the second line is a word-by-word gloss, where we indicate the grammatical categories that serve as descriptors; the third line is a free translation.

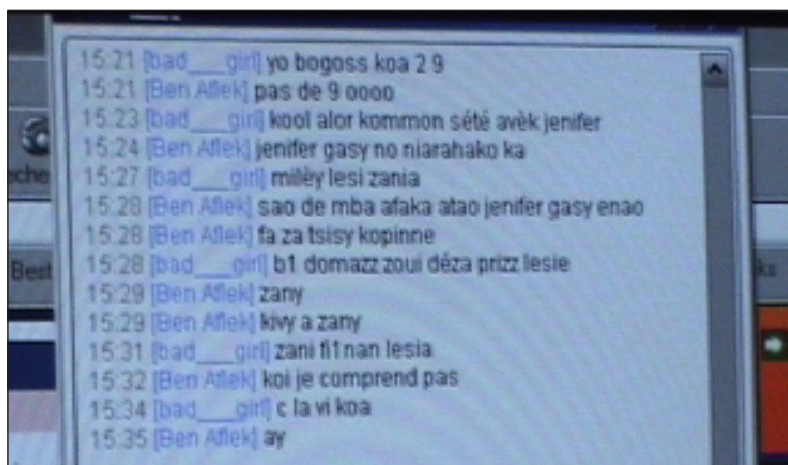


Illustration: Chat excerpt on the rta.org website

<BenAfleck>_<Bad_girl>_Sequence_rta.org

1. <BenAfleck> *fa za tsisy kopinne*

CONJ/Pers Pron 1 pers sg / LOC-not have/ N-girlfriend
(but me (I) don't have a girlfriend)

2. <Bad_girl> *b1 domazz zoui déza prizz lesie*

INTERJ-well / C-too bad / I am / already/taken / INTERJEC-man VOC
(well too bad I am already taken man)

3. <BenAfleck> *zany*

ADV-well
(oh really) OR (that's it)

4. <BenAfleck> *kivy a zany*

ADJ-disappointed / VOC / ADV
((I) am disappointed then)

5. <Bad_girl> *zani fi1nan lesia*

ADV-well / C-life / INTERJEC-man / VOC
(well that's life man huh)

6. <BenAfleck> *koi je comprend pas*

(what? I don't understand)

7. <Bad_girl> *c la vie koi*

(that's life huh)

8. <BenAfleck> *ay*

(Ah!)

At certain points in the interaction, as this excerpt between <BenAfleck> and <Bad_girl> shows, when there emerges, for example, a difficulty in decoding the interlocutor’s turn, going from Malagasy to French can prove to be a solution for the chatters. Let us examine more closely this sequence and the series of turns at L5, L6, and L7, where code-switching can be observed, that is, a shift from Malagasy in the initial turn (L5) to French in the two turns that follow (L6 and L7). A comprehension difficulty arises in L6 (“what? I don’t understand,” writes <BenAfleck> in French) after a reply from <Bad_girl> in Malagasy in L5 (“well that’s life man huh,” which she writes in Malagasy). This reflection by the female chatter is a comment on the difficulties of life following from the preceding turns, when <BenAfleck> expressed his disappointment (L4) at not being able to count on <Bad_girl>, who announces that she is already taken (L2), even though <BenAfleck> indicates that he does not have a girlfriend and that he is therefore available (L1). The utterance by <Bad_girl> is in Malagasy, while <BenAfleck> indicates in French that he does not understand. During her turn (L7), <Bad_girl> performs a self-correction in reiterating what she had uttered previously, but this time in French. Here, we should note that the writing by <Bad_girl> is problematic for the interlocutor not in terms of the meaning of the terms, which are hardly difficult to grasp and part of daily vocabulary (*zani*-well, *filnan*-life, *lesia*-man/huh) but as a difficulty <BenAfleck> has in decoding the words because <Bad_girl> did not write them in the conventional form, which is indicated below:

<i>As written in the chat</i>	<i>Equivalent in standard spelling</i>	<i>French translation</i>
zani	zany	alors/quoi
fi1nan	fiainana	vie
lesia	leisy a/lesy a	mec hein

The phenomena described here is the very type of metapragmatic phenomenon with which we start our analysis.

4. Analysis of Contextualization Cues

Other examples similar to the utterance by <Bad_girl> show identical phenomena of unconventional writing and code-switching. This is the case in the following excerpt:

As written by <mec-pr-fi> *ol 1 iany no miresaka @ko zao 2 avec toi!*
 Standard spelling *Olona inay ihany no miresaka amiko izao roa avec toi!*
 person / 1 / only / CONJ / PRES-talk / PREP /
 1st pers sg / now 2 / with you
 (only one person is talking with me now two
 with you)

We could multiply the examples of this type of writing that deviates from standardized spelling and shows numerous effects, particularly graphics (such as the use of @ for the preposition *amin'* and the numbers 1 and 2), all of which are known and have been studied (Pierozak 2000; Bays 2001). However, we underscore that for the analyst, the writing of Malagasy-speaking chatters present interesting variations according to whether they write in Malagasy or in French.

4.1 Relationship between Written and Oral Speech in Chat Writing

Our examination of the Malagasy and French written forms observed in chats brings us to two types of phenomena, the first related to oral pronunciation, the second to graphemes. In both cases, although the type of writing may be found to be closely linked to oral speech, the way the link is made varies according to whether the writing is in Malagasy or French.

4.1.1. Phenomena Related to Oral Pronunciation

A first phenomenon seen in writing in Malagasy is linked to the tonal stress that characterizes the Malagasy language.⁴ Of course, this stress is not written by the chatters. However, the way they write – or ignore – certain sounds indicates by way of contrast the position of the tonal stress in pronunciation. Thus, orally we see elision of vowels at word endings. For example, the end of *fiainana* (life) is not pronounced, becoming [fjɛnan] or [fjainan]. It is evident that the chatters note this type of phenomenon when a number of unstressed phonemes or syllables disappear in writing.

A second phenomenon in Malagasy writing, which is also linked to stress, concerns more specifically modifications in groups of stressed vowels. In chat writing, we observe that series of vowels have different vocalic realizations relative to what is indicated in writing.⁵ This oral

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4. Malagasy words all include a stressed syllable, generally the penultimate or antepenultimate, depending on the structure of the word, where the stress marks length and intensity (Dez 1990, 5). Moreover, in Malagasy, there exists a tonal accent with a distinctive value because it allows distinctions between phonemic groups.
 5. An analysis of the relationship between written and oral speech in Malagasy and French chats is detailed in Verdier 2010.

phenomenon has long been highlighted by linguists and grammarians specializing in Malagasy (Berthier 1922; Domenichini-Ramiaramanana 1976; Dez 1980). We again find in the written chat what was observed in oral language. In particular, let us take the case of the vowel cluster *ai*, as in the term *fiainana* (life). In informal oral interaction, the realization of the vowel [ɛ] tends to replace the realization of [ai]. In writing, the chatters can thus replace the vowel cluster *ai/ay* with *e* (corresponding to the pronunciation *è* in French), as their writing system allows. However, we should emphasize that the letters do not transcribe the same sounds in Malagasy and in French. When the chatters write in Malagasy, the letters refer to sounds in Malagasy. To abbreviate the French, they use letters from the French system.⁶ Only one case of the use of the French writing system was found to represent a sound in Malagasy, namely the letter *ô* written in place of the vowels *ao* (as in *vaovao*).

In the case of chats in French, we see suppression in writing of vowels or syllables that are silent orally. These transformations in the written form are in large part due to the silent *e*. We also find among the transformations in pronunciation the case of the French pronoun “je,” which is pronounced *ch* (as in “*chuis*”), though this is an isolated case.

4.1.2 Phenomena Linked to the Written Form

Contrasting with what we observe for Malagasy, forms linked to the writing of the language are much more numerous in chats in French. We thus identify three principles of modifications linked to: (1) numbers replacing a phoneme; (2) use of abbreviations; and (3) phonetic writing with recurrences for certain phonemes. In particular, the use of non-alphabetic signs is much more frequent in French, where numbers represent specific morphemes or phonemes (even if this means a degree of distortion compared to the oral, of course), as in *1* for *un-en* (as in *bien*). In Malagasy, the number 2 is used to represent identical repetition of a morpheme.⁷ As there does not exist a morpheme equivalent to numbers in the language, replacement is not appropriate and is therefore not used.

6. In the excerpt between <BenAfleck> and <Bad_girl>, we also see a play on the writing and pronunciation, which is possible in French, as in the utterance (L2) by <Bad_girl>: b1 *domazz zoui déza prizz lesie* (well too bad I am already taken man). The female chatter signals that she is a Malagasy through writing and that she speaks French with a Malagasy accent, indicating the Malagasy pronunciation by the grapheme *z*. Since the phoneme [ʒ] does not exist in Malagasy, the closest phoneme is [z]. This play on writing is possible because the female chatter knows the two linguistic systems and how they are transcribed in writing.

7. For example, the chatters write *vao²* or *vao2* for *vaovao* (news).

4.1.3. *Mixed Phenomena*

These phenomena can also be combined by transcribing the oral while suppressing vowels or syllables in order to shorten the output. For example, this is the case in the utterance *kes tu fé?* (*qu'est-ce que tu fais?* what are you doing?), which refers to both oral and written forms and takes into account phonetic ways of writing. That is, *kes* records the fact that, orally, the *que* can be elided, and it shows that the writing segment that follows *que* can be replaced by *k*. Moreover, it is very common to not represent vowels that are pronounced orally, as in *salut* (hello) written as *slt*, for example. As regards Malagasy, we find some written forms that combine both the rules linked to oral speech and phenomena linked to writing. The written form helps to formulate shifts in the oral form but according to a modality that is first of all written. To clarify, in examining the doubling of the consonant *n*, as in *maninn* for *maninona*, a lengthening of the consonant can be deduced *a priori* from the fact that orally, non-stressed syllables tend to become mute. In fact, it is a game of abbreviation that enables chatters to write *maninn* even though they pronounce it [manin]. This form shows that the chatters sometimes mix what they pronounce orally with the writing conventions that also enable them to shorten their output. All of this confirms the double process at work in Malagasy, in which writing is influenced by oral speech and at the same time is modified according to a logic that belongs to writing. By contrast, for the most part only the second process is applied to French, with the result that chatters abbreviate the forms in question. This point will be crucial when we later establish a link between written behaviors and linguistic ideology.

Thus, the chatters do not transcribe Malagasy and French according to the same modalities. For chat writing in Malagasy, the link with the oral form is predominant, with chatters making modifications to writing in function of their perception of oral forms. By contrast, when they write in French, these modifications are more generally made in relation to the oral forms of the language. We will see that for French, such a relationship to writing is related less to the fact that the learning of this language is generally achieved through writing (Nicot-Guillotel 2009) than to the existence of a particular type of language standardization. In addition, this explains why these forms in French not only do not appear in a Malagasy corpus but are also widely distributed in the corpus of French chats from France that we have studied elsewhere (de Fornel et al. 2007).

4.2 *The Status of Variaminanana in the Chats*

Defined as “an individual’s use of two or more language varieties in the same speech event or exchange” (Woolard 2004, 74), the phenomenon of code-switching has been studied by linguists and sociolinguists (Milroy and Wei 1995; Dreyfus and Juillard 2001), some of whom have been particularly interested in the description and characterization of grammatical constraints on code-switching (for example, Poplack 1980; Sankoff and Poplack 1981; Myers-Scotton 1995). For our part, we are interested in the relationship between code-switching and the linguistic ideology that appears to accompany it (Mertz 1993; Woolard 1998; Silverstein 1998b). This dimension is already present in the foundational study of the Norwegian dialect by Blom and Gumperz (1972). This study led to an understanding of the fact that code shifts could include social information in addition to a strictly referential dimension. However, this may not necessarily mean that speakers use code-switching strategically. The code-switching we see in the chats as a mixture of French and Malagasy is well known among chatters, who use the Malagasy term *varieminanana* to characterize it and who are fully capable of discussing it, as we observe in our interviews (see below). However, what this code-switching accomplishes at the level of the interaction is not necessarily available consciously, in any case according to the data we studied.

4.2.1 *The Sociolinguistic Situation in Antananarivo*

To understand the practices of *varieminanana* in the context of media communications, a few words should be said about the sociolinguistic situation in Madagascar.⁸ In particular, the sociolinguistic situation of the Malagasy language is complex.⁹ *Merina*, the variant standardized in the nineteenth century and the official national language ever since, is used in teaching, the media, and in political and cultural life. Within the central administration, on the other hand, French is used more frequently for writing than official Malagasy (Rabenoro and Rajaonarivo 1997, 107). Despite the period of “Malagasization” (1973-1992), with teaching being

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8. *Variaminanana*, sometimes called Frangasy or Frangache, has been the subject of studies primarily in the school context (Rafitoson 1998; Ranaivoson 2004; Babault 2003, 2006; Nicot-Guillourel 2009) and more rarely in face-to-face situations, with the exception of Rasoloniaina’s 2003 study of markets. *Variaminanana* has been the subject of some sociolinguistic studies focusing on the speakers’ representations using the traditional methodology of survey and interview research (Bavoux 2000; Babault 2006; Soa 2002; Rasoloniaina 2005).
 9. For a detailed presentation of the sociolinguistic situation in Madagascar, see Rambelo 1991 and Rabenoro 2006.

done in Malagasy, French still remains the first instrument of social promotion (Rabenoro and Rajaonarivo 1997, 108).

The linguistic background of the chatters we encountered is the following. They all have as their maternal language official Malagasy (as well as another dialectical variant for those with one parent not from the Central Highlands), the language taught and the language of teaching. All had access to French as a language taught and a language of teaching, and among some, French may be spoken at home by one parent. However, French is not limited to educational contexts as it is present in the media. As a result, these young people are exposed daily to French and for the most part develop a passive competence in the language. On the other hand, Malagasy remains the language of their daily exchanges, between couples and within the family, as well as the language of official functions (such as rituals or ceremonies).

4.2.2. *What the Chatters Have to Say about Variaminanana*

We see that the chatters, whether spontaneously when we observe them while chatting or in interviews, express positive or negative evaluations of the use of *variaminanana*. This term is interesting for the link it establishes with another domain of Malagasy culture as it comes from the culinary metaphor *vary amin'anana*, which means “rice with leafy green vegetables” and includes both positive and negative connotations (Rasoloniaina 2003). In taking on the normative judgment made regarding language mixing, the chatters in part echo certain institutional discourses that particularly concern language mixing, terminological invasion, and the creolization of Malagasy, all of which are threats to the integrity of the “language of the ancestors” (*tenin-drazana*).¹⁰ A female chatter takes up the widespread conception that the mixture “hurts one’s ears:”

(. . .) Malagasy and French mixed that hurts one’s ears / *tsy tiako ny frantsay marary ny sofina*¹¹ (interview with <avotra> in Madagascar, 2005)

Even if she does not like to mix the two languages, she does not refrain from doing so during the interview, as shown above, and even less when she chats, adding:

here [in the chat] it doesn’t bother me to speak French because there’s nobody to see me (interview with <avotra> in Madagascar, 2005)

10. This is the case in particular of the *Académie Malgache* (Malagasy Academy), created in 1902, which plays a non-negligible role in the evaluation and setting of norms and whose recommendations are taken up in the media.

11. Translation: “I don’t like French; it hurts one’s ears.”

Thus, the chat seems to be an informal interactional space where the relationship with the norm seems to be lifted and where it is possible to speak incorrectly, mix languages, or depart from the norm in any number of ways as there will be no sanction. It is therefore not surprising that when they associate *variaminanana* with chatting, other young people also express an entirely positive evaluation of their practices.

We should highlight a theme that recurred frequently in the interviews, with many chatters expressing a preference for using French to chat because it favors fast exchanges. The chatters also state that the Malagasy language would take longer to write and is therefore not well adapted to the medium of instantaneous conversation that is the chat. As Ma explains:

Ma: In fact French [is] faster I think because you can use all kinds of abbreviations and then with French you can change the words uh I don't know what you call the new way of writing for example I write *quoi* [what] with a *koi* that's faster that's why we speak French too.

MV: And in Malagasy you can't do that?

Ma: No, in Malagasy you have to write it out completely because if not that would not be understandable.

However, examination of the practice of this usage do not confirm this perception, as the excerpt between <BenAflex> and <Bad_girl> and the utterance of <mec-pr-fi> demonstrate. Rather, the discourse of the chatters agrees with the prevailing ideology conveyed by certain institutions whereby Malagasy should be standardized further in order for it to become a(n international) language of communication (Rabenoro 1996-1997, 7-8). Understandably, it is therefore possible to see the language as poorly adapted to the modern world. However, this matters little if it is experienced symbolically as such.

4.2.3 Observation of Variaminanana Practices in Chats

In fact, we were tempted at one point not to take seriously the declarations of chatters who considered French to be better adapted and more practical for chatting than Malagasy given that practices proved not to correspond to what was stated. However, a more in-depth examination of the conversational data shows that the chatters were correct. Let us again refer to the excerpt between <BenAflex> and <Bad_girl>, who both resorted to French to make themselves understood.

We have already shown that <BenAflex> undeniably has a problem decoding what his female interlocutor sent him. To explain this difficulty, we compared the Malagasy words as <Bad_girl> wrote them (L5 "*zani*

filnan lesia”) with the standard spelling. Let us now dwell specifically on the term *filnan* (life), which is central to understanding the utterance. This term is written in a very specific way, with the final vowel (the *a* at the end of *fiainana*) being dropped. This is a widespread phenomenon among chatters who, as we already saw, do not write out the vowels that are not stressed in oral speech. This presents no obstacle to comprehension. On the other hand, the number 1, which is generally used to replace the French phoneme “*un*,” as discussed previously, here replaces the Malagasy diphthong [ai]. As we explained previously, in chats, the vowel cluster *ai* is regularly transcribed as *e*. In addition, although numbers can be used to express certain phenomena, we already saw that the number 1 is used only in French. We can now make explicit the reason the use of the number 1 may be at the root of the incomprehension exhibited by <BenAfleck> because the transcription of *fi1nan* is difficult to understand on several accounts. Indeed, what sound does 1 transcribe given that it is included in a group of Malagasy phonemes? If we replace the 1 in the string, we obtain nothing that is correct in Malagasy. Given that *variainanana* is rather frequent in the chat, as this excerpt specifically shows, it could be that the term *fi1nan* belongs to the French lexicon, which the number 1 would seem to indicate. Yet we obtain nothing convincing here either. In these conditions, it is not surprising that <BenAfleck> has difficulties understanding the fact that his female interlocutor used the number 1 to transcribe the sound [ɛ] or [ai]. He thus has to ask his interlocutor for an explanation. In general, the utterance “*quoi*” (“what”), as in “*koi je comprend pas*” (“what, I don’t understand”) that <BenAfleck> writes does not specify the source of the problem. Rather, the switch to French presents the advantage of allowing him to indicate that he has a decoding problem. As for <Bad_girl>, in effecting a self-correction in French in the next turn (L7), she avoids a new failure of interpretation of her writing by reformulating what she wrote previously in a slightly different way (L7 “*c’est la vie quoi*”/“that’s life huh”), which is precisely what we could expect because not using identical repetition is unmarked.¹² <Bad_girl> thus relies not only on what <BenAfleck> wrote to her but also on his own code-switching in order to infer an interactional problem (a problem of decoding) and the way toward resolution. This example shows that code-switching is neither problematic nor especially marked and that it can as a result serve to resolve interactional problems.

Nonetheless, even though we observe an absence of stigmatization toward code-switching in the chats, to the point where we can see

12. An identical repetition would be marked, as de Fornel (2001) explains.

variaminanana as the very index of this activity (Verdier 2009b), the chatters we interviewed evaluate the two languages differently. One of the reasons advanced for preferring French is its ease and rapidity of use compared to Malagasy, which takes “longer to write.” How can we explain what is at work here? Here, we touch on a problem revealed by linguistic ideology. An understanding of mechanisms presiding over the standardization of Malagasy in the nineteenth century compared with those chosen for the standardization of French allows us to grasp more directly the relationship between, on the one hand, the writing used in chats and standard writing, and on the other, the metalinguistic evaluations of chatters.

4.2.4. *The Standardization of Malagasy and French*

Officially adopted in 1823, the writing system for Malagasy, which includes French vowels and English consonants, follows the following principle: “Each letter should have only one sound” (Rabary 1929, 34, in Dahl 1966, 34). We already explained that Malagasy-speaking chatters drop unstressed vowels or syllables, which is permitted by the way in which the language was standardized. If there is no sound, then there is no letter. Yet the word remains readable by the interlocutor, and the guiding principle (one sound, one letter) is retained. In the same way, if the chatters change the spelling of certain sounds (as in the change from *ai* to *e*, for example), they do it according to this principle. Moreover, we see that chatters do not use the French writing system, which is reserved for writing in French, but rather the Malagasy writing system. Chatters write a language whose standardization was based on the principle of one sound, one letter, and they record in writing the phonic modifications of their language by continuing to base their actions on this system.

Let us now contrast this briefly with the standardization of French. In the case of French, the gap between written and oral speech is wide. In this sense, French orthography contrasts strongly with Malagasy orthography. Owing to the particular history of its standardization, this language is not written as it is pronounced.¹³ There is an incompatibility between its alphabet, which is rigid, and the phonological system, which is perpetually being reinvented. Despite work readapting and completing the extant graphemes in parallel with developments in oral language and writing conventions, a gap persists between oral and written language. Even if the orthography has been stabilized since the eighteenth century,

13. For work on French orthography, see Blanche-Benveniste and Chervel 1969; Catach 1994; Walter 1994; Cerquiglini 1996; Encrevé 2002.

it did not take into account developments in the phonological system of the language (Blanche-Benveniste and Chervel 1969, 65). It is therefore necessary to visualize the French writing system as doubly maladapted, neither intrinsically coherent at the level of the system itself nor corresponding to an oral reality. Thus, for both vowels and consonants, the same sound can be transcribed in multiple ways. In addition, in contrast to Malagasy in particular, many unpronounced letters are nonetheless written. Despite multiple adjustments to the orthography over time, and especially in 1990, written French remains far removed from oral French. It is still possible therefore to simplify what is written in French.

5. The Emergence of Linguistic Ideology

Let us recall that computer-mediated conversations owe their success to the fact that the two interlocutors manage to establish a form of co-presence despite all the technical hazards (Verdier 2009a, 2010). In addition and for the same reason, the engagement the parties must exhibit cannot be conducted via the modalities offered by face-to-face situations (through exchanging looks, for example). Rather, this co-presence is almost exclusively manifested through the display of turns in writing. As a result, the rapidity of sending messages and receiving replies becomes an essential factor for evaluating engagement in the exchange. However, we saw that some chatters construct a representation of Malagasy and French in relationship to this question of rapidity. We initially concluded that this was an issue of beliefs held about each language, whose sources were various institutional discourses. Are we dealing therefore with pure ideological fiction? Because they are in an informal situation, chatters are not under the control of dominant discourses, neither in the sense of an attitude of revolt nor of an internalization of these discourses, which would bring about a devalorization of their own practices. The consequence is that they write without pressure from the dominant norm. Moreover, their practices assume one type of writing that must carry the marks of oral speech and that should be rapid because this is the price of success in the interaction. It is therefore within this framework that we must understand their discourses, which are above all *a posteriori* rationalizations. Chat is a situation in which it is necessary not to simulate the oral but to create writing that allows for the most rapid exchange possible. As a result, the question of an efficient and rapid writing system arises. In Malagasy, the chatters' room for maneuver is very narrow because of the "one sound, one letter" rule. What therefore remains available to them if they are to reduce written strings, beside the elision of vowels and even of

unstressed syllables? Their room for creativity – that is, abbreviation – is very limited because of the very fact that the orthography is based on a principle of economy. By contrast, in French, the room for maneuver is much wider because the orthography does not obey a principle of economy. This explains why the chatters find French more practical because it makes it easier to shorten messages.

6. Conclusion

Our analysis leads us to propose a second definition of linguistic ideology, more complete than that proposed initially. To us, linguistic ideology consists of the set of speakers' perceptions on the subject of language(s) (metalinguistics) and their use (pragmatics). These perceptions are the product of metapragmatic activities. Being by nature evaluative, they proceed by typifying and generalizing what is perceived of the structure and use of the language(s) through which the speakers (or others) interact. With this definition in mind, we can formulate the emergence of the linguistic ideology of the Malagasy-speaking chatters in the following way. Chatters evaluate the languages they use to interact (perceptions) differently, with French being more practical than Malagasy for chatting purposes (uses). The chatters' statements that they resort to French because it is better adapted (evaluative character) is explained by the fact that writing in French enables them to apply the principle of economy, in contrast to Malagasy (metapragmatic activity), which predominates in the types of exchanges we studied. In this case, because French is evaluated as being better adapted, it can be used to disambiguate a Malagasy utterance. However, as we have shown, this is possible only because code-switching is unmarked in chat practices. These representations of Malagasy and French are thus the result of generalizations of what is perceived about the use chatters make of the languages through which they interact.

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