

# Code-switching among Tunisian women and its impact on identity

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**Abstract:** When France made Tunisia a protectorate in 1881, they introduced language policies that established French as the language of the public sphere and restricted Arabic to religion and the home. Until Tunisian independence in 1956, French was officially the language of social and economic mobility and even after the establishment of the republic French persisted unofficially as the language of the public sphere. It maintained this role despite the establishment of Arabic as the official language and the ultimately failed policies of Arabization. This study will focus on code-switching in Tunisia, or the habitual switching between French and Arabic that many citizens practice. Based on interviews with several Tunisian women who came of age during the transition from the protectorate to the republic, this paper attempts to prove that French and Arabic are politically charged languages that signify identity in Tunisia. The research, however, indicates that the issue is too complicated to be explained with a single theory that equates language and identity.

## I. Introduction

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish grammarian Antonio de Nebrija once said: “Language has always been the companion of empire.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the French occupation of Tunisia demonstrated the weapon-like role language can play. When the French established the Tunisian protectorate in 1881 they set in motion a linguistic encounter that continues to shape social interactions in Tunisia decades after independence. The question at present is to what extent this weapon of empire retains its edge and to what extent it has been dulled and internalized into Tunisian society. This paper will explore these ideas through an examination of current language habits in Tunisia. Specifically, the paper will consider the phenomenon among Tunisian women of 60-70 years old of code-switching between French and (Tunisian) Arabic; it will explore whether language choices in conversations are indicative of social identity. Code-switching refers to the phenomenon of switching from one language to another in everyday life.<sup>2</sup> My research will endeavor to support the thesis that code-switching between French and Arabic carries implications for identity because of the politically charged characteristics of both languages. The paper will attempt to prove the thesis in several steps. First, the introduction will establish the basics of the language climate in Tunisia. Following that, the paper will outline relevant theories about the connections between language and identity and consider their relevance to a Tunisian case study. After the paper is grounded in theory, I will present my field work research. The research involved observing Tunisian women’s language habits and interviewing them about their perceptions of language and identity. The research will be analyzed based on the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, “Language Ideology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 67

<sup>2</sup> Peter Sutton, “Educational language planning and linguistic identity,” *International Review of Education* 31.1 (1991): 138

established theories. Lastly, the paper will make brief hypotheses about what this research could imply about the future language situation in Tunisia and suggest further areas of study.

As the aforementioned agenda indicates, the research will take many forms. I will include work published previously in academic journals by other authors, but there is a great need to test these theories and, especially, to assess the extent to which one might apply them to Tunisia. The work done in this project is largely historical in perspective and, thus, its immediate relevance may not be wholly apparent. However, it may be that through studying the historical factors that created certain language-identity associations that one can hypothesize about future language dynamics. Specifically, this information could be used to assess the issues that might arise as English gains more ground in both Tunisia and the globe; English now rivals French in popularity as a teaching medium in higher education.<sup>3</sup> Globalization has replaced colonialism as the avenue through which languages are spread. This research will hopefully provide some grounding for such future studies.

### **The language situation in Tunisia**

Situated in North Africa on the Mediterranean coast, Tunisia has seen its share of foreign intruders. A possession that passed between Roman, Arab, Ottoman Turk and French hands, Tunisia is an exceptional place to study the political and social influences of language. Moha Ennaji writes: “One should not think...that all the inhabitants of the Maghreb are multilingual...Speakers range from monolingual Berber or Dialectal Arabic speakers to those who can use the two varieties of Arabic as well as one or two European languages in their

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<sup>3</sup> Moha Ennaji, “Aspects of multilingualism in the Maghreb,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 87 (1991): 19

everyday life for specific purposes.”<sup>4</sup> The language dynamics in the Maghreb and Tunisia in particular are complex and deserve a closer examination. While the point of this paper is not to examine how different languages came to exist in Tunisian society, it would be helpful to begin the paper with a brief overview of these languages. One can then better understand the circumstances that were at work during the French protectorate and after 1956 independence.

When setting the stage for Arabic-French code-switching, it is logical to first focus on Arabic, the language that established itself in Tunisia long before French. However, one must differentiate between the categories of Arabic. First, there is Classical Arabic, a codified language that is irrevocably associated with Islam. It is a sacred language used in prayer and the Koran but few have a fluent grasp of it because of its high level of difficulty.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is the official language of Arab states, including Tunisia. Efforts have been made to popularize Arabic through a new form, Modern Standard Arabic. Also a written language, Modern Standard is associated with Arabization and the attempt to spread a sense of universal culture in the Arab world. Its original aim in the Maghreb was to replace French as a medium of expressing modernity.<sup>6</sup> It is seen today as easier and as more useful than Classical Arabic but is learned in school and is no one’s mother tongue.<sup>7</sup> Finally, there is dialectal Arabic, which is unique to each Arab country and is spoken at home as the mother tongue. It is not a written language, and is seen as the language of the street and home, rather than the language of education, modernity or public life. The 1975 International Conference on Arabization urged governments to stop the use of dialect in art, and today the language has little substantial government support. Dialect, however, is less stigmatized in Tunisia than elsewhere in the Maghreb. The first president of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ennaji: 7

<sup>5</sup> Ennaji: 8

<sup>6</sup> Ennaji: 9

<sup>7</sup> Ennaji: 10

republic, Habib Bourguiba, used dialectal Arabic in many speeches and recognized its importance for effective communication with the population.<sup>8</sup> One reason behind the relative lack of stigmatism may be because of Tunisia's relatively small Berber population. While Berber is the mother tongue of 40 percent of Moroccans and 25 percent of Algerians, it is the mother tongue of just one percent of Tunisians.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, Morocco and Algeria might place greater prestige on the "higher" forms of Arabic because of their association with Arab cultural preeminence. Unless otherwise indicated, when this paper refers to the Arabic used between the speakers in conversations the assumption will be that it is Tunisian dialect.

Dialectal Arabic in Tunisia, as in the entire Maghreb, is heavily influenced by French and a significant portion of the vocabulary is directly borrowed or adapted from French. Nonetheless, French holds its own status in the language field. It is still popular despite Arabization policies; French media still outsells Arabic media in Tunisia. Similar to how French influences Tunisian dialect, French in Tunisia also borrows from Arabic.<sup>10</sup> It is the mutual borrowing characterizing the two principal languages of Tunisia that is the first indication that the country is rich ground for studying code-switching. Now that the language setting is clearer, the paper will examine the connections between identity and language and the politics of language policies.

## **II. Language and Identity**

This section will make clear the main ideas behind this paper's supposition that code-switching habits are indicative of perceptions of self identity by presenting the theoretical foundations of the research. First, the ideological undertones of language will be explored, including the ability of language to create group identity. Next, the paper will expand on the

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<sup>8</sup> Ennaji: 13

<sup>9</sup> Ennaji: 14

<sup>10</sup> Ennaji: 18

connection between politics and language by examining the nature of language planning. Specific references will be made to Tunisia's language policies as a French protectorate and as an independent republic. This information will provide the necessary context to analyze my field work observations.

### **Language as a basis of group dynamics**

Characterizing the 75-year period of French control in Tunisia as a period of political dominance would be a too limited description. The creation of the French protectorate ushered in a new era in which language became not just a medium of communication, but a declaration of social and political identity. The inundation of French into a society that had previously been 100 percent Arabic-speaking put into sharp relief the connotations attached to speaking a language.<sup>11</sup> In order to assess the specific case of Tunisia, however, it is first necessary to look at the general theories about the correlation between language and identity. A multilingual situation such as that in Tunisia creates a hyperconsciousness in speakers, in which one thinks about the language in which one speaks more than one would in a monolingual society.<sup>12</sup> The colonial encounter in particular highlights the ideologies that underlie languages.<sup>13</sup> This ideology includes "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests."<sup>14</sup> An event like the arrival of the French in Tunisia, an event in which two different communities come into contact, may lead to reconfigurations and reassessments of speech patterns that reflect changes in social ideologies. In one scenario,

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<sup>11</sup> Craig A. Sirles, "Politics and Arabization: the evolution of postindependence North Africa," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 137 (1999): 116

<sup>12</sup> Madeleine Dobie, "Francophone Studies and the Linguistic Diversity of the Maghreb," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23 (2003): 35

<sup>13</sup> Woolard and Schieffelin, "Language Ideology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 56

<sup>14</sup> Woolard and Schieffelin: 57

borrowing words from the newly encountered language and integrating them into one's existing language may indicate a high regard for the donor language. This encounter also has the potential to serve as an impetus to delineate a language for the community that the donor language has occupied.<sup>15</sup> In the latter situation, speaking a language is a way of declaring a belonging to a specific, closed group whereas the former situation might indicate a greater openness. These groups are not necessarily bound by borders; they are instead imagined nations based around linguistic homogeneity.<sup>16</sup> The contrasting scenarios mentioned demonstrate that the association of languages with community identities has the equal potential to be either a sign of estrangement or one of acculturation.<sup>17</sup>

Switching between languages and keeping group associations separate, rather than incorporating words from a donor language into one's existing language, is more likely to occur when politicization of identity is paramount.<sup>18</sup> Deeply-rooted cultural and personal attitudes, including perceptions of modernity and openness, affect speaking habits.<sup>19</sup> Switching between languages, however, can be psychologically taxing. The speaker may feel frustrated about her command of the languages, but she may also be affected by the possible switching of identities.<sup>20</sup> When one language community begins to integrate a new language into their vernacular, they still might attempt to create a semblance of homogeneity and use what lexical and grammatical resources they have to create, in greetings and other formulaic ways, their sense of belonging together."<sup>21</sup> This process may, in fact, lead to the development of new language patterns. Bonnie Urciuoli uses the terms "matrix language" to describe one's mother tongue, and "embedded

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<sup>15</sup> Woolard and Schieffelin: 62

<sup>16</sup> Bonnie Urciuoli, "Language and Borders," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 527

<sup>17</sup> Ennaji: 21

<sup>18</sup> Urciuoli: 527

<sup>19</sup> Dobie: 34

<sup>20</sup> Ennaji: 22

<sup>21</sup> Urciuoli: 530

language” to describe the language that is introduced and incorporated into one’s habits.<sup>22</sup> Which language is which differs on the basis of social factors like economics. The embedding of cultural identity through language demonstrates that identity has become de-territorialized; it is no longer always associated with a specific area of the world, but with certain ideologies. Boundaries remain in other aspects. Those in power may develop speaking habits that enclose them in an elite group, including switching completely from the common language of the community to the imported one.<sup>23</sup> This phenomenon creates boundaries on identity, assigning specific social identity characteristics to linguistic groups. Those excluded from the elite group may also react, and feel more compelled to use language as a unifying factor within their own group and solidify their identity in opposition to the elites.

### **The Politics of Language Planning**

In many cases the members of the aforementioned elite class and the government officials overlap. These are the people with the power to assign roles to language. They may be guided by their equation of language and national identity, although their personal histories certainly influence their perceptions of what constitutes national identity.<sup>24</sup> It may be difficult to directly regulate what language(s) parents pass on to their children as mother tongues, but language planning choices still influence the population at large because of their far reach. Political decisions are made about the languages used in government and education.<sup>25</sup> Language planning sends a message about which languages will be tolerated, and sets up a linguistic hierarchy. Postcolonial states, particularly, tend to organize their societies around projects that

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<sup>22</sup> Urciuoli: 527

<sup>23</sup> Urciuoli 535

<sup>24</sup> Sutton: 150

<sup>25</sup> Sutton: 140



relate cultural identity to economic and political development and this association is apparent in language planning.<sup>26</sup> There is in this situation the assumption that language equals culture. Whether or not this assumption is inherently true is less important than the fact that the perpetuation of such an assumption through language planning may make it the reality in the citizens' minds. As the top-down language planning changes over time, so do perceptions of self and use of language. The next two segments of this paper will demonstrate the potential motivations and effects of these shifts through a look at Tunisia as a French protectorate and as an independent state. Together these political histories set the stage for looking at the motivations and implications of code-switching in Tunisia.

#### *A. The French protectorate: 1881-1956*

The 1881 establishment of a French protectorate in Tunisia marked France's second occupation in the Maghreb; Algeria had been colonized in 1830 and Morocco would later become a protectorate in 1912. The French approach to colonialism was unique and lends itself particularly well to an examination of language and identity. The British colonial missions implemented language policies that stressed the separateness of the European and African identities by not encouraging linguistic assimilation. The French took a different approach and sought to establish a more universal identity to which a limited number of African elites could belong once they learned the French language and the ideology that accompanied it.<sup>27</sup> Taking power in Tunisia was a "*mission civilisatrice*" for the French.<sup>28</sup> Whereas the British focused

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<sup>26</sup> Ronald A. T. Judy, "Some Notes on the Status of Global English in Tunisia," *boundary 2* 26.2 (1999): 6

<sup>27</sup> Sirles: 117

<sup>28</sup> Sirles: 118

chiefly on economic exploitation, the French goals were largely cultural in nature.<sup>29</sup> The notion of cultural superiority, as evidenced through the high status they gave their language over Arabic, was seen as a justification of colonialism.<sup>30</sup> The French classified Arabic (both classical and dialectal) as a lesser language and thus classified its speakers as belonging to an inferior society and backwards ways of life. The strong social connotations of French and its presentation as a superior language explain “the somewhat stronger language loyalty among francophone Africans than among their Anglophone counterparts...the status of English in post independence Africa does not carry the same emotional weight as do issues involving the status of French.”<sup>31</sup>

It has been established here that the French sought to infiltrate Tunisia through language, but the issue at hand now is how this goal was accomplished. How did French shift from being the language of the conqueror to being integrated into everyday speech and interaction? The colonial administration’s language planning exemplifies the manner in which language and ideology can be conflated and perpetuated. The choice of language had not only ideological motivations, based on the superior perception of French language and society, but it also had practical consequences.<sup>32</sup> The French implemented their language as the language of government, business and secular education, a decision which put the Tunisian subjects under French control.<sup>33</sup> The administration forced Arabic speakers to acquire an adequate command of French by making it the only language of social mobility. Advancement politically or economically required speaking French. One of the ramifications of this policy was that French became associated with modernity and economic advancement, an association that reinforced the

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<sup>29</sup> Mark I. Choate, “Identity politics and political perception in the European settlement of Tunisia: The French colony versus the Italian colony,” *French Colonial History* 8 (2007): 98

<sup>30</sup> Woolard and Schieffelin: 63

<sup>31</sup> Sirles: 117

<sup>32</sup> Woolard and Schieffelin: 67

<sup>33</sup> Dobie: 33

French justification of the protectorate. Second, the policy relegated French and Arabic to different social domains; French took over the official and public spheres, except for the mosque, while Arabic (regardless of style) was narrowed to the home and religion.

The establishment of the French protectorate in Tunisia exemplifies how a government's language planning shapes the role of languages in a society and instills the ideology attached to them. The ideological and political objectives of the French bureaucracy would in fact have far-reaching implications and lasting effects on the roles of language in Tunisia. The language policies after 1956 will be discussed now with the intention of further explaining how the phenomenon of code-switching took root in Tunisia.

#### *B. Independent Tunisia: 1956-present*

When the French protectorate ended in 1956 the only viable education system was in French; a system that used Arabic as the medium of teaching, even in the lower grades, was not to be found.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, after Habib Bourguiba became the first president of the independent state in 1956, linguistic and cultural ties to France continued to dominate the Arabic language. Initially he had favored Arabization – or the elevation of Arabic to the status of the sole language of the government and the sole language of instruction in education – despite the fact that he and the other members of the political elite received French educations. Soon, however, he publicly favored French language and culture and pressed for the expansion of the *Francophonie*, the organization of French-speaking nations.<sup>35</sup> Bourguiba hoped to create a modernized state and, in doing so, tied modernization with the French language. French was given a privileged place in the education system with the intention of facilitating the creation of

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<sup>34</sup> Sirles: 118

<sup>35</sup> Sirles: 122

the nation's future modern public figures.<sup>36</sup> The Tunisian republic stressed its biculturalism and its ties to the West through language and indelibly associated French with modernity and progress. In this sociopolitical context, Arabic had little choice but to default to the language of tradition; it was to be consigned to the private sphere. Bourguiba thus created a climate which encouraged bilingualism, but also a greater consciousness of what language one speaks and when.

In light of Bourguiba's language planning, the question arises: why was Arabization deemphasized? Arabization seemed to be the direction of choice among the newly independent Maghreb in the 1960s, including reform in Algeria after its 1962 independence. The process was meant to remedy the effects of a 75-year lack of public discourse in Arabic in Tunisia and to produce "an Arabic modernity as well as an integral national linguistic space of cultural authenticity."<sup>37</sup> Like French, Arabic vied for the position of a modernizing language. Unlike Morocco and Algeria, states which have large Berber populations, Tunisia's population is nearly 100 percent native-Arabic-speaking.<sup>38</sup> Hypothetically, Arabization should thus have found its firmest ground in Tunisia. In reality the country remains more francophone than Morocco or Algeria. Although Bourguiba followed the other leaders and imposed Arabic as the official language, French was too deeply ingrained in government and education to be rapidly replaced on a widespread scale by Arabic.<sup>39</sup>

Post independence Tunisia initially presented the continued use of French in public life as an interim strategy, a bridge between the colonial language planning and the widespread

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<sup>36</sup> Sirles: 122

<sup>37</sup> Judy: 6

<sup>38</sup> Sirles: 116

<sup>39</sup> Dobie: 34

establishment of Arabic as the national language.<sup>40</sup> It could be argued that French cultural influences were also left standing for the time being as Tunisia sought to establish its own identity. Yet over time complete Arabization fell short. The infrastructure was simply not there. The lack of Arabic infrastructure in the public sphere meant a continued, uncontested association of French with modernity and stunted Arabization in Tunisia. The members of the government were nearly all French-educated and most Tunisians lived close to the most francophone areas of the country, the coasts where the French had settled. Tunisian literacy rates in Arabic and French at this time were roughly equal.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Arabization never became the politically charged issue that it was in neighboring Algeria. Several factors may be responsible for the lack of language polarization. First, the French colonized Algeria whereas they made Tunisia a protectorate, indicating a much more pervasive control of everyday Algerian life, the resentment of which was evidenced by the 7-year bloody war for independence.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, Algeria had to contend with a large Berber language fighting for their language rights and thus had more contested identities to manage and appease. Tunisia, alternately, had only to negotiate the path between Arabic and French, languages which had already been established as belonging to separate areas of life. The Tunisian leadership saw no conflict between the path of modernization enabled by French and the traditional societal values ingrained in Arabic.<sup>43</sup> Under the second president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, French continues to be the language of social mobility and the number of students learning the language has even increased since 1956.<sup>44</sup> While humanities

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<sup>40</sup> Dobie: 32

<sup>41</sup> Sirles: 120

<sup>42</sup> Sirles: 123

<sup>43</sup> Sirles: 122

<sup>44</sup> Ennaji: 17

studies have gradually been arabized at the secondary school level, French remains the language of instruction for science and technical subjects, especially at the level of higher education.<sup>45</sup>

Considering that language is a medium through which one identifies with a community, the language planning of the Tunisian government indicates a desire to be at once both francophone and Arab. It is because of this apparent split-personality of society that Tunisia makes an excellent case study for the effects of code-switching on identity. The field work for this study will now delve further into the motivations behind switching between Arabic and French and will look closer at the extent to which language is indicative of personal identity.

### **III. Framing the Study**

#### **Criteria for choosing research subjects**

The field study research was designed to test the theoretical connections between language and identity. I selected subjects who code-switch regularly between French and Arabic because the deeply ingrained bilingualism reflects a diverse political past in Tunisia that has shaped identity on both the state and citizen level. Interviewing monolingual subjects would be inappropriate for this study; such a course would not illustrate to the desired extent the ramifications of competing political identities for the speaker's identity. It is the existence of this competition, the result of two different cultural encounters in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which enables observations of calculated choice of language. The subjects of this research also fit other criteria. To begin with, they are women. This choice was made for two reasons, the first of which is practicality. As a female researcher I would have been constrained by social norms had I tried to seek out men to interview. Because I live with only a host mother, it is more realistic for me to use her and her closest friends, who are all female. The second reason for

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<sup>45</sup> Ennaji: 19

choosing to study Tunisian women is more political. One of the hallmarks of Bourguiba's reform after independence was the improved status of women and greater emphasis on their education.<sup>46</sup> These reforms are seen as one of the new nation's greatest Westernization efforts. The women in this study would have finished or nearly finished lower education by 1956, but it would be interesting to see if there is a connection between the greater involvement of women in the public sphere and language choice.

Now that the gender of the subjects has been established, this paper will outline the other criteria. All of the women featured are Tunisian and of the same generation. They were born in Tunisia in the late 1930s or 1940s and are now of retirement age. This is an appropriate age group for this study because the women lived under both the French protectorate and the Tunisian republic and may reflect the changes (or lack thereof) that came with political change. Furthermore, their age implies that they have had the opportunity to settle into their language habits. Interviewing young women in secondary school or in early professional life could create less stable results because they would, perhaps, still be experimenting linguistically and be less sure about their political identities. The generation of women in this study will probably not be very useful to hypothesize about the future code-switching situation in Tunisia. Studying them will be useful to examine how language and identity connect and the role that major political shifts can play in this connection.

Another aspect the women share is a high level of education. The high level of education (at least through university) makes it more likely that the women have been exposed to both French and Arabic. While these women were in primary and secondary school the system was French; Arabization of the lower grades is a recent development. Furthermore, French would

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<sup>46</sup> "Country Profile: Tunisia," BBC News Online  
<[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/country\\_profiles/791969.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/791969.stm)>

have been the language of education at the university level. The high level of education also implies that the women have been exposed to a wide variety of worldviews. This criterion is important to the study because, again, the thesis is based on the assumption that these women make a choice between languages. The level of education makes this assumption plausible because the more languages and worldviews they were exposed to, the more likely it is that their code-switching indicates a conscious perception of self-identity.

The final criterion is location. All of the women studied had to live in the urbanized suburban areas around Tunis. By happenstance, all of the women included live in La Marsa. As mentioned in the previous section, the areas of the greatest French influence were the urban areas along the coast. This location thus presents an interesting bubble in which French and Arabic interact on a more comparable scale than if, for instance, this study were conducted in the South, where Arabic might be more dominant. While some of the women may have been born outside the Tunis area, they have lived here for significant amounts of time. The relatively equal occurrences of the languages are needed to create an environment in which code-switching is present and common.

As a final note about criteria, I would like to highlight the constraints of this study. Ideally this research would have involved at least 50 women in order to get a representative sample. However, given the time constraints the focus has become more limited. While this is not ideal, this study still holds value. Although the population studied is small, the women in question embody many of the ideologies that characterized Tunisia since the French protectorate and the events of 1956 including bilingualism, and emphasis on education and openness to the outside world. These traits make them compelling case studies for the connections between code-switching and identity.



The main focus of the interviews and observations include a 69-year-old retired professor of social sciences named Khedija. Her family originates from Sousse and she has spent many decades in the cities of Bizerte and La Marsa. Khedija fits all of the criteria of the research subjects including the aforementioned geographic location, a high level of education, and extensive exposure to both French and Arabic. Another central focus is Emna, an international translator (Arabic, French and English) also in her 60's. Emna grew up in the Tunisian suburb of Le Bardo, and her family originates from Sfax. Finally, the study includes a couple of supplementary statements from Khedija's 62-year-old acquaintance, Rawda. Like her friend, Rawda is a professor (of Arabic) and also lives in the Tunis suburban area. All three women have spent extensive time abroad.

## **Questionnaire**

There are three parts to the field work: observations, follow-up interviews, and background questions. The observations involved observing the interactions between the women. I sat in on their meetings and followed their conversations. These meetings were diverse in character, ranging from afternoon teas, early morning walks, and friendly visits. I explicitly told the women to act as if I was not there so that my presence did not influence their language choices. I took note of what was discussed in French, and later asked the women to clarify what was discussed in Arabic. After making these observations I proceeded to ask follow-up questions about the conversations. The point of these questions was to test the theories about making a conscious choice to speak about certain things in a certain language. Furthermore, the follow-up interviews were meant to ascertain to what extent the women noticed they were code-switching. The questions asked were as follows:

1. What did you discuss in French and what did you discuss in Arabic?
  - a. Did you think about the switch between languages, or did it happen automatically?
    - i. If you did make a deliberate decision, what was your reason?
2. Did you notice when your friend(s) code-switched?
  - a. If yes, did this influence what language you continued to use?
3. Do you have the linguistic capacity to discuss these subjects equally in both languages or does one language lend a more specialized vocabulary than the other?
4. Would your language choices have been different if you had not known (and known the language skills/habits of) the women with whom you spoke?

The other questions in this study are categorized as background questions. These questions intended to give insight into the influences that have shaped how the women use French and Arabic. The questions included inquiries about their upbringings, their education and daily lives. They also included more reflective questions, which were used to uncover how they perceived their identities in Tunisia. These questions were more sensitive in nature and care was taken to make them neutral and revealing, but not prying. The questions were designed as follows:

5. What was your mother tongue, i.e. what language did you speak in your home as a child?
6. Did other family members speak both French and Arabic?
  - a. If yes, did this also encourage you to code-switch?

- b. If no, did code-switching ever cause you to feel distanced from your family? Did you develop certain speaking habits at home that were different from those you followed outside the home?
7. What language did you speak most with friends/classmates/peers?
  - a. Do you think that language, specifically one's ability to code-switch between French and Arabic, influenced what company you kept?
8. Do you see the French language as being a relic of France and colonialism, or more simply as one of the languages of Tunisia?
9. Do you think that your generation is particularly likely to switch between Arabic and French? Why?
10. Do you see speaking French as a necessity for success in Tunisia?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. If you did not have the ability to code-switch, do you think you would be hindered professionally?
11. How are code-switchers viewed by others (who do not code-switch) in society?
  - a. Are they seen as more worldly? More Western and less Arab?
12. Do you see any conflict with identifying as a Tunisian or as an Arab and predominantly speaking French?

#### **IV. Observations**

The follow-up interviews were conducted after observing specific conversations, while the background questions were asked only once. The methodology varied from the hypothetical framework in two minor respects. First, instead of interviewing the subject question by question,

the interviews were conducted in a more conversational manner that, nonetheless, covered all desired subject areas. Second, it was the intention to do an in-depth analysis of several observed conversations. As the interview answers will demonstrate, this process did not prove as prolific as originally predicted.

### **Conversation observations**

The impulse to scrutinize conversations was a result of my sojourn in Tunisia. Spending time with my host mother and her acquaintances first introduced me to the pervasiveness in everyday life of code-switching between French and Arabic. The ways in which conversations appeared to transition fluidly in and out of the two languages was an intriguing area of study and an inescapable aspect of Tunisian society. I began my research by writing down observations of interactions between my host mother and her friends. These observations focused on four main events: a tea gathering in October at Rawda's house, a morning walk in early November with Khedija and Rawda, a late November dinner party at Khedija's house and a December get-together between Emna and Khedija. The choice of these interactions was random, except for the fact that they involved the women chosen as subjects and thus precipitated situations in which code-switching would be present. My strategy when observing these interactions was to take note of the language trends in the conversations and clarify what subjects were discussed afterwards, as based on the questions outlined earlier. Interestingly, my observations of language use were the same for all of the interactions. Greetings were almost always expressed in Arabic. In all cases it appeared as if more Arabic was used than French, although occasional statements were made entirely in French. More often than not, however, it appeared as if the matrix language was Arabic and the embedded language was French; French words were present, but

mixed into predominantly Arabic sentences. Regarding subject matter the results were not as clear-cut as anticipated. The most French was used in what could be described as less personal topics, like the 2008 United States presidential election, which was a popular topic at all of the discussions. A sustained conversation in French was rare. I remarked upon the many uses of the Tunisian dialect words for “when” and “where,” along with names mixed in with words referring to family status like “sister” and “brother.” I was capable of following the French parts of the conversations but because my grasp of the Arabic was limited beyond a few words and phrases, I attempted to clarify what subjects were discussed. This attempt at clarification was unproductive because the speakers could not remember the subjects that were discussed in French and the subjects that were discussed in Arabic. Thus, although the post-conversation interviews were asked, they did not provide satisfactory information.

## **Interviews**

Given that observing the conversations did not yield an abundance of information, the background interviews with the women proved to be even more imperative to this study. In practice the questions framed in section II were not asked systematically as they were outlined. Instead, the interviews took on more conversational tones but all of the inquiries behind the questions were nonetheless addressed. Subsequently, the responses below are categorized by general subject matter rather than specific question.

### *A. Personal linguistic history*

Despite the many parallels between their situations, Khedija and Emna recounted slight differences regarding their personal histories with language. Khedija spoke of her multilingual

upbringing and the consequences of going to a French school in response to an inquiry about whether she thinks knowing both French and Arabic is necessary for professional success in Tunisia:

*I have always spoken French, so I do not know. I read in French, my neighbors spoke French. I am good in French and my Arabic is very poor. But I belong to the older generation and for us Arabic was not very important. I learned [Classical] Arabic in secondary school before I started learning English. I spoke a mixture at home. My grandmother did not speak French, only Arabic. My mother spoke and wrote French and Arabic.<sup>47</sup>*

Although she grew up in the same generation and in a similar location, Emna recounted a different narrative than that of Khedija:

*I learned the languages at the same time. We went to school at the age of six, and from the age of six at school we learned both [Classical] Arabic and French. I learned to speak Arabic at home and not French. We did not speak French at home. My mother did not know any French... My family belongs to a circle that speaks Arabic only. They did not mix Arabic and French... [But] this did not create any kind of estrangement. [My speaking French] was alright with my parents, they did not feel like we were getting away from their culture. But it is a question of generation and the type of family you belong to. It is also a question of what school you went to. I went to a school that taught in both, which was more than other people in my generation who spoke mostly in French.<sup>48</sup>*

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<sup>47</sup> Khedija. Personal interview. 30 November, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Emna. Personal interview. 2 December, 2008

Rawda also recounted her language experiences, although she gave more general impressions about the situation in Tunisia rather than her personal history: “True bilingualism can only be when one speaks two languages from birth. Tunisians like me grow up speaking both languages equally and mix them together.”<sup>49</sup> Rawda added that these circumstances allow Tunisians to switch fluidly in and out of a language without realizing they are switching. In fact, Rawda made these comments during the morning walk in November on which I accompanied Khedija and Rawda. Khedija had pointed out to Rawda that they had switched from speaking in a mixture of French and Arabic to mostly Arabic and (despite my protests) she suggested that they make an effort to speak solely in French so that I could understand.

#### *B. Perceived connotations of speaking French*

In addition to knowing the background circumstances that have shaped the respondents’ relationships with code-switching, it was integral to this research to know how the subjects view the French language. In particular, the questions aimed to ascertain the extent to which the subjects feel French is an intrinsic part of their identities as Tunisian or if it runs counter to this identity. Khedija explained her views about the association between French and colonization in the following manner:

*It is the marks of colonization. French has remained in the country after colonization ended. It is taught in our schools before English, even though English has increased in popularity and is gradually gaining. The French are not happy about that... [However], it is not linked in our minds to colonization... We are aware in this country of the importance of learning languages. Our government is giving much importance to other languages. Maybe the fact that we are learning other languages gives less significance to*

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<sup>49</sup> Rawda. Personal interview. 25 November, 2008

*French. French will become a language like any of the other languages that are taught. We understand the significance of languages. Even though French is the language of our colonizers, it is still a beautiful language and it is a language we appreciate.*<sup>50</sup>

I pressed Khedija further to find out if French has any other associations, including modernity or education. In response she shared an anecdote with me:

*Is [French] associated with modernity? I do not think so. But there is something true in what you said. A Palestinian colleague of mine married to a Tunisian was here in the early 1970s. When she went shopping she would speak Arabic, and she said the shopkeepers at the market would answer in French. She said ‘I would tell them that I did not understand French, and when I said that they would look down on me.’ There was this idea that if you did not speak French you were illiterate. This is no longer the case today. I do not think that anybody considers anybody who speaks Arabic only to be illiterate.*<sup>51</sup>

Emna’s response also expressed a disconnect between the French language and the political and cultural history of the French in Tunisia:

*I do not really associate French with colonization. I associate it with school and education. It is a question of generation. In my generation we used French a lot because our schools were French schools. Younger generations use Arabic more than French, unlike us. If I did [associate French with colonization], I would stop speaking so much French because I do not like that idea. There are things I try to reduce on that basis, for example when I think I watch too much French television or I get too involved in thinking*

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<sup>50</sup> Kedija. Personal interview. 30 November, 2008

<sup>51</sup> Khedija. Personal interview. 2 December, 2008



*about French politics, because I think it should not be important to me. But I do not think this about the language.*<sup>52</sup>

Several days after this interview, Emna contacted me to tell me that she had reflected more on the connotations of speaking French. While she maintained that there are not colonial connotations to speaking French, she expressed that there is a social class component upon which she wished to remark. Emna related to me a trip to the police station she made to make an inquiry about her identity card. She emphasized to me how she had made a conscious effort to speak to the officers in Arabic. She then told me about another Tunisian woman of a similar age who came to the bureau while she was there, and who spoke entirely in French with the officers. Emna said that even though the officers understood the French, she found the woman's actions snobbish and rude. According to Emna there was no reason for the woman to speak entirely in French to the officers except to express her social standing.<sup>53</sup> She said that the association between class and language is especially significant for people in her generation.

### *C. Cognizance of language habits*

The last area addressed in these interviews was the speakers' awareness of changing between languages. A lack of awareness had already been established by the interviews following the conversations but I decided to probe this point further with more generalized questions. I pressed the respondents harder to think about their language habits and to try to describe to me what goes through their minds when they are speaking, especially whether they correlate certain languages with certain subjects of discussion. Khedija explained her thoughts as follows:

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<sup>52</sup> Emna. Personal interview. 2 December, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Emna. Personal interview. 8 December, 2008.

*I do not think I have a certain language for certain topics. I would say, though, there are recurrent words that are so popular...for the younger generation it is 'mushnormale,' a French word, and it has somehow been adopted. You have other words that belong to the background. There is no effort, the words come by themselves... [I discuss] politics more in French than in Arabic, but Arabic could still be used. Maybe this is because I watch French news, read French newspapers. But even those who are very good in Arabic will tend to use French to talk about politics. I use Arabic maybe with housework, with shopping, going to the market. There we use the Arabic words for vegetables, fruit and meat.<sup>54</sup>*

Emna's responses were in a similar vein:

*I speak more in Arabic for the things in daily life and in the family, such as 'I am going to Tunis today.' If I discuss the family, or the subjects that concern family, I discuss more in Arabic. If I have a discussion more systematic, I speak in French. It depends a lot on who I am speaking with. I do not have the same way of speaking, for example, with someone who is more arabophone and someone who is more francophone. It is not just me who chooses, it is with whom I am speaking.<sup>55</sup>*

Both women also tried to articulate whether they notice their code-switching habits. I detected that it seemed difficult for both of them to describe their habits, and they indicated that this was a question they rarely consider. Khedija described her thoughts:

*Sometimes I do not find the word in Arabic. I notice that I am switching to French because I cannot find the word in Arabic. If someone speaks in Arabic, I will speak in Arabic, same with French. It is when I realize I am talking to someone that does not*

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<sup>54</sup> Khedija. Personal interview. 30 November, 2008

<sup>55</sup> Emna. Personal interview. 2 December, 2008

*speak French that I make an effort to not use any French words. That happens when I am talking with other people from the rest of the Arab world. For example when I am talking with Jordanians I will not use French, they do not understand French.*<sup>56</sup>

Emna also expressed a frustration resulting from searching for words in Arabic:

*When I discuss with my friends, I do not perceive when I am changing. However, when I hear someone who I do not know, or the radio, I immediately notice. It bothers me, it is not attractive to change between the languages, although I do it...It is true that when I switch to some subjects I find it difficult to speak Arabic all the time. I have to think about how to say some words in Arabic. This is for sophisticated things, if I am reasoning about problems or politics. But if I am making plans with my sisters, I can say everything in Arabic.*

The responses provided above will provide the basis of this paper's analysis. They will be used to test to what extent the theoretical association between language and identity may be present in Tunisia, particularly among women of the subjects' generation.

## **V. Analysis**

This paper was built around the hypothesis that code-switching between French and Arabic is a phenomenon that affects the identity of the individual code-switcher. The political history of language in Tunisia under the French protectorate and the policies of Arabization underlie this proposition. Through the interviews one can see that while there may be a hyperconsciousness about language, the speakers do not necessarily tie it to issues of identity. In fact, one of the hindrances of the interviewing process was that the speakers found it difficult to explain their code-switching choices. As the forthcoming analysis of the responses will

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<sup>56</sup> Khedija. Personal interview. 30 November, 2008.

demonstrate, however, the responses given by the interviewees do still provide insight into the extent to which language and identity are connected in Tunisia.

### **The influences of language planning**

Language planning, as discussed in section II, includes decisions made by the government about what languages will be used in what capacities in the country. In this situation languages are relegated to certain spheres depending on their perceived importance in shaping national identity. When the French established their Tunisian protectorate in 1881, they followed this line of thought and defined public spheres like government and education as French spaces and limited Arabic to religion and the home. Although the governments post-independence have taken some steps to arabize Tunisia – by declaring Arabic the official language, and by making Arabic a more extensive medium of education – French still remains a language of the public sphere, including commerce, science and media. The three women I interviewed serve as interesting illustrations of the effects that language planning in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century had on the Tunisian population. Their school and family histories, in particular, emphasize this point. Khedija went to a monolingual French school and spoke a mixture of French and Arabic at home. The use of French as the sole method of education could lead the student to identify French as the language associated with learning and knowledge advancement. Alternately, the lack of Arabic outside the home might have influenced her use of the language; even today she uses Arabic primarily in relation to household matters. It is intriguing to contrast Khedija's personal history with that of Emna. Unlike Khedija, Emna was educated in both French and (Classical) Arabic. She spoke only Arabic at home. Despite their different language conditionings, Emna, like Khedija, associates Arabic with the private sphere and French with the

public sphere. This phenomenon exists despite the fact that Emna was introduced to Arabic as a language of knowledge parallel to French.

The fact that both Khedija and Emna associate Arabic with the more mundane, everyday subjects is perhaps indicative of a perception of French as a more sophisticated language. I found notable Khedija's comment that even people who know Arabic very well tend to discuss politics in French. If this is true, it would imply that the superiority the French claimed through the equation of language with culture has to some extent been internalized in these women. Their habits, furthermore, indicate the way in which language planning can leave lasting impressions on a country's citizens. The women observed and interviewed for this paper came of age in a time of transition in Tunisia. They attended primary school under French rule, and higher education in the newly independent republic. The efforts of the state to establish its independent identity are evident in the initially proposed Arabization policies. One can see the struggle with the lasting influences of the protectorate in the way that French maintained an important role in public life, despite its demotion to an interim language and the elevation of Arabic to official status. To some extent, perhaps, the struggles of the state to define its identity influenced the generation of Khedija and Emna and are exemplified in their code-switching habits. The elevated status of French during their school years ensured that this language would play a large role in their speaking habits. And, yet, the resistance to the French under the protectorate and the support for an Arab identity under Arabization may have contributed to the continued use of Arabic among Tunisians in the home. It is important to reiterate here that the resistance and calls for Arabization were not as strong in Tunisia as in Algeria, a country more infiltrated by the French because of its status as an official colony. Perhaps this lack of resistance is what allowed the two languages to, apparently amicably, retreat to separate social spheres. Emna supported

this idea with her assertion that although her family only spoke Arabic, she encountered no discouraging sentiments or feelings of estrangement when she learned French. Much like the situation under the protectorate, the interview responses indicate that for that generation of women French is irreversibly associated with public and official life while Arabic is associated with private and family life. The comments of the women indicate that this is not a contentious split. Instead, they are much like the state itself as it struggled between two ideational extremes and settled on middle ground. Like the state itself, there appears to be a desire to be at once francophone and Arab.

### **Associations of French and France**

Perhaps one of the reasons that the middle ground of code-switching between French and Arabic is not very contentious for women like Khedija and Emna is that they make very little association between the French language and the French. The French may have used language as a weapon of subjugation in the imperial era, but these women do not make that association when they code-switch. This finding was particularly surprising, given that the thesis of this paper was premised on the assumption that French is a politically and emotionally charged language in a postcolonial state like Tunisia. Based on the responses, one cannot attribute this lack of association simply to a lack of thinking about the historical role of the language. Indeed, Emna pointed out clearly that she considers the legacy of the French when she contemplates her attachment to French media and she desires to limit that attachment. The women attribute their command of French to their education. While one can trace the style of education they received directly to the French and the ideologies that they brought with them to Tunisia, the interview responses did not emphasize this connection. Khedija, indeed, offered another explanation. She

expressed her belief that Tunisia and its government stress the importance of multilingualism. She implied that if it had not been French, it would have been another language in its place. Moreover, Rawda also conveys that the bilingualism is an inherent aspect of Tunisia with her comment about bilingualism beginning at birth.

This analysis cannot consider these responses anything but valid because they represent the views of the contributors. The responses, though, do raise several theoretical questions about the association of the French language with the historical role of the French in Tunisia. Language may have been de-territorialized as a result of colonization, but that is not to say that language and ideology were separated. Emna attributes her language situation to her education. Khedija attributes her penchant to speak about politics in French to the fact that she prefers to read French media. However, it must be asked: what are the factors that lead to these sources of influence? Why was education in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century dominated by French? Why has French media historically been more popular than Arabic media? Theoretically one can trace these circumstances to the connection of language and identity. One would say, in theory, that the perception of French as a superior language, and thus culture, was propagated to the point that the identity that came with the language was internalized into Tunisian society. The responses to the interview questions complicate matters of field work because they highlight the way in which habits like code-switching between French and Arabic become so ingrained that the speakers cease to see the former language as a characteristic of the “other.” These findings challenge the thesis of this paper. The responses cast doubt on one’s ability to apply theory to reality, because theory, in this case, does not take into account that habits might become so deeply rooted that the people no longer associate them with choices.

## **Code-switching and group dynamics**

The responses given to the questions about associating French with certain ideologies and the ways in which the respondents were perplexed when they tried to explain their code-switching habits, indicates that code-switching among this generation of Tunisian women is decidedly less political than was expected. Both Emna and Khedija conveyed that they do not see speaking French in addition to Arabic as preventative to identifying as Tunisian. The two women, in addition to Rawda, spoke of the bilingual language habits in terms of “we” and “us,” indicating that they do not see code-switching as a divide among Tunisians but as a distinctive characteristic of the population. When reviewing these results one should keep in mind the political history of language in Tunisia. These responses come from women who were influenced by the French education systems and now speak French as a primary language. The historically superior status of French in Tunisia may influence the sentiments of inclusiveness in the responses. That is to say, if the respondents had not been products of the French education system of their generation, and if they instead used Arabic more than French, it is possible they would have given different responses. Being able to code-switch easily between the languages of public and private life, and indeed to be more proficient in the language of social mobility, might put them in a position where language does not carry as much political or ideological significance. Emna’s anecdote about the police station lends validity to this idea. Although speaking Arabic or speaking French was not a matter of practicality because the police officers understood both, it was a matter of relating with one another on an equal, respectful level. It exemplifies that while the linkage of French to ideas of linguistic superiority may not continue, it is still linked to issues of social class and power. Indeed, both women indicated that their language habits, when talking to people who are not of similar social, economic or educational



backgrounds, depend not on their own prerogatives but those of the others. This position appears to be one of privilege, but their actions also indicate a lack of desire to use language as a divisive factor between them and their fellow Tunisians.

It should not be forgotten that even though the women profiled here did not see strong, direct links between French and identity, they did communicate the frustration that theoretically accompanies code-switching when the languages are politicized. The women spoke of their inabilities to talk in depth about subjects like politics in Arabic. They lamented the fact that, outside of basic household conversations, they often found themselves searching for the Arabic words and steering the conversation back into French. Despite their use of inclusive language when talking about the bilingual nature of Tunisia, the inability to communicate about some subjects with monolingual Arabic-speaking Tunisians seems to cause a frustrating divide. The fact that these subjects of frustration include politics might over time lead to divided identities within Tunisia simply because of the lack of communication about the subject that might occur between a generation that speaks primarily in French and younger generations in which more people favor Arabic. Arabization might not have as tight a hold in Tunisia as elsewhere in the Maghreb, but Arabic is nonetheless gaining in status, as proven by its increased use in schools. It is unlikely that one would now be looked down upon, like the woman in Khedija's anecdote, for speaking in Arabic at the market. The political leaders controlling language planning may for now be predominantly French-educated, but it is probable that in the future this will change. As the language of politics and the language planning policies change, it will be interesting to see what divisions might erupt between the French-speaking generations and the Arabic-speaking factions in Tunisia. Will Arabic-French code-switching become even more widespread, or will other languages become involved? Or, will a more monolingual phenomenon arise? According

to the women interviewed, code-switching is not motivated by politics but as the linguistic landscape changes this might not always be the case. Perhaps there is some significance in the fact that the women interviewed associate primarily with women who follow similar language habits. The code-switching among friends was fluid and unaware, while the women said that with strangers or people with language habits known to be different from their own they must be more hyperconscious about how they speak. The linguistic dynamics of Tunisia appear to encourage group divisions because of the many frustrations that come with efforts to accommodate various language habits. These sentiments show that the code-switching is not ubiquitous throughout the Tunisian population and indicates the possibility for more political connotations in the future.

While the interview responses give insight into Tunisian language dynamics, the women's statements also provide insight into the linguistic interaction between Tunisia and the rest of the Arab world. All three of the women suggested that the phenomenon of code-switching between French and Arabic is a distinguishing aspect of Tunisia. The women also articulated the increased attention they must pay to how they speak when they are speaking with someone from the Mashreq versus the Maghreb. One should not ignore the differences between Arabic dialects to which these women must pay attention, but what is of greater significance for this study is the attention they must pay to the francophone-arabophone divide. Khedija's story about the Palestinian woman in Tunisia is particularly illuminating because it shows the strong place of French in Tunisian society as well as how it can be a divisive factor between Tunisia and other Arab countries. The policies of Arabization were intended to culturally and politically unite Arab countries. The failure of these policies in Tunisia may have marked a turning point at which Tunisia began to emphasize a more independent identity. Thus, although the women do not

associate speaking French with a pro-France perspective, it seems that they do see it as a factor that separates them from other Arab countries. The frustration the women have speaking solely in Arabic with Tunisians would only be augmented on the regional scale. In this context, perhaps, code-switching would take on a more political character than it has in Tunisia because historical, cultural, and political differences would be emphasized by the use of French. However, the effort that the women say they make when talking non-Tunisian Arabs, like they do with arabophone Tunisians, indicates a desire to project an inclusive image. They could choose to continue speaking as they do among one another, in a mixture of French and Arabic, and make a clear separation between them and other Arab people but they do not. While the women may not think politically or ideologically about their language choices in conversations with other Tunisian code-switchers, they may be more conscious of the implications of language in other contexts. One can even make comparisons between the domains of code-switching on national and regional levels. In Tunisia, and especially among the generation interviewed, French is the means of communication in the public sphere and Arabic belongs to the private sphere. Alternately, when interacting with Arabs from other countries, Tunisians like those interviewed must use Arabic at both the public and the private levels.

## **VI. Conclusions**

Tunisia may have declared independence from France in 1956 but the formal separation does not carry over to linguistic reality. For Tunisians like the women in this study who grew up in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, bilingualism and the *mélange* of French and Arabic is a certainty of everyday life.<sup>57</sup> The comments of Khedija, Emna and Rawda offer insight into the reasoning behind language habits. Furthermore, their remarks allow a comparison between theory and

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<sup>57</sup> Ennaji: 23

reality that highlights the weaknesses of the theory that one can equate language and identity. The thesis of this paper expected to find that the women code-switch due to a conscious association between language and identity. Instead, this paper found that the speakers at question code-switch chiefly in an unconscious manner. While they attributed their habits to the circumstances of their upbringings, they did not associate French or Arabic with separate identities. For them, the coexistence of the languages is a defining characteristic of Tunisia. They did, however, indicate considerations of class. The women's comments offered the chance to speculate about the political circumstances behind language planning and to probe deeper into possible influences on uses of language that they might not have pinpointed.

Even though the thesis was not proven, the women interviewed facilitated an intriguing study of the language situation in Tunisia. This project demonstrates the complexities of identity and language in a postcolonial society like Tunisia that cannot be explained with a single theory, and it encourages further research in a variety of avenues. One of the limitations of this research was the narrow scope of observations. While observing the conversations between friends revealed one aspect of code-switching, it would be interesting to observe these habits in a variety of situations, such as in the professional realm and in the classroom. The women gave anecdotes about other situations, but first-hand observations would help circumvent any bias that might have been present. While the women described how they changed their language habits when speaking with non-Tunisian Arabs, observing these conversations could yield greater information about the constraints and frustrations the women face. It would also be useful to expand the socioeconomic qualifications of the research subjects. Tunisian women from different economic classes and geographic locations would most likely add more facets to the issue of code-switching in Tunisia. As mentioned earlier, the primarily French-speaking women profiled

here do not make strong associations between language and identity but this may not be the case for primarily Arabic-speaking women or women who grew up away from areas of great French influence. Additionally, a study of the code-switching habits of men would enable an investigation of whether the habits are gendered. This would be especially intriguing considering the emphasis placed postindependence on the greater public role of women. To finish, while the generation of women in this study is useful to examine the effects of imperialism on a society, the study of younger generations would provide an intriguing comparison. How do young people today view French and Arabic code-switching? Many of their parents and grandparents may have gone to French schools like the women mentioned here, but does this affect their habits? It is not possible to ignore the increasing presence of English as a code-switching language. Rawda, in fact, insisted: “Be sure to include that I am now English speaking too!”<sup>58</sup> Is it possible that, as Khedija said, languages have a revered place in Tunisian society and English could take the place of French and become the new hallmark of bilingualism? Comparing and contrasting the politics of language in the era of colonialism and the era of globalization would strengthen the conclusions for both areas of study. Given the unique geographical, political, cultural and linguistic histories of Tunisia, the country undoubtedly has the potential to host many future studies about language and identity.

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<sup>58</sup> Rawda. Personal interview. 25 November, 2008.

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