

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE CHANGE AMONG KABIYE-FRENCH BILINGUALS

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This study examines the influence of French on Kabiye (Gur language) in everyday communication among Kabiye-French bilinguals in Togo. Since French is the official language of education and the government, nearly all educated Kabiye speakers are bilingual in French and Kabiye.

My study shows that the prestige and the socio-economic status of French coupled with the fact that it is the formal language of communication within a multilingual set up have led to an increase in its use in the country. Importantly, I observe that the influence of French has been increasing particularly among educated Kabiye-French bilinguals. Today, the use of the Kabiye verb *lábu* 'to do' plus a French noun or verb as well as the use of the verb *kpáú* 'to take/carry', the meaning of which is calqued from the French verb *prendre* 'to take' has become commonplace among Kabiye-French bilinguals.

More specifically, the study shows that in order to maintain their language, Kabiye speakers use language maintenance mechanisms to prevent Kabiye from being corrupted by such a powerful language as French.

The data for this study are drawn from tape-recorded interviews and participant observation of Kabiye speakers in informal settings.

Cette étude examine l'influence du français sur le kabiye (langue Gur) dans les communications quotidiennes entre les bilingues kabiye et français au togo. Comme le français est la langue officielle dans l'éducation et dans le gouvernement, presque tous les kabiyes scolarisés sont bilingues en kabiye et en français.

La présente étude montre que le prestige et le statut socioéconomique du français en plus du fait qu'il soit la langue utilisée dans le secteur formel et multilingue privilégie son usage dans le pays. Nous avons observé plus particulièrement que l'influence du français s'accroît surtout parmi les locuteurs bilingues en kabiye et en français. Aujourd'hui, l'usage du verbe *lábu* 'faire' accompagné d'un nom français ou d'un verbe français à l'infinitif, ainsi que l'usage du verbe kabiye *kpáú* 'prendre' est devenu quotidien entre les bilingues kabiye et français.

Par ailleurs, notre étude démontre qu'afin de protéger leur langue, les locuteurs Kabiye ont créé des mécanismes de protection afin de sauvegarder le kabiye et le protéger contre toute forme de corruption d'une si puissante langue qu'est le français.

Ce travail est basé sur des enregistrements des interviews et sur ma propre observation des conversations informelles de locuteurs Kabiye.

0. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the role of French in Togo and its influence on Kabiye in everyday communication among Kabiye-French bilinguals. Because French is the official language of education and the government, nearly all educated Kabiye speakers are bilingual in French and Kabiye. My observation of the Kabiye community shows that the influence of French has been increasing among educated Kabiye-French bilinguals. Today, the use of the verb **lábu** 'to do' plus a French noun or verb as well as the use of the Kabiye verb **kpáú** 'to take/carry', the meaning of which is calqued from the French verb **prendre** 'to take' have become commonplace among Kabiye-French bilinguals.

The data for this study are drawn from tape-recorded interviews and participant observation of Kabiye speakers in informal settings.

Originally, the verb **lábu** 'to do' was used transitively and was never followed by any

verb. But today, the use of **lábu** followed by a French infinitive verb has become the norm among Kabiye-French bilinguals. Hence, it appears that the verb **lábu** is used both as a transitive verb and as an auxiliary. It carries the necessary inflections, while the French inserted verb provides the semantic content. The inflections follow the morphological and syntactic rules of Kabiye, the Matrix Language (ML), allowing French, the Embedded Language (EL) verb stems to ‘avoid’ Kabiye inflectional morphology (Myers-Scotton 1993).

1. SOCIOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND OF KABIYE AND FRENCH

1.1. KABIYE

Kabiye is a Gur language spoken by more than 800,000 people (Roberts 2002). It is spoken in the northern part of Togo, mainly in the prefectures of Kozah (Kara) and Binah. Kabiye speakers are also found in other parts of the country due to migration. Today, economic, educational and professional opportunities have led many Kabiye speakers to settle in major cities particularly the capital city, Lome. Since 1975, Kabiye and Ewe have been declared ‘national languages’ by the Togolese government.

1.2. FRENCH

At independence in 1960, French became the official language in the first Constitution of Togo, meaning that it is the sole language used in various government and administrative offices and institutions. It is also the language used for all international affairs. French enjoys a special position in education because it is used as a subject of study besides being the only language of instruction in the whole of the educational system in Togo.

Officially, the use of French dominates in the media (e.g. radio, television, newspapers, etc.). In Togo, the strength of French lies more on the major functions it assumes than on the demographic weight of its speakers.

Today, the increase in spoken French can be explained by the fact that success in school, and generally in social life, depends on the mastery of French. A good knowledge of French is required for all administrative positions in Togo. It is the language of upward mobility, a status that gives it heightened prestige. French is considered Togo’s window on the West. French is so much identified with socio-economic status that even those who have made it in life following non-academic channels still want to acquire it in order to create that impression of being men and women of status. In fact, it can be said without exaggeration that the “Frenchification” of the educational system in Togo has dated from the French colonial time to independence (1960), and to some extent, to the present day.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My observation in the Kabiye-French bilinguals’ speech shows that the speakers use French items that may or may not take Kabiye affixes. Thus, it is often difficult to tell whether the inserted items are borrowed or code-switched. Myers-Scotton (1993) treats borrowing and single-word insertions in equivalent ways. Myers-Scotton’s treatment relates well to the phenomena observed with French inserted elements observed in Kabiye-French bilinguals’ discourse. Accordingly, I will follow her lead in the treatment of borrowing and single-word insertion as equivalent. I will use Myers-Scotton’s language

- (4) **ε-κ'η** **λε**, **ma-lábi-η** *telephoner*
 3SG-come then 1SG-do-you.SG to telephone
 When he comes, I'll give you a call.

When I went back two weeks later to interview Neme, she told me:

- (5) **mε-wε prêt**, **í-bizu** **í-labi-m** *interviewer* **λε**
 1SG-be ready, 2PL-can 2PL-do-me to interview then
 I am ready, you can interview me.

Example (6) is another informant telling me the means he used to come to the interview:

- (6) **miη-kpáy** *lɔdɛ parce que* **Agoe wε poluuη**
 1SG-take.PAST car because Agoe be far
 I took a car because Agoe is far from here.

Examples (1) through (6) illustrate the forms of C-S commonly used in daily interactions among Kabiye-French bilinguals today. Two main observations can be made in these examples: firstly, the insertion of French words and expressions in Kabiye; some inserted words are phonologically fully integrated into Kabiye (e.g. **frert**, 'frère' **lɔdɛ** 'car/lorry'), some partially (e.g. **semaine-wa** 'week-pl'); secondly, the use of the verbs **lábu** 'to do' and **kpáu** 'to take/carry' as mentioned above) come with new meanings and structures that did not formerly exist in Kabiye.

Furthermore, in the examples above and those that will follow below (7 through 20), the sentences follow Kabiye and not French morpho-syntactic structure. This is an indication that Kabiye is the Matrix language and French, the Embedded one (Myers-Scotton 1993). Again, observe that while the insertion of French items has been part of Kabiye-French bilinguals' conversation, the use of verbs **lábu** (with an embedded item) and that of **kpáu** as witnessed today is a completely new phenomenon. Hence, I will mainly focus on these new forms which, I think, are due to the economic and prestigious power of French in Togo.

5. NEW CONSTRUCTIONS IN KABIYE

As stated in section (1.2), the political and socioeconomic status of French has made it to remain the only language of upward mobility in Togo. Consequently, French has had a major influence on Kabiye speakers, particularly those who have had some form of French education. This influence can be seen not only in socio-political or educational life, but more importantly in the way Kabiye bilinguals use their mother tongue today. The data below involving use of **lábu** show some aspects of French influence on Kabiye with the introduction of new features, meanings, and structures in everyday conversations.

5.1. CURRENT USE OF **lábu**

As stated earlier, in Kabiye the verb **lábu** 'to do' is used only transitively and it is neither followed by a verb nor a pronoun. Today, many Kabiye-French bilinguals use **lábu** differently from its traditional use such that it can take a French infinitive or a Kabiye

pronoun. The use of **lábu** is presented below in (7) through (10). In the examples, I highlight the forms of **lábu** in bold and the French words in italics.

The data presents another informant, Naka. When I first met Naka, I asked her for an appointment for interview. She was not sure about her availability so she replied:

- (7) **ma-lákt** *penser* **ɛ**, **ma-lábí** **mi** *téléphoner*, **í-nɔwá?**
 1SG-do.PRES to think then, 1SG-do.FUT you.PL to telephone, 2PL-understand
 After thinking, I will call you back, ok?

Naka then noticed that there is no telephone booth near her house from which she could easily call me. And since I already promised to visit her on Sunday, she said:

- (8) *frɛɾt*, **ŋ-ŋ-lakɩ-m** *visiter Dimanche* **wiyé-o?** **í-kɔŋ** **ɛ**, **ɔi-lá**
 brother, 2SG-NEG-do.PRES-me to visit Sunday day-QP 2PL-come 1PL-do
 Brother, aren't you visiting me on Sunday? When you come, we can do it.

Another informant, Kezié then asks me the following:

- (9) **í-labá** **lála** **ɔɔɔ** **yawé?**
 2PL-do.PAST others yesterday QP
 Did you interview others yesterday?

He then tells the interviewer:

- (10) **eyáa** **lábí-ŋ** *attendre* **páa** **ɔɔɔ** **ŋ-ti-kɔ'**
 people do.PAST-you.SG to wait EP yesterday 1SG-NEG-come
 People waited for you for a long time yesterday, but you did not come.

As seen in the data above, the use of **lábu** with a French lexeme is very frequent among Kabiye-French bilinguals. In such constructions, **lábu** is often directly or indirectly followed by a French infinitive verb. As said earlier, originally, the verb **lábu** was used transitively (i.e. always takes a direct object) but never followed by a verb. More importantly, the object is generally a noun, not a pronoun. As can be seen from the data, this is in contradiction with what Kabiye normal social usage used to be. The normal social usage of **lábu** in Kabiye is that in (2), repeated below in (11), as well as the example in (12):

- (11) **ɛ-lákt** *semaine-wa* **náale**
 3SG-do.FUT week-PL two
 He will spend two weeks.

- (12) **Kpaca labá** **tumtye** **camiyé** **ɛ-ti-lá** **féendu**
 Kpaca do.PAST work good 3SG-NEG-do.PAST laziness
 Kpaca did a good job, he was not lazy.

As stated above, in Kabiye, **lábu** takes a noun as direct object but never a pronoun or a verb. Because **lábu** does not take a pronoun, sentences in (3), (5), and (7) to (9) are not

normally used by Kabiye monolinguals in the village. For a monolingual, (7) and (10) for example are rendered as (13) and (14) respectively:

- (13) **ma-mázu** **le,** **ma-yá-ŋ** **ŋ-nuwá?**
 1SG-think.PRES then 1SG-call-you.SG 2SG-understand
 After thinking, I will call you back, ok?

- (14) **eyáa** **dáŋki-ŋ** **páa** **dede,** **ŋ-ti-ko´**
 people wait.PRES-you.SG EP yesterday 2SG-NEG-come
 People waited for you for a long time yesterday, but you did not come.

Clearly, (13) and (14) show that Kabiye equivalent verbs **maazu** ‘to think’, **yáú** ‘to call/telephone’, and **dáŋgu** ‘to wait’, do not need **lábu** in the language. I observe that **lábu** is used as a strategy to introduce foreign items, i.e., French lexemes. As a result, in current usage, in addition to the original use of **lábu**, Kabiye-French bilinguals have extended its function as a transitive verb to include that of an auxiliary or dummy verb. Thus, in the new constructions, **lábu** serves as the auxiliary and carries the necessary inflections (e.g. tense, aspect, subject/object or pronoun agreement, etc.), while the French verb, entirely uninflected provides the semantic content of the sentence as seen above. The inflections follow the morphological and syntactic rules of ML, Kabiye, allowing the EL French verb stems to ‘avoid’ Kabiye inflectional morphology (Myers-Scotton 1993). It can be argued that the use of **lábu** as an auxiliary constitutes a strategy for the speakers, (1) to create a quarantine for French verbs in order to prevent any form of French inflections on Kabiye verbs, and (2) to allow Kabiye speakers to distinguish alien French items from local ones (e.g. Ewe) which Kabiye accommodates easily in similar contexts (see Essizewa 2007). More specifically, it can be said that Kabiye speakers have created an innovation for C-S as language maintenance mechanism to prevent Kabiye from being corrupted by French.

5.2. USE OF FRENCH CALQUES (i.e. SEMANTIC BORROWING)

Another common usage observed in the speech of Kabiye-French bilinguals is the use of some Kabiye verbs whose meanings are calqued from that of French equivalent verb. This means that the meanings of such verbs are literally translated from the other language. I refer to the use of Kabiye verbs with intended French meaning as ‘new forms’ in Kabiye, because, formerly, these forms were not used by the community. Furthermore, the original Kabiye verb does not carry the meaning intended in the new form.

The new forms consist in the use the Kabiye verb **kpáú** ‘to take/carry’, the meaning of which is calqued directly from that of the French equivalent verb **prendre** ‘to take’, as in the expression **prendre une voiture/medicament**, meaning, ‘take a car/medicine.’ The original appropriate verb used in Kabiye is **súu** ‘to enter’ and not **kpáú**. Thus, expressions such as those in (15) and (16) have become routine among Kabiye-French bilinguals.

- (15) a. **Kofi kpáy** **lɔdɛ** ..., instead of b. **Kofi súy** **lɔdɛ**
 Kofi take/carry.PAST car ... Kofi enter.PAST car
 Kofi took/carried a car. Kofi took a car.

- (16) a. **Lemu kpáku** **kpɔɛ**, instead of b. **Lemu ñɔu** **kpɔɛ**
 Lemu take/carry.PRES medicine Lemu drink.PRES medicine
 Lemu is taking/carrying medicine. Lemu is taking medicine.

The use of **kpáɣ** instead of **súɣ** (15b) and **kpáku** instead of **ñɔu** (16b) shows that (i) the use of **kpáku** differs from that of *prendre* in French, and (ii) the speakers are mainly influenced by French. For a traditional Kabiye monolingual who has no contact with French, (15a) is unacceptable because a person cannot carry a car on the head. Similarly, in Kabiye, medicine (traditionally liquid) can only be drunk not taken. Nevertheless, Kabiye-French bilinguals do understand each other since the meanings are inferred from the target French verb. It should also be noted that these semantic borrowings are not limited only to educated Kabiye-French bilinguals; they are also gaining ground elsewhere, particularly among younger monolingual Kabiye speakers as well as people with limited formal education in urban areas.

5.3. FRENCH CALQUES IN KABIYE FORMS OF ADDRESS

French influence is also observed in the forms of address in Kabiye. In this domain, it is noted that younger speakers often greet older people and of higher status using the French *vous* ‘you plural’ form. In Kabiye, the appropriate subject or object pronoun used as address term is the *tu* (*T*) ‘you singular’ form, whatever the age or social status of the addressee. However, current usage of Kabiye subject/object pronoun shows that “power semantic” *vous* (*V*) (Brown & Gilman. 1960) (i.e. **í-**, **mí-**, and **mi**)⁴ has been transferred into Kabiye and used in contexts in which the singular subject/object pronouns, **ɲ-/-ɲ’** are normally used. For example, during my interview with a high school teacher, one of his students came to see him and greeted him in the terms:

- (17) **í-liwa** **ɛ...**?
 2PL-go.out QP
 Good morning

The teacher then replies:

- (18) **ɲ-liwa ɛ, léé** **ɲ-wóki tɛ** ?
 2SG-go.out where 2SG-go QP
 Good morning, how are you?

In traditional Kabiye, even though the teacher is ‘superior’, or of higher status, the student will normally not use the plural pronoun subject **-í** ‘you (pl)’ to address him. The appropriate pronoun in this case would be the singular **ɲ-** ‘you sg’ (**ɲ-liwa ɛ, ...**). The student however, chose the appropriate address term of ‘respect’ in French, *V* to address someone superior than oneself (here, one’s teacher). Similarly, the teacher replies accordingly with the *T* form. Further illustrations of the use of “power semantic” *V* can be seen in (4), (5), (7), and (9), as seen earlier.

Observe, however that sometimes, younger speakers do mix the “power semantic” *vous* and the “solidarity semantic” *tu* (Brown & Gilman. 1960) or maintain the *T* form all through within the same interaction. This is illustrated in (8) and (10), repeated below as

(19) and (20) for convenience.

(19) *frɛrɛ, ŋ-ŋ-lakl-m* *visiter Dimanche wiyé-o? í-kɔ* *qi-lá*
 brother, 2SG-NEG-do.PRES-me to visit Sunday day-FOC 2PL-come 1PL-do
 Brother, aren't you visiting me on Sunday? When you come, we can do it.

(20) *eyáa lábí-ŋ* *attendre páa se deđe* *ŋ-ti-kó*
 people do.PAST-you.SG to wait EP that yesterday 2SG-NEG-come
 People waited for you for a long time yesterday, but you did not come.

Examples (19) and (20) can be explained by the fact that despite the influence of a powerful and prestigious language, French, Kabiye-French bilinguals have not totally shifted to the *V* form in all their address forms.

These new constructions show that C-S and semantic borrowing can change the grammar of a language by creating new forms in the language. The introduction of new forms due to the influence of a socially and economically powerful language has been found in other language pairs such as Lingala-French and Kiswahili-English (Kamwangamalu 1989, 2000, Sesep 1978, Mkilifi 1978).

6. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data on Kabiye-French bilinguals' speech reveals that the influence of French revolves mainly around the insertion of French items, semantic borrowing from French into Kabiye, and particularly, the introduction of new forms previously unknown to the Kabiye community. The current increase in the use of French and the grammatical and lexical changes observed due to the influence of French can be explained by the prestige and high status carried by that language, due mainly to its instrumental value in the "market place" (Calvet 1992) in Togo. This process is in fact what Chisanga (2000) refers to as a natural propensity for languages to acquire new characteristics in order to meet changing circumstances. Because French terms are considered prestigious, speakers use them to gain or even increase their own prestige.

My study confirms other studies that code-switching often results in changes and innovations in the structure of the African language due to the influence of the Western language. However, in order to maintain their language, Kabiye speakers use language maintenance mechanisms to prevent Kabiye from being corrupted by such a powerful language, as French.

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