

DIGITAL LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES: UNVEILING YOUTH CODE-SWITCHING IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: In the dynamic digital landscape, the realm of youth communication has evolved into a captivating playground where the intricate dynamics of code-switching and language innovation manifest, characterized by the use of diverse languages or linguistic varieties. This paper seeks to delve into the underlying motivations driving code-switching and linguistic innovation among EFL learners, while concurrently scrutinizing the socio-cultural factors that influence these linguistic practices. Furthermore, it seeks to examine the profound impact exerted by technology and social media on the linguistic repertoire and communicative behaviors of the youth. Methodologically grounded in a mixed-method approach, which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative instruments for data collection, such as questionnaires and interviews, this study navigates through the linguistic landscape occupied by first-year English students at Tlemcen University (Algeria). Through systematic analysis and interpretation, the findings elucidate the emergence of a new form of written language within computer-mediated communication platforms, thereby shedding light on the youth's positive attitudes toward linguistic innovations. Moreover, the findings underscore the active engagement of these learners within the digital field, highlighting their adeptness in navigating the complexities of digital communication. In sum, this research contributes not only to the discourse on language variation and digital communication but also provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay between language, technology, and culture within educational contexts.

Keywords: Attitudes, code-switching, computer-mediated communication, language innovation

PAYSAGES LINGUISTIQUES NUMERIQUES : DEVOILER L'ALTERNANCE CODIQUE CHEZ LES JEUNES A TRAVERS LA CYBER COMMUNICATION

Résumé : Dans le paysage numérique dynamique, le domaine de la communication des jeunes s'est transformé en un terrain de jeu captivant où les dynamiques complexes de l'alternance codique et de l'innovation linguistique se manifestent, caractérisées par l'utilisation de langues diverses ou de variétés linguistiques. Cet article vise l'exploration des motivations sous-jacentes qui conduisent à l'alternance codique et à l'innovation linguistique chez les apprenants de langue anglaise comme langue étrangère (EFL), tout en examinant simultanément les facteurs socioculturels qui influent sur ces pratiques linguistiques. De plus, il cherche à examiner l'impact profond exercé par la technologie et les médias sociaux sur le répertoire linguistique et les comportements communicatifs des jeunes. Fondée méthodologiquement sur une approche mixte : quantitative et qualitative, elle use pour la collecte de données à travers des questionnaires et des entretiens. Cette étude navigue à travers le paysage linguistique occupé par les étudiants de première année langue Anglaise à l'Université de Tlemcen (Algérie). À travers une analyse et une interprétation systématique, les résultats éclairent l'émergence d'une nouvelle forme de langage écrit au sein des plateformes de communication médiatisées, mettant ainsi en

lumière les attitudes positives des jeunes envers les innovations linguistiques. De plus, les résultats soulignent l'engagement actif de ces apprenants dans le domaine numérique, mettant en évidence leur aptitude à naviguer dans les complexités de la communication numérique. En résumé, cette recherche contribue non seulement au discours sur la variation linguistique et la communication numérique, mais fournit également des perspectives précieuses sur l'interaction complexe entre langue, technologie et culture dans les contextes éducatifs.

Mots-clés : Attitudes, alternance codique, cyber communication, innovation linguistique.

Introduction

Many of today's youth have grown up surrounded by digital technology, becoming adept at various forms of computer-mediated communication like social media, instant messaging, and video calls. These digital tools frequently feature prominently in their daily lives and social interactions, and in certain instances, may even be favored over traditional face-to-face communication. Thus, generalizing about the attitudes of young people towards computer-mediated communication poses a challenge due to the diverse array of factors shaping their perceptions, including age, cultural background, and personal experiences. The connection between code-switching and language innovation in computer-mediated communication (CMC) is complex in the sense that within a single conversation, code-switching is commonly observed in CMC settings. Users can switch languages or dialects based on the context and the preferences of the conversation participants. Code switching is a powerful tool for linguistic and cultural negotiation, and it allows speakers to express their multilingual identities in creative and innovative ways (Myers-Scotton, 2006).

Currently, CMC plays a role in fostering language innovation as users experiment with new ways of expressing themselves and adapting their language to suit the digital communication landscape. For example, the adoption of emojis, abbreviations, and slang in online messaging and social media has given rise to a new form of digital language that constantly evolves to meet the preferences and needs of its users. This language innovation is particularly evident in youth communication, where the use of CMC contributes to the creation of new words and expressions that are integrated into various social and linguistic contexts. The use of CMC has also been shown to promote language play and creativity among young people, as they experiment with new forms of expression and push the boundaries of traditional language norms" (Androutsopoulos, 2006, p. 42). Therefore, the interaction between code-switching and language innovation in CMC is characterized by an ongoing exchange between linguistic diversity and creativity as users navigate between linguistic and cultural frontiers while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of language in the digital realm.

0.1 Problem Statement

The aim of this research is to examine the impact of CMC on youth language and to delve deeper into the motivations and implications of code-switching and language innovation among the targeted group of students. Therefore, the following research questions have been posited: What are the underlying motivations driving the use of code-switching and linguistic innovations among Algerian youth, particularly on CMC platforms? How does today's youth language affect their writing skills in computer-mediated communication? How do social and cultural factors, along with the influence of

technology and social media, shape the attitudes and behaviors of youngsters towards linguistic innovations and code-switching in their everyday interactions? In order to investigate the research inquiries outlined earlier, we posit that young individuals are inclined to engage in code-switching and linguistic innovation for a range of purposes, including expressing their cultural identity, fostering their social connections, and adjusting to online communication conventions. Moreover, these youths exhibit favorable attitudes towards adopting innovations while communicating through digital platforms.

0.2. Theoretical Framework

-Computer-mediated Communication and Youth Language

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) encompasses the exchange of information, ideas, or messages via digital devices and computer networks. « Computer-mediated communication has created a new form of language that is constantly evolving and adapting to new technologies and social contexts » Baron (2008). The rise of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has significantly affected language use, particularly among young people worldwide. According to Tannen, "written CMC often lacks the richness of face-to-face communication". (2001: p. 142). In addition, Androutsopoulos (2011) asserts that digital communication has helped in the spread of vernacular writing in new areas of practice that are characterized by different writing styles and norms. In Algeria, the influence of computer-mediated communication (CMC) on youth language is pervasive. The convergence of French and Arabic produces a distinctive online linguistic environment. Moreover, the widespread use of "Arabizi," a fusion of Arabic script with Latin letters and numbers, is prevalent in online interactions. This phenomenon underscores the flexibility of language in the digital era. In considering the sociolinguistic change, it is important to consider the written language that is used, identify the different fields of language practice, and "distinguish potential trajectories of change within online written usage, from digital to non-digital written language, or to spoken usage" (Androutsopoulos, 2011, P. 145).

-Code-switching and Language Innovation

The relationship between code-switching and language innovation is complex and multifaceted, potentially influencing and facilitating each other in various ways. On the one hand, code-switching facilitates the spread of linguistic innovations across languages or language varieties. For example, if a new word or expression is introduced in one language, it may be adopted and incorporated into another language. Typically employed by bilingual or multilingual individuals, code-switching also serves to express cultural identity, solidarity, or convey nuance that may not be present in a single language. It was defined as the "alternation between two linguistic systems in the course of speaking", (Poplack, 2000, p. 264) as cited in (Al-Rowais, 2012, p.13). Language innovation on the other hand refers to the process of creating or adopting new linguistic forms, structures, or vocabulary; This can happen in any language, as speakers develop new ways of expressing themselves and adapting to changing social and cultural circumstances. According to (Auer, 2013) language innovation is driven by the need to express new ideas and experiences, and code-switching is one of the ways in which speakers adapt to changing linguistic and cultural contexts.

2.3. Effects of CMC on Youth Language

With the rapid advancement of new technologies, languages undergo continuous evolution. Consequently, the shift in language usage in people's daily communication is readily apparent. As a result, CMC has contributed to the evolution of language, with new words and expressions emerging from online communication and spreading rapidly through social networks" (Tagg, 2012, p. 123). Additionally, the emergence of CMC platforms has significantly affected the language patterns of the youth in both written and spoken discourse. In this vein, Crystal (2001) asserts that « CMC environments provide a unique space for linguistic experimentation and innovation among young users ». According to him, this experimentation often leads to the emergence of new linguistic features. Baron (2008) notes that « Youth language settings tends to exhibit abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons, reflecting the need for efficiency and expressiveness online communication ». Concerns have also been raised regarding the potential negative impact of CMC on formal writing skills among youngsters; Herring (2002) states « The informality and brevity of CMC exchanges may hinder the development of traditional writing conventions and grammatical accuracy ». As a result, the wide-spread of CMC platforms has facilitated the adoption of neologisms among the youth; these newly coined words or phrases can have a significant impact on youth language such as: Identity and belonging : Youngsters use neologisms to show their membership to a particular social group or speech community; Innovation and creativity : By using linguistic innovations, youngsters try not only to express their creativity but also to push the boundaries of language. In this vein, (Turlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004, p.11) point out : ‘The language used in computer-mediated communication (CMC) is often criticized for being informal, ungrammatical, and lacking in proper spelling and punctuation »; Obsolescence of older language: As new words and expressions emerge to reflect contemporary experiences and concepts, older terms may become less relevant or fall out of use.

2.4. Linguistic Diversity on Social Media in Algeria

In Algeria, linguistic diversity on social media reflects different languages and dialects that exist within the country's digital landscape. In this context, Algerian social media users exhibit a remarkable proficiency in code-switching integrating Arabic, French, Berber, and even English into their online discourse. Yet, the influence of French remains significant. Thus, linguistic diversity on social media in Algeria not only mirrors the country's complex language environment but also serves as an important space for linguistic diversity. This phenomenon is further amplified by the use of social media, where English often serves as a common ground for international interaction and where online spaces witness a growing acceptance of code-switching and the emergence of new linguistic practices like online slang and neologisms as observed by Melgani (2019). These have become widely accepted and integrated into the everyday online language.

0.3 Methodology

This section is dedicated to elucidating the methodology employed in the present study, serving as a scholarly exposition of the research approach undertaken.

-Research Design

The study adopts a case study methodology to investigate the impact of code-switching on youth language in computer-mediated communication, with a particular focus on its influence on writing skills. Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the

investigation aims to delve into students' perceptions regarding the integration of innovations within computer-mediated communication platforms.

-Participants

The participants of the study included students from the department of English at Tlemcen university, Algeria. The data were collected from first year students. The sample population included 80 participants aged between 17 and 21 years old.

-Research Instruments

The study employed two research instruments: a close-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The primary objective of the questionnaire was to investigate youth language and the manner in which young individuals engage with each other through computer-mediated communication. Comprising questions, the questionnaire aimed to provide initial insights. To supplement this data and gain deeper insights into participants' experiences and opinions, a semi-structured interview was conducted. This method proved invaluable in enriching the findings obtained from the questionnaire.

1. Data Analysis

Students' Questionnaire

Question 1: Which one (s) of the following social media do you use the most to communicate?

This question aims to check the preferences of youth regarding social media usage. It is important to note that participants in this study were given the freedom to select any alternatives they preferred; thus, one informant might have chosen multiple options.

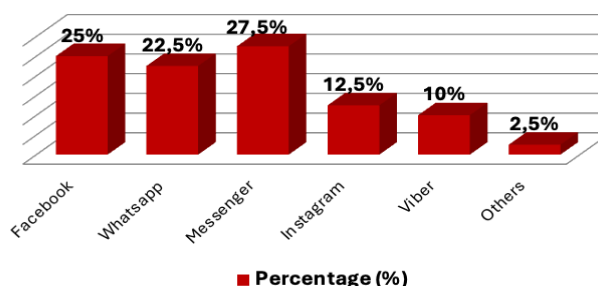


Figure 1: Predominant Social Media Platforms Among Students

In considering the results, Facebook emerges as the most popular platform, with 20 students, constituting 25% of the sample, reporting its usage. Following closely behind is WhatsApp, with 18 students (22.5% of the sample) using it. Messenger is also prevalent, with 22 students (27.5% of the sample) indicating its use. Instagram is utilized by 10 students, making up 12.5% of the sample. Viber and other platforms are less commonly used, with 8 students (10% of the sample) and 2 students (2.5% of the sample), respectively, reporting their usage. The findings reveal a clear hierarchy in social media platform preferences among the surveyed students, with Facebook, WhatsApp, and Messenger emerging as the most widely utilized platforms. While Facebook leads in usage, both WhatsApp and Messenger closely follow, indicating their significant role in student communication. Additionally, Instagram enjoys moderate popularity among the surveyed

students. Conversely, platforms like Viber and others exhibit lower usage rates. Overall, the results highlight the diverse landscape of social media usage among students, underscoring the importance of digital communication platforms in facilitating social interactions and connectivity in contemporary student life.

Question 2: On average, how much time do you typically spend on social media networks each day?

This inquiry seeks to ascertain the typical duration of time that English students dedicate to social media networks daily.

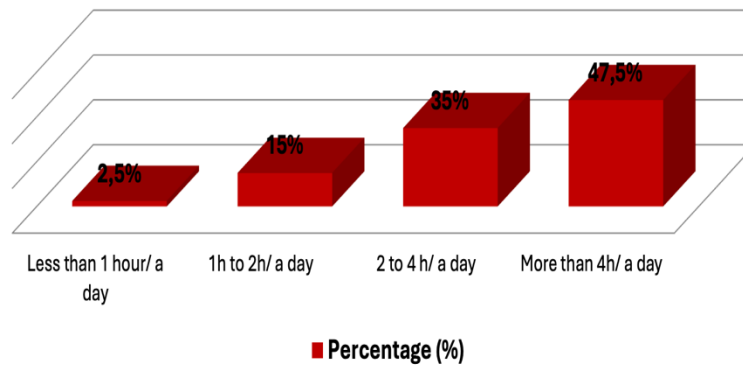


Figure 2: Informants’ Average Time Spent on the Network

The findings indicate diverse patterns of social media usage among English students. Nearly half of the surveyed students spend over 4 hours per day on social media networks, reflecting a significant engagement with online platforms. A sizable portion allocates between 2 to 4 hours daily, indicating moderate usage habits. Conversely, a minority of students engage in more restricted online activity, with only 2.5% spending less than 1 hour per day on social media. These results underscore the need to consider the implications of extensive social media usage on time management, academic performance, and overall well-being among English students.

Question 3: What is the dominant language that you use on Social Media?

The target of the inquiry is to identify the primary language used by the youth on social media platforms.

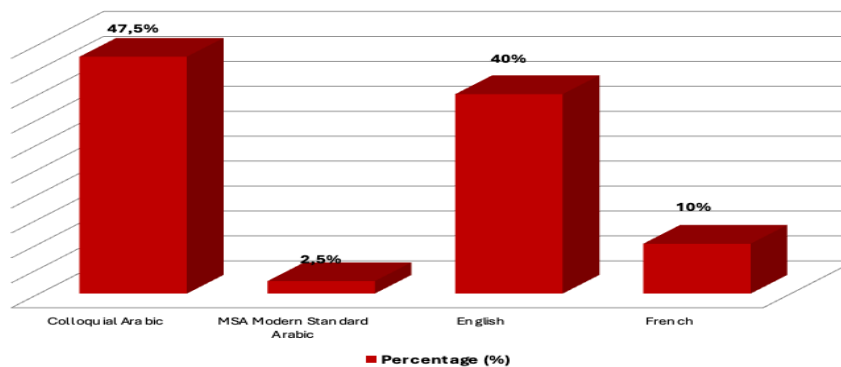


Figure3 : Dominant Language Use on Social Media Platforms

The data reveal a diverse linguistic profile among English students, with Colloquial Arabic emerging as the dominant language, utilized by nearly half of the surveyed participants, reflecting its prevalence in informal communication contexts. English follows closely as a widely used second language, indicating its importance in academic and possibly professional settings. French and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) are reported by smaller proportions of students, suggesting their lesser prominence in daily communication. This diversity highlights the multilingual environment within the student population, underscoring the complex interplay of linguistic influences in Algerian society.

Question4: How frequently do you engage in code-switching when interacting with your peers ?

This question aims at measuring the frequency of code-switching among individuals when interacting with peers, offering a scale ranging from "Always" to "Never" to capture various levels of linguistic adaptation.

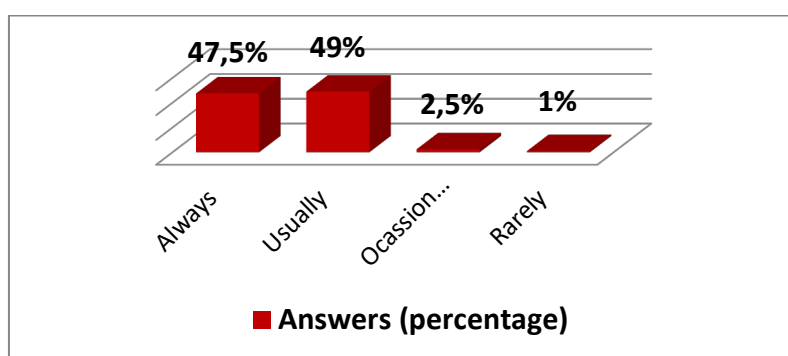


Figure4 :Frequency and Patterns of Code-Switching in Peer Interaction

The data illustrate a prevalent practice of code-switching among English students when interacting with peers. Nearly half of the participants report engaging in code-switching "Always," indicating a frequent and ingrained use of this linguistic phenomenon. Additionally, an almost equal proportion state that they "Usually" code-switch, further emphasizing its common occurrence in peer interactions. While a small percentage mention code-switching "Occasionally" or "Rarely," none of the respondents claim to "Never" engage in this practice, suggesting its ubiquity among the surveyed students. These findings highlight the widespread nature of code-switching within the student community, underscoring its integral role in communication dynamics among English students.

Question 5 : What are the main reasons for code-switching in English?

This inquiry seeks to understand the motivations behind code-switching in English, including whether it occurs due to habitual practice, to fill lexical gaps where one language may lack appropriate vocabulary, or to exhibit language proficiency or cultural identity.

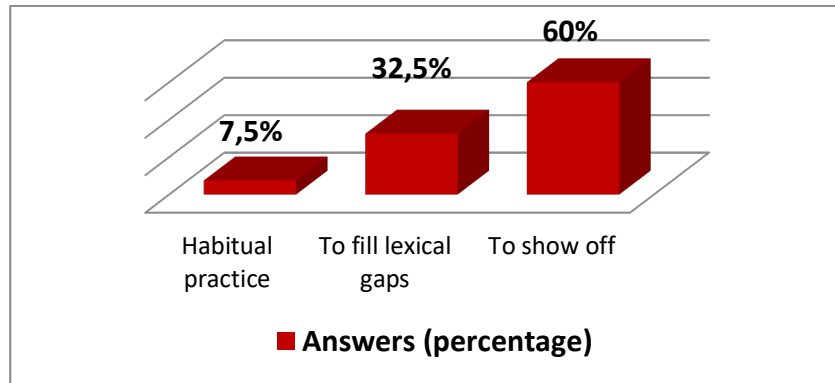


Figure 5 : Motivations Behind Code-Switching in English

The analysis of the results reveals that the most prevalent reason for code-switching among the surveyed students is "To show off," with 48 respondents constituting 60% of the total. This suggests that a significant proportion of students engage in code-switching as a means to exhibit linguistic proficiency or superiority. Following this, "To fill lexical gaps" emerges as the second most common reason, with 26 respondents, comprising 32.5% of the total. This indicates that a substantial portion of students resorts to code-switching to compensate for vocabulary limitations in one language by using terms from another. Lastly, "Habitual practice" is cited by 6 respondents, accounting for 7.5% of the total, suggesting that for a smaller minority, code-switching is a routine aspect of their linguistic behavior. Overall, these findings underscore the varied motivations behind code-switching among the surveyed students, with a significant emphasis on displaying linguistic prowess. All in all, these findings highlight the diverse motivations behind code-switching among English students, ranging from pragmatic needs to social and communicative motivations.

Question 6 : How do you perceive the use of language innovation in written communication ?

The question aims at assessing how individuals perceive the use of language innovation in written communication, offering alternatives ranging from viewing it as innovative and creative to practical for conveying ideas, or even considering it negative and unnecessary.

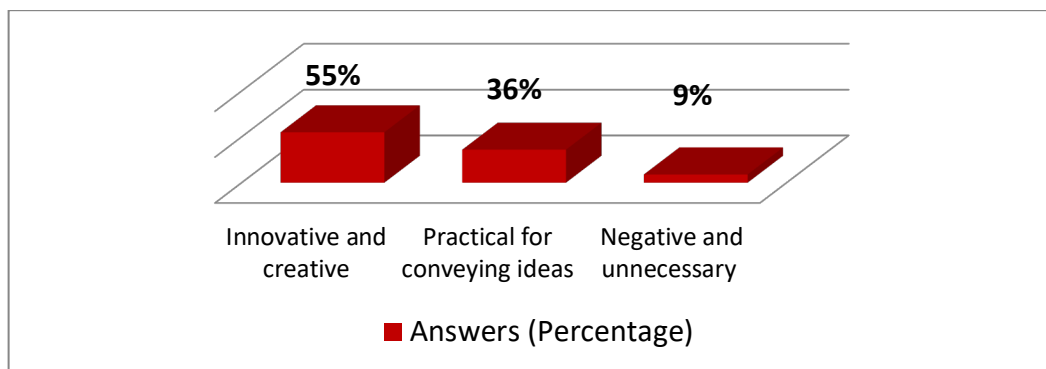


Figure 6 : Perceptions of Language Innovation in Written Communication

Based on these outcomes, the majority of respondents (55%) perceive the use of language innovation in written communication as innovative and creative. A significant portion (36%) also see it as practical for conveying ideas. However, a smaller proportion (9%) view it negatively and consider it unnecessary. Thus, the majority of respondents perceive language innovation in written communication as either innovative and creative or practical for conveying ideas, with a smaller minority viewing it negatively and considering it unnecessary.

Question 7 : To what extent do you feel influenced by technology and social media platforms in shaping your language use and communication style in English?

The target of the question is to find out the level of influence that technology and social media platforms have on individuals' language use and communication style in English, offering alternatives ranging from "Strongly influenced" to "Not influenced."

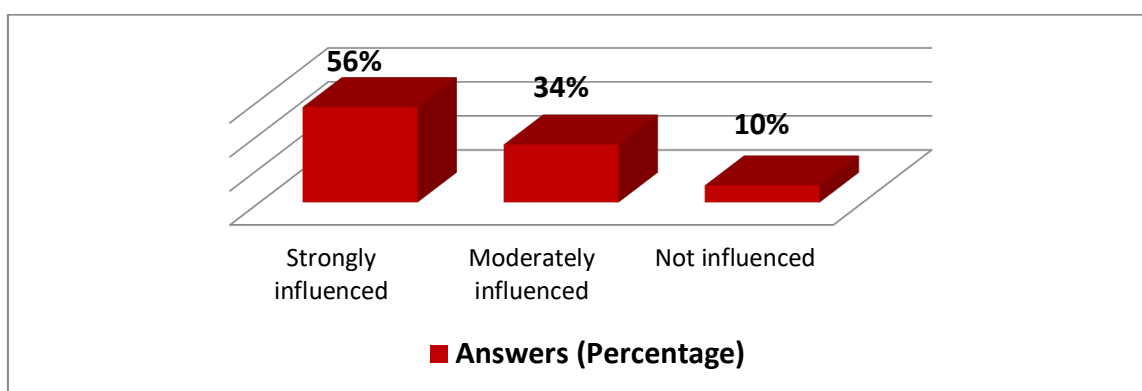


Figure7 : Influence of Technology and Social Media on Youth's English Communication

The results show that the majority of respondents, constituting 56%, feel strongly influenced by technology and social media platforms in shaping their language use and communication style in English. A significant portion, comprising 34% of respondents, perceive a moderate level of influence from these platforms. Conversely, a smaller proportion, accounting for 10% of respondents, indicate that they are not influenced by technology and social media in this regard. Overall, the data suggests that a considerable number of individuals acknowledge the impact of technology and social media on their language use and communication style, with varying degrees of influence reported among respondents.

Students' Interview :

Question 1: How do you perceive the role of technology and social media in shaping language use among students of English at Tlemcen University? How has the integration of technology affected your language learning experience and communication habits?

Most students acknowledge the significant role of technology and social media in shaping their language use. They note that the integration of technology has profoundly impacted their language learning experience and communication habits by providing access to authentic materials like videos and articles, which enrich their vocabulary and

understanding of English usage. Additionally, they assert that language learning applications offer personalized experiences tailored to individual needs, enabling practice outside traditional classroom settings and fostering increased confidence and motivation in English language learning.

Question 2: Could you discuss any challenges or difficulties you encounter when navigating between different language varieties, such as Arabic, French, and English, in your academic and social interactions?

The greatest portion of students discuss the challenges faced when navigating between different language varieties, including Arabic, French, and English, in academic and social interactions. They note that maintaining proficiency and fluency across multiple languages is difficult, often leading to language switching depending on the conversation context, which can result in confusion or mixing of language elements, especially when expressing complex ideas. They also added that the cultural nuances and expectations associated with each language pose challenges in effective communication, requiring sensitivity and awareness to navigate successfully and avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

Question 3: In your opinion, what are the potential benefits and drawbacks of using a mixture of languages in written communication, particularly in digital contexts? How does this language practice contribute to your sense of identity and belonging within your peer group and broader community?

The majority of students highlight the potential benefits and drawbacks of using a mixture of languages in written communication, particularly in digital contexts. They argue that this practice offers greater linguistic flexibility and creativity, allowing individuals to express themselves more effectively by drawing from multiple linguistic resources. By blending languages like Arabic, French, and English, nuanced meanings can be conveyed, cultural references incorporated, and language gaps bridged. Furthermore, using a mixture of languages reflects linguistic diversity and multiculturalism, fostering inclusivity and belonging among speakers of different linguistic backgrounds. In digital contexts, such as social media platforms, this language practice facilitates communication and collaboration among individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, promoting cross-cultural understanding and empathy. This suggests that embracing linguistic diversity in written communication enhances communication effectiveness and fosters a sense of belonging within diverse communities.

3. Data Analysis

The findings reveal that the majority of participants recognize the influential role of technology and social media in shaping language use among English students at Tlemcen University. They highlight the positive impact of technology integration on language learning experiences, citing benefits such as access to resources, personalized learning opportunities, and enhanced communication with peers. However, youngsters also acknowledge challenges such as digital distractions and the influence of informal language on communication habits, indicating a nuanced perspective on the role of technology and social media in language learning and communication practices. In addition, informants

frequently encounter challenges when navigating between language varieties such as Arabic, French, and English in both academic and social interactions. These difficulties encompass maintaining language proficiency and fluency, managing language mixing, adapting language register to various contexts, and negotiating cultural nuances and expectations. In order to address these challenges, participants employ strategies such as consistent language practice, immersive experiences, interaction with native speakers, and ongoing reflection on language learning journeys. This highlights the complexity of multilingual communication and underscores the importance of active engagement and reflection in navigating linguistic diversity effectively. It is worth noting that youngsters also acknowledge both the benefits and drawbacks of using mixed languages in written communication. They recognize the advantages, such as linguistic flexibility, cultural inclusivity, and enriched expression, while also noting potential drawbacks like confusion or misinterpretation, erosion of linguistic boundaries, and dilution of cultural identities. Despite these challenges, participants view mixed language use as a form of cultural expression and identity negotiation, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity within their peer group. This highlights the complex interplay between language, culture, and identity in written communication practices. Additionally, the interview results highlight the complex interplay between technology, language diversity, and cultural identity in the linguistic landscape of students of English at Tlemcen University. Informants navigate a multilingual environment, leveraging digital tools and social media platforms to enhance language learning and communication while struggling with challenges such as language mixing and cultural adaptation. As a result, mixed language use emerges as a dynamic practice that reflects linguistic diversity and cultural hybridity, contributing to participants' sense of identity and belonging within their social and cultural contexts.

4. Discussion

The research findings show that most English students at Tlemcen University recognize that technology and social media play a significant and a positive role in shaping language use but also may pose some challenges like digital distractions. According to them, navigating between Arabic, French, and English presents difficulties in maintaining proficiency and adapting to various contexts though code-switching in written communication is acknowledged for its flexibility and cultural inclusivity. Overall, code-switching and language innovation are viewed as a form of cultural expression, contributing to the youth's sense of identity and belonging. Therefore, the complex interplay between technology, language diversity, and cultural identity underscores the need for educators and policymakers to support students' diverse backgrounds and promote critical engagement with digital tools in language learning.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this study provide insight into the intricate dynamics of language use and communication among students of English at Tlemcen University, Algeria, particularly within the context of digital communication and linguistic diversity. The integration of technology and social media has emerged as a significant influence, presenting both opportunities and challenges in language learning and communication practices. Youngsters perceive technology as a valuable tool for accessing resources, enhancing language skills, and facilitating cross-cultural interactions, despite acknowledging potential drawbacks such as digital distractions and the influence of

informal language. Additionally, the interview results underscore the complexities of navigating between different language varieties, including Arabic, French, and English, in academic and social settings. Youngsters encounter challenges in maintaining language proficiency, adapting language register, and negotiating cultural nuances, yet they employ various strategies to overcome these obstacles, emphasizing the importance of language practice, immersion, and interaction with other speakers. Moreover, the study highlights the phenomenon of language innovation, particularly in written communication, where participants engage in code-switching and the blending of multiple languages to express themselves creatively and inclusively. While this practice offers benefits such as linguistic flexibility and cultural inclusivity, it also poses challenges in terms of clarity, comprehension, and the preservation of linguistic boundaries.

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