Layers of multilingualism and ideas of language

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Structure of the talk

- A glimpse at multilingualism in Senegal from the perspective of named languages
- A zoom on multilingual practices, focusing on Wolof and French (“Urban Wolof”)
- A look at two layers of multilingualism in which Wolof and French participate

A shift in perspective from language to practice
A shift from assuming fixed or no boundaries at all to look at individual repertoires
Preliminaries: multilingualism in Senegal

Spoken multilingualism

- Official contexts, including schools;
- Some urban settings;
- Contexts where formally educated speakers don’t share another lingua franca

- Homes;
- Schools;
- Translocal contexts

- Lébou
- Bassari
- Pepel
- Gujaher
- Soninké
- Mancagne
- Maninka
- Gubééher
- Niominka

Also LWC

Not LWC
Small-scale multilingualism

- “African Frontier” situation (Kopytoff 1987) where only small groups can (could?) thrive
- Survival requires multiple & flexible alliances
- Speaking several languages serves to index different affinities as required by context
- Nominal identities based on patrilineal descent are not evoked in all contexts and not matched by practices

Official written multilingualism

- The official language of Senegal is French.
- French and Arabic are the only languages that are the official media of instruction in schools.
- All languages spoken in Senegal can attain the status of national language through their codification.
- Ca. 19 languages have attained codified status so far.

Text in three Baïnounk languages illustrating the codification of “Bainounk” in the official alphabet for Senegalese languages
Lead writing cultures vs. the standard

French orthography is used for writing in Latin script. The Warsh tradition is used for writing in the Arabic script.

Actual written multilingualism

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official and standardised</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Unofficial but conventionalised</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the Latin alphabet and standard spelling</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>In the Latin alphabet in francised spelling in text messages and social media</td>
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<td>In the Arabic script for religious, ritual and personal use and poetry. In francised Latin spelling in social media etc.</td>
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Two layers of multilingualism

Polyglossic multilingualism

Hierarchical relationships between languages and domain specialisations for them

Nationally

Locally

Small-scale multilingualism

No hierarchical relationships between languages, and not domain specialisation

Code-oriented perspectives on Urban Wolof

• Some snapshots of West African multilingualism
• A zoom on Senegal
• Why is this relevant?
Boundaries evoked by standard language culture

“No, mélanger ak olof barewul de. Mélanger ak Français, moo bare, mo gëna bare. Mélanger ak olof? No no no no.”

’No, there is not a lot of mixture [ of Casamance languages] with Wolof. The mixture with French, it is a lot, it is more. A mixture with Wolof? No no no no.’

... but not by local writers

Marie Pierre Biagu: Les brinois Kasscumay
‘Guys of Brin, hi there.’

Ousseynou Sadio: Les si fiarou boudji lobé
‘Hey, the monkeys, what are you saying?’

Christiane Ines Biagu: wa dji reme founah fafou
‘What have you been drinking that day?’

TheKing Cain: sama gay yi beugue na lene
‘My guys, I like you.’
The origins of Urban Wolof

**Precolonial broker language**
- Due to the geographical location of Wolof speakers on the Dakar peninsula, contact with French traders started in the 17th century
- Wolof became a broker language assimilating French vocabulary (McLaughlin 2008, 2009)

**Postcolonial Creole**
- New speech code associated with an urban elite
- Expresses a dual and urban identity
- Linked to a postcolonial setting (Swigart 1994)
Contemporary trends for Urban Wolof

**Vehicularisation**
- In parts of Senegal and Guinea Bissau without high proportions of identity speakers of Wolof
- Used as a lingua franca, in popular culture and for expressing urbanity

**Vernacularisation**
- In the urban centre Dakar
- Rural identities of migrants become altered over generations
- A new urban identity becomes associated with speaking and “being” Wolof


A speaker-oriented perspective on “Urban Wolof”
Hortense Diandy

- Hortense Diandy spent her entire life in Agnack, a small village in Casamance.
- She is highly multilingual and speaks Wolof.
- She has no formal schooling and has not learned French as a separate code.
- She uses Wolof to communicate with those of her children and grandchildren who grew up in Dakar.

Repertoire: Urban Wolof, no French

Jaqueline Biai

- Jaqueline Biai has been married into Agnack and comes from a village in near-by Guinea Bissau.
- She learned Portuguese at school and is now informally picking up French.
- Wolof is part of her multilingual repertoire.

Repertoire: Urban Wolof, Senegal French
Prospère Mané

- Prospère Mané grew up in Agnack until the age of 7.
- Since then, he has been fostered out with family friends in Dakar.
- He has lost all codes in his repertoire and only speaks Wolof to his family now.
- He learns Standard French at school.

Repertoire: Urban Wolof, Standard French

Alpha Mané

- Alpha Mané has lived with Wolof-speaking hosts while attending high school.
- His brother lives in Dakar and doesn’t speak Baïnounk Gujaher anymore, so they communicate in Wolof.
- His mother splits her time between the two brothers.

Repertoire: Urban Wolof, Standard French
Zooming out

Mobile speakers in a dialectic process
Vernacularisation of Urban Wolof

Dakar

Agnack

Vehicularisation of Urban Wolof
The ambivalent role of Wolof in the repertoires

- Wolof dominates the national linguistic market place.
- Speakers of other languages symbolically fight for the recognition of their languages as discrete codes in this polyglossic arena.

Bainounk Gujaher orthography workshop introducing the standard orthography based on Wolof

Publicity materials produced by Bainounk activists

This participation in the polyglossic market place remains symbolic.
Symbolic ideologies and language practices don’t match

- While non-ethnic Wolof invoke the “wolofisation” of the country and symbolically react to it, this has no actual influence on their linguistic behaviour.
- Wolof is integrated into the multilingual repertoires according to adaptive situational needs.

Symbolic reaction to polyglossic setting at the national level

Lived multilingualism following the egalitarian small-scale multilingualism patterns