



**Exploring Transliteration in the Algerian Advertising
Billboards.**

**Exploration de la translittération dans les panneaux
publicitaires algériens.**

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Reçu : 26/04/2023

Accepté : 30/05/2023

Publié : 20/08/2023

Résumé: L'utilisation de l'alternance et mélanges codiques dans n'importe quelle instance de production de langue pourrait également impliquer la translittération si nécessaire. Un miroir de cet usage est le discours publicitaire, qui se prévaut généralement de ce phénomène linguistique à des fins commerciales. Par conséquent, il convient de visualiser cette idée à travers ce traité en examinant les instances de l'alternance et mélanges codiques translittérés omniprésents dans les panneaux publicitaires Algériens. À cet égard, bien que la translittération puisse être abordée sous n'importe quelle forme, cette étude n'en aborde que trois : l'altération des consonnes, l'altération des voyelles et l'altération intrusive des voyelles et des consonnes. Pour cela, une analyse du discours publicitaire sur sept panneaux publicitaires est menée. Les résultats ont montré que les concepteurs publicitaires violent les aspects phonologiques et graphémiques des langues Française et Anglaise.

Mots clés : Translittération, alternance codique, mélange de code, langue, prononciation.



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Abstract: The use of code switching and code mixing in whatever language production instance might also involve transliteration when needed. A mirror of this use is the discourse of advertising, which generally avails itself of this linguistic phenomenon for commercial purposes. Therefore, it is worth visualizing this idea through this treatise by examining the instances of the transliterated code mixing and code switching omnipresent in the Algerian advertising billboards. In this regard, while transliteration might be approached in any form it may take, this study addresses only three: consonant alteration, vowel alteration, and intrusive vowel and consonant alteration. To this end, an analysis of the advertising discourse on seven billboards is conducted. The results have shown that advertising designers are violating the phonological and graphemic aspects of the French and English languages.

Keywords : Transliteration, code switching, code mixing, language, pronunciation

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1. Introduction :

Despite the fact that Petrof (1993), Gerritsen et al. (2000), and Piller (2001) approached the use of foreign languages as “an attention getting device”, their works did not pay attention to the role that might be played by the strategy of representing the sounds of the source language in the alphabet of the target language, referred to as transliteration (Md. Faruquzzaman Akan, 2018, p. 3). Likewise, studies of advertising discourse in general and the written one in particular have tended to put more emphasis on the persuasive functions of code switching and code mixing-without reference to transliteration. For example, in his study, Tay, M.W.J. (1989, p. 408), approached code mixing as the embedding or mixing of words, phrases, and sentences from two codes within the same speech event and across sentence boundaries. He also approached code mixing as the embedding or mixing of morphemes, words, phrases, and clauses from two different grammatical systems or subsystems within the same sentence and the same speech situation. That is, while studying code mixing and code switching in persuasive advertising discourse, transliteration is overlooked. Indeed, and as far as my knowledge goes, transliterated code switching and code mixing in the Algerian context are generally rarely explored. Therefore, it is worth taking a first step to explore this research gap in this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Code switching and Code Mixing in Outdoor Advertising

Outdoor advertising has long been and is still regarded as one of the most crucial elements of the modern media complex. It has become an essential component of the urban landscape. Rob Bowdery (2008) sums up what it is all about through the AIDA theory acronym: “your advert needs to attract the **Attention** of the customer, deliver relevant **Information**, persuade the customer that they **Desire** this product or service, and finally, provide a call to **Action** that encourages or enables customers to purchase your product.” (p.91). The ultimate aim behind this is to push forward a purchase action.

For advertising discourse to attract consumers attention, deliver relevant information, and persuade consumers and, therefore, achieve purchase actions, copywriters may go about ads writing in many ways to make their advertisement appealing, including transliteration. Also, one of the commonly used technique

that has been recently noticed is involves code mixing and code switching in their texts. It is noteworthy to mention that the appropriateness of using these strategies, to a great extent, depends on context. That is to say, advertisers need to know “when it is and is not appropriate to communicate to the target audience in this manner.” (Melissa and Mark 2017, p. 1000) In this regard, advertisers should take into consideration factors such as 1) attitudes toward languages, 2) attitudes toward the practice of code switching, and, 3) the presence of inter-group tension as expressed through language use. (ibid).

To see how advertisers encode advertising texts in their ads, it is necessary to look in the context of this study, not at code switching/ code mixing as a linguistic phenomenon itself, but at the way they transliterate foreign items into the language of the audience.

2.2 Transliteration

Emon et al. (2018) define transliteration as “the process of converting sequences from one writing system to another.” (p.449). Similarly, Reima Al-Jarf (2022) states that it refers to “the conversion of words from the alphabet of one language to the alphabet of another without changing the pronunciation of the words.” (p.81). That is to say, opting for transliteration means some items can be adapted according to the demands of the new market’s alphabet. Though it has some advantages, the transliteration strategy is not without disadvantages. According to Latesh Kumari (2014), using this technique in advertising is not very common. However, when it is used, it attracts readers’ attention and produces a positive result. This is not always the case. Emon et al. (2018), for instance, state that: “transliteration of Indic languages to Latin script is particularly challenging due to the large combination of consonants, vowels, and diacritics that result in a non-unique mapping.” (ibid). Similarly, from a preliminary observation of our data, we noticed some sounds in English are inappropriately represented in the Arabic Alphabet, resulting in difficulty in readability.

Figure N° 1



This billboard includes French, transliterated French in Arabic ‘كيا’ for ‘KIA’, transliterated English in Arabic ‘غولبال غروب’ for ‘Global Group’, Standard Arabic and transliterated Arabic in French ‘AL Djazair’. The case for ‘Global Group’ seems ill-transliterated since, phonetically, there is no equivalence for /g/ and /p/ sounds in Arabic. The letter ‘ق’ is not used for the transcription of Modern Standard Arabic, but can be used to represent a voiced velar stop consonant /g/ only in writing dialectal Arabic. Global Group / غولبال غروب / can be used for fun, but the term “غروب” can be read as “sun set” and thus making no sense.

3. Research Questions

This paper encompasses a number of underlying motifs, which are reflected in two research questions, and considers the language of advertising in explaining transliterated code switching and/or code mixing and their applicability into written advertising texts as products.

1. At which levels does transliteration occur?
2. What are the phonological-graphemic issues copywriters make in their advertisements?

4. Methodology

The data in this paper is empirically vested in the instances of language transliterated into Arabic, French, or English and used in natural settings-advertising billboards. Reporting (Gonzales et al. 2008, p. 3), Louis Cohen et al. (2018, p. 288) reveal that “qualitative research provides an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviors, and these are well served by naturalistic enquiry.” (p.288). Thus, this study is exploratory, and the qualitative method is the most suitable one.

5. Findings

5.1. Consonant Alteration

When producing transliterated words from Latin into the Arabic alphabet, advertising designers attempt to match the closest pronunciation of the French words. Since there are some phonological patterns that do not correspond identically, readers may have to reread some sound alternations as they seem like new words at first glance. To illustrate, in the following billboard, the French consonant /p/ is replaced by its voiced counterpart /b/ in medial position as in the word “rapide” (Figure 2). Advertising designers have no choice but to replace this consonant with /ب/ because there is no phoneme equivalent of /p/ in Arabic. Therefore, to facilitate the word production, they transliterate it as [رابط]. Using this Arabic script  displays some issues with phonology and phonetics. Another problem is vowel lengthening. The short French vowel /i/ is lengthened to /i:/ to replace the problem of the Arabic diacritic, the kasra – a diacritic in the form of a dash used beneath the consonant. This distorts not only the French pronunciation but even the Arabic one. The Arabic sound ‘ر’ i.e / r / , the voiced dental trill does not correspond to the French sound ‘r’ i.e /ʁ/altering thus the pronunciation producing a funny one to the French ear , [ra:bi:d] instead of [ʁapid].

Figure N° 2



Another similar example that occurs in the initial position is the French word “vache” in Figure 3, transliterated as “فاش” in Arabic. Though the consonant /v/ does not exist in the Arabic alphabets, it is used to facilitate reading. The target segment reading this example, therefore, resorts to the closest native sound available in their repertoire.

Figure N° 3



Figure N° 4



What is noticed in Figure 4 is that the copywriter uses dialectal Arabic – French intra-word mixing and French transliterated into Arabic as “كونيكتي، بارتاجي” and “مودم” respectively. The processing strategy of these examples concerns the morpho-phonological adaptation of the French verbs ‘connecter’ and ‘partager’ into dialectal Arabic, creating verbs with the use of the DA inflectional bound morpheme: كونيكتي, بارتاجي. This shows how the copywriter is knowledgeable regarding his audience’s daily language use.

These unusual and funny orthographic use of Arabic lexical items will certainly attract the audience to spend some time to decode them and may thus be memorized. Copywriters are also using violation of phonetic, phonological, and orthographic rules as an attraction strategy. For instance, the phoneme /ب/ in place of the French /p/, which is a case of transphonemisation.

5.2. Vowel Alteration

To suit the sound patterns of Algerian dialectal Arabic, vowels in French lexical items may undergo two main types of alteration: substitution and/or lengthening. Vowel substitution may be due to their absence from dialectal Arabic, a preference for one vowel over another, or for vowel harmony in a word. Vowels that are not found in dialectal Arabic are substituted by others when they occur in some French lexical items. An example of this, as shown in the following Figure 5, is the French vowel /et/ which is usually rendered as /ee/ as in /براسلي/ for “bracelet”.

Figure N° 5



Figure N° 6



Algerian dialectal Arabic shows preference for /i/ over /e/ in some loanwords. As shown in Figure 6 the French loanword “télévision” is transliterated into the Arabic alphabets as /tilifizjoon/. Vowels are sometimes lengthened when they are in a stressed syllable. It is clarified in the transformation of /o/ to /oo/ in the same word. This four-consonantal word receiving stress on the final syllable is lengthened in both standard and dialectal Arabic and pronounced as /tilifiz'joon/. Therefore, vowels are altered to simplify the pronunciation of loanwords to suit the stress patterns of standard/ Algerian dialectal Arabic. This is

especially so due to the misrepresentation, and sometimes lack of representation, of vowel sounds in the spelling of Arabic.

5.3. Intrusive Vowels and Consonants

One of the phonological constraints that the Algerian dialect is subject to, which leads loanwords to accommodate it, is that no two vowels can occur in succession without being separated by an intrusive consonant. To overcome this constraint, for instance, the feminine singular suffix /a/ at the end of some loanwords is usually turned into /-et/ when inflected for the genitive. In the following billboard, the word “battery” or “batteria” in Arabic, pronounced as /ba’tarijja/ in isolation, becomes /ba’tarijjet/.

Figure N° 7



6. Conclusion:

This study is an empirical attempt to figure out the instances of transliteration on the Algerian billboards where code switching and code mixing is/are involved. While there are several ways to approach transliteration in this regard, only three were covered in this study: consonant alteration, vowel alteration, and intrusive vowel and consonant alteration. The findings indicate that advertising designers are violating the French and English languages’ phonological and graphemic rules.

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