

# Communication accommodation amongst Congolese Facebook users

Jean Mathieu TSOUYOU

Universidad Europea de Canarias & Universidad Complutense Madrid

[Jean.mathieu@universidadeuropea.es](mailto:Jean.mathieu@universidadeuropea.es)

**Abstract:** Facebook is one of the top social media in use worldwide at present. With millions of people around the globe frequently communicating on the social media, investigating users' interactions and their behaviour on Facebook is a breakthrough in an attempt to gain an understanding of how people behave beyond their traditional face-to-face space. The present study intends to examine patterns of communication accommodation in Facebook interaction amongst Congolese users. Applying communication accommodation theory to analyse a dataset of 262 Facebook updates, the study reveals that, though there is no one-on-one correlation between the incidences of Codeswitching (henceforth cs) in Facebook updates and comments, the two main concepts of communication accommodation theory – namely convergence and divergence – are observed as the main communicative strategies used by Congolese Facebook users.

**Keywords:** Computer-mediated communication; Communication accommodation theory; Code-switching; Netnography; Congo-Brazzaville.

**Resumen:** Facebook es una de las principales redes sociales en uso en todo el mundo en la actualidad. Con millones de personas que se comunican con frecuencia en las redes sociales, investigar las interacciones de los usuarios y su comportamiento en Facebook es un gran avance en un intento de obtener una comprensión global de cómo se comportan las personas online, que es una nueva forma de comunicación diferente la forma presencial. Por lo tanto, el presente estudio examina la adaptación de la comunicación en la interacción de las personas de Congo-Brazzaville en Facebook. Analizando 262 actualizaciones de Facebook, el estudio revela que, aunque no existe una correlación directa entre las incidencias de alternancia de idiomas (Codeswitching, cs) en las actualizaciones y comentarios de Facebook, los dos conceptos principales de la teoría de la acomodación de la comunicación, a saber, la convergencia y la divergencia, se consideran las principales estrategias comunicativas utilizadas por los usuarios de Facebook.

**Palabras claves:** comunicación mediada por ordenador; teoría de la acomodación en la comunicación; alternancia de lenguaje; netnografía; Congo-Brazzaville.

## I. Introduction

Computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) is a new fast-growing field of research that has attracted serious attention from scholars over the past two decades. This dynamic global phenomenon, with its ubiquitous nature, has turned the world into a wide village where people interact with one another from wherever they are at.

Facebook is one of the world's most popular social media that make it easy to connect and share information online (cf. Facebook Inc., 2016). It was co-invented by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. By 2006, Facebook had grown from a private club at Harvard to a service open to everyone. Today, millions of people around the globe frequently communicate on Facebook. It has become a platform in which participants

have a uniquely identifiable profile that consists of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site. (Ellison & Boyd 2013, p. 157)

Facebook on its own for instance remains, perhaps, one of the top popular social media on which much work is still needed (Jucker & Durcheid, 2012; Perez-Sabater, 2012; Ong'onda et al., 2013). The rapid growth of this social media is, without doubt, setting up new challenges to researchers interested in investigating the linguistic characteristics of Facebook. It is also probable that the more popular Facebook becomes, the greater its complexity will be. In fact, one of the challenges to bear in mind while investigating Facebook is that the social media allows several genres to occur on it. For example, not only does Facebook allows users to interact and collaborate; it also offers them a range of possibilities such as the exchange of text messages, going live, posting texts, photos and videos (Tsoumou, 2019).

Communication Accommodation Theory (*CAT*) is a cognitive approach developed by Giles in the 1970s. The theory accounts for the basic assumption that whenever and wherever people interact, their speech is influenced by extralinguistic factors surrounding the interaction. These factors include setting, the context of interaction, age and so forth. Farzadnia and Giles (2015, p. 18) point out that «as an interface between linguistics, communication, and social psychology, *CAT* is a framework for understanding the interpersonal and intergroup dynamics of speakers (and communicators) adjusting their language and

nonverbal patterns to each other's». Likewise, Giles & Gasiorek (2012) argue that adjusting for others is a fundamental part of successful interaction. In this line, interaction can be understood as the process through which interactants adjust and accommodate to and with each other in order to make their speech and that of others meaningful.

The focus of *CAT* is on explaining the motives and constraints behind the speech shift that occurs in human interaction (Giles & Johnson, 1987; Giles, Coupland and Nikolas, 1991; Giles et al., 1991; Giles and Coupland, 1991; Shippey, 1997). This shift in speech is always connected with individuals' beliefs, attitudes and experience of the communicators. Farzadnia and Giles (1995) add that the mere goal of *CAT* is to highlight individuals' beliefs and motives underlying their communicative behaviour in the immediate situation, either orientated convergently toward or divergently away from others present.

The back and forth in interaction amongst individuals can have several causes, including positive and/or negative appreciation of one another, linguistic (in) security, expressions of solidarity, power display and so forth. *CAT* appears to be a very useful framework within which to analyse socio-psychological as well as sociolinguistic phenomena that occur as people interact.

People reduce and magnify communicative differences and similarities among themselves in day-to-day communication whether the interaction is in the traditional face-to-face mode or in online mode. The social consequences of reducing and/or magnifying social differences and similarities in an interaction are certainly an expression the complexity of any given society. CS, defined as the ability of multilingual speakers to alternate between the languages in their linguistic repertoire, is one example of those social consequences, since the phenomenon of language alternation portrays the correlation between a society and the sociolinguistic configuration governing that society.

Two opposing but complementary concepts are at the heart of *CAT*: *Convergence* and *Divergence*, both of which are considered major strategies of communication within the *CAT* mainstream, as previous studies on CS have shown that CS is a strategy whereby individuals emphasize the social difference as well as similarities between themselves and their interlocutors (Gumperz, 1982a; Auer, 1984b; Myers-Scotton, 1993, 2006; Giles, 2009). Switching back and forth can then be inclusive (or convergent), and/or exclusive (divergent), depending upon multiple motives and motivations of the speakers as well as sociolinguistic factors informing the context of the interaction.

The aim of the present study is to examine communication accommodation in Facebook interaction by Congolese users. As pointed out elsewhere (Tsoumou, 2019), Congo-Brazzaville is a multilingual country in which almost

sixty languages are spoken within the national borders. Of all these languages, French is the only national official language. Kituba and Lingala are both major and widespread indigenous lingua francas, which are well known and overused in daily communicative transactions across the country. However, it is mostly the linguistic systems of both languages that have generated healthy body of research carried out by missionaries and (local) language experts. These basically descriptive investigations have specially provided the two languages with phonological, morphological, derivational, lexical, syntactic, and semantic systems. Thus, while technically both languages are relatively codified –as shown by the availability of dictionaries, textbooks, etc.– which could be used both in written and spoken means of communication, they are still hardly recognised institutionally, for example, neither is taught at school nor institutionally implemented despite having some fairly elaborated written forms. In fact, they are mostly used as oral varieties. Finally, social identities are usually expressed by means of an ethnic language since they represent the L1 for most citizens. An ethnic group is thus named after a corresponding ethnic language, which, in turn, operates as an indication of both social and linguistic identities (Ndamba, 2000, 2008; Mamono-Ngolo, 2012; Ngoko, 2013; Kounghat, 2013).

On the other hand, based on Giles and Coupland's (1991a) assumption that when people interact, they adjust their speech, their vocal patterns and gestures to accommodate others, it is eventually expected that language alternation in *Facebook comments* amongst Congolese people depends upon language alternation in *Facebook updates* in which they appear. In other words, multilingual *Facebook updates* could trigger even more cases of CS in *Facebook comments* than one language *Facebook updates* because of communication accommodation.

Very specifically, the study will provide a scientific answer to the following research question

- What are the patterns of the occurrences of CS in *Facebook updates* as opposed to CS in *Facebook comments*?

Before moving forward, it is important to define the concepts of *update* and *comment*, as they are applied throughout the study. An *update* is all new information posted publicly on the timeline of a Facebook user. An *update* can be fully public when the user considers their posts to be available to all their Friends and Followers. It can also be partly public when the user allows only a few Friends access to their post (Maíz-Arévalo, 2015; Lee & Zuercher, 2017). Maíz-Arévalo (2015, p. 300) describes *Facebook updates* as «serving to display new personal information users consider relevant enough to be shared with their Facebook community».

The term *comment* can, on the other hand, be described as any reaction of a Facebook user to an *update*. A *comment* includes a simple click on the *like* button, *reactions*, *gifs*, and so on, which users make or type in order to express their opinion or feelings on a public *update* posted by a Friend or a Follower within the same Facebook community.

Bearing in mind the multimodal characteristic of information on Facebook, these *updates* and *comments* can be of different categories, namely visual – such as simple pictures, photographs or pieces of video recordings, explaining something; audio – such as sounds recorded, transmitted or reproduced; textual – such as text displayed on users' walls – or a combination of the above (Yus, 2011; Herring et al., 2013; Maíz-Arévalo, 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Lee & Zuercher, 2017).

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section two focuses on the description of the theoretical model used in order to analyse data and determine patterns of communication accommodation in *updates* as opposed to *comments*. Section three explains the research method used to collect the data which will be thoroughly analysed in section four. Section five provides a brief discussion along with a general conclusion.

## II. Theoretical model

This section is devoted to describing motives underlying communication accommodation as well as concepts of convergence and divergence, which make up main concepts within the framework.

Studies in *CAT* mainstream have reportedly categorised the motives of speech accommodation into two different types, including affective and cognitive motives (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et al., 2016a, 2016b). On the one hand, it is to note that communicative behaviours are managerial in that the manner in which interlocutors perceive the speech and behaviour of another has a core role in how they evaluate a conversation. Interpersonal communication can stand for both the referential and social (or relational) information (Beebe & Giles, 1984; Vătămănescu, 2010, Giles et al., 2016a). The more similar attitudes and beliefs, the more attracted speakers will be to other interactants in the conversation. Accommodation, therefore, varies in both its degree of appropriateness and the norms that guide speech. Interactants constantly change their communicative behaviour based on who their interlocutors are, and what social status they occupy.

Social (and personal) identity, self-consciousness as well as rules governing any given society play a major role in the way people interact. A notable exam-

ple would be a conversation between two speakers from different social classes in which one participant is of a lower status level and the other of a high social class. It could be argued that the person of a lower social status is likely to accommodate to the person of a higher social class due to his/her desire to become part of the other person's group (Beebe & Giles, 1984). The main goal of *CAT* is to explain how speakers, by using language in interaction, attempt to manage and regulate social distance and to signal their attitudes to each other and their respective social group (Giles et al., 2016a). Affective motives are considered to account for approval seeking by speakers involved in communication.

On the other hand, the desire to ease comprehension and increase communicative efficiency can also motivate communication accommodation (Giles et al., 2016a, 2016b), since convergence to someone else's accent, register, dialect, language, may be key to promoting communicative effectiveness, face-saving, and so on. However, in the context where knowledge is differently shared, as in native and non-native communication, cognitive motivation may be a valuable way to avoid misunderstanding between interactants.

It is worth pointing out that these two groups of motives – affective and cognitive – basically rely upon different factors underlying the context of communication, including interpersonal history, sociocultural norms and values, experiences, and the current and past state of relevant intergroup relations. Linguistic history of Congo-Brazzaville as well as the current linguistic configuration and the asymmetry in terms of education rate may be essential for constant communication accommodation amongst Congolese people.

- **Convergence**

One of the main characteristics of mankind seems to be that individuals usually seek inclusion rather than exclusion. In other words, in any communication setting, people try to adjust themselves because they want to gain approval, increase communicative efficiency, and maintain positive face with their interlocutors (Runciman, 1998; Vătămănescu, 2010). Convergence seems to be a highly productive communicative strategy in that it entails expressing effective feelings in the course of the interaction where both the speaker and the listener render their communication mutually intelligible and integrative. It is arguable that convergence is a mere expression of the desire for social integration.

- **Divergence**

Unlike convergence, divergence is defined as a strategy whereby individuals alter their speech (or communication more generally) to move away and distance themselves from their conversational partners' communicative habits (Bourhis

et al., 1979; Coupland and Nikolas, 1991; Giles & Coupland, 1991b; Giles & Coupland, 1991a). An example of divergence can be found in Giles et al. (2016a) as the authors report a frame interaction between English speakers and Welsh ones, in which the former exhibit some negative opinion of the Welsh language. As the English speakers described Welsh as a dying language with a dismal future, Welsh participants broadened their Welsh accents, and some even introduced Welsh vocabulary and phrases in their responses, thereby emphasizing their Welsh identity and distancing themselves from their English interviewers. While convergence is a strategy for expressing the type of solidarity amongst people, divergence rather sets boundaries and distances. The broad use of the term «divergence» is therefore equated with the exclusion of outgroup members and reinforcement of dissimilarities between interlocutors (Beebe & Giles, 1984; Giles, 2009; Giles et al., 2016a, 2016b; Dragojevic, 2016).

Thomas' (1995, p. 128) explains the difference between convergence and divergence as follows: factors that trigger social distance (e.g. status, social class) are the opposite of factors that trigger solidarity among interlocutors (e.g. degree of intimacy, group membership). Social distance is a composite of psychologically real factors (status, age, sex and so on), which together determine the overall degree of respectfulness within a given speech situation.

*CAT* is also a socio-psychologically-based approach that attempts to explain subsequent outcomes of linguistic production in any given interaction. These outcomes, which are almost always cognitive and affective in nature, include convergence, divergence and, eventually, CS. Interestingly, CS is usually expressed as a means to claiming identity and/or setting social boundaries between people. In some communication settings, speakers can make use of an unmarked choice to claim membership in any given group. In this case, the unmarked choice can be viewed as convergence in interaction. Still, if people make use of a marked choice when the unmarked choice is expected, this might be due to their desire to leave other people out of the communication exchange. This is simply divergence (Myers-Scotton, 1993, 2006).

The use of more than one language in the course of interaction embodies a multitude of concepts, such as code-mixing, language choice, language alternation, all of which are the linguistic behaviour of multilingual speakers in multilingual contexts. These concepts all entail the juxtaposition of, at least, two languages in a single piece of discourse. However, throughout this study, these terms – i.e. code-mixing, language choice and language alternation – are used without distinction under the umbrella concept of CS. In fact, CS, as a communicative strategy, is first and foremost a language choice made by multilingual speakers. Such choice results in mixing items from different languages in con-

versation. This consideration falls within Pagano's (2010) definition of CS, in which the author describes it as all instances where speakers shift from one language to another, either in one or several turns of talk in interaction.

CS also encompasses (a) all words from any other language inserted in conversation where naturally only one language is expected; (b) that the fact of mixing languages is rather a motivated choice emerging from both the intention of the speakers and social factors informing the context of the interaction. Poplack (1981, p. 1) also describes CS as the process of mixing at least two languages by multilingual speakers often with no change of interlocutor or topic. Such mixing may take place at any level of the linguistic structure.

Scholars such as Gumperz 1982a and Gardener-Chloros (2009) believe that what is really termed CS is the intersentential language alternation – which refers to the type of language alternation encompassing sentences from two (distinct) languages available to multilingual speakers; whereas intrasentential language alternation is assimilated to codemixing. According to Gardener-Chloros (2009), CS or intersentential code alternation occurs when a multilingual speaker uses more than one language in a single utterance above the clause to appropriately convey his/her intentions. However, codemixing or intrasentential CS occurs when speakers use two or more languages below the clause level within one social situation.

The reason to consider all these concepts under the umbrella concept of CS in this study is because, as mentioned earlier, French is a potential unmarked code when it comes to written interaction. Theoretically, French is expectedly viewed as an unmarked choice since it is, within the Congolese Facebook community, the only language dedicated to written discourse, especially on Facebook, where the interactions are mostly written-based. Any other language used instead of French appears as a marked choice given the highly official status of French in the country. The marked choices, on the other hand, are those that are unexpected, given the right and obligation set that is in effect (Myers-Scotton, 2006). The use of Kituba and/or Lingala in Facebook communication, for instance, is a perfect example of marked choices.

### III. Method

The method used to gather data for the present study is *Netnography*, knowing as a participant-observational method based on online interaction. It enables to obtain a cultural understanding of human online social interaction and content and to represent them as a form of research (Kozinets, 2015; Tsoumou, 2019). It



also provides researchers with access to groups of people who may otherwise be difficult to reach out to (Kozinets, 2002a, 2002b).

Qualitative along with quantitative analyses were jointly carried out with the purpose of providing a complete analytical description of the data. As Kozinets (2015) stipulates, in *Netnography*, as in all sciences, the method should relate to the type of data and analysis capable of answering the research question investigated. Bowler (2010, p. 1270) synthesizes that «*Netnography* is an excellent resource for the seasoned qualitative researcher and a useful entry point for the newcomer to qualitative research».

The data collection process was based on *symbolic netnography*<sup>1</sup>, meaning that the researcher's role in the process was highly important. The study was entirely carried out manually and were gathered during a period of 10 months, from October 2015 to July 2016. In order to avoid any bias, I was constantly connected to Facebook, to closely observe the ongoing interactions. As soon as I logged on, I collected the newest *updates* as they appeared on personal newsfeeds. *Facebook updates*, as well as the subsequent *comments*, were gathered (Tsoumou, 2019). The process of data collection was relatively simple and easy as I followed step by step the netnographic mainstream and its application in Maíz-Arévalo's (2015) study on jocular mockery in computer-mediated communication. Every *Facebook update* was copy-pasted in a.doc file. A total of 262 *Facebook updates* featuring 9,330 *comments* (see table 1 below) were randomly compiled. As far as the corpus is concerned, the dataset renders 265,147 words.

In an effort to choose a topic that could not only generate CS as such but, most importantly, be of exclusive interest to Congolese people, national politics appeared to be the perfect match. This topic thus becomes the mere parameter that delimits the research. Every update was collectable as long as it deals with Congolese politics.

---

1. There are four types of netnography namely, *symbolic netnography*, *digital netnography*, *auto-netnography*, and *humanist netnography*. Firstly, *symbolic netnography* is a human-based research method which explains online values, cultures, groups and social rituals. The role played by researchers in the process of data collection and analysis is thus crucial as the most part of the research is carried out manually. Secondly, *digital netnography* is a computer-assisted research method. In *digital netnography* data are collected and analysed by means of a substantial participation of digital tools. Thirdly, *auto-netnography* is a research method that consists of using researchers' own private online discourse as an object of analysis. Fourthly, *humanist netnography* regards online culture as a human production; as such it needs a particular analysis from a netnographer (Kozinets, 2015b).

The Congolese Facebook community is as vast as its members are diversely located. It regroups people residing inside and outside the country. At first glance this diversity makes it a little hard to gather a representative sample of data to analyse. Therefore, the decision was made to select the six most popular Facebook pages<sup>2</sup>, which are well-known and widely visited. Accordingly, the six Facebook pages selected include Brazzanews, *Brazzaporisinfos*, *ZianaTV*, *Brazzavilleinfos242*, *DispoInvestigation*, and *Sadio-Kante Morel*.

- **Ethics in CMC research**

In every investigation based on online data, it is always important to emphasize that the nature of online data (public or private) as well as participants' consent, are main concerns of Internet-based communication research (Villi & Matikainen, 2016; Tsouyou, 2019). There has been some controversy around the nature of online material as online social interactions are sometimes viewed as if they took place in either a public or private space. Walther (2002, quoted in Kozinets, 2015, p. 138) reports «that people who post material on a publicly available communication system on the Internet should understand that it is public, not private or confidential». However, Kozinets (2015, p. 139) advises that the netnographer has choices when it comes to ethics procedure, but there are certain requirements that are well established, such as informed consent and risks versus benefits. Even though most online researchers consider messages posted online to be public acts, gaining the consent of participants is usually the best-reported advice and the safest practice within the netnographical tradition.

The protocol followed in the present study was inspired by Maíz-Arévalo (2015), as the author gathered data without informing participants so as not to prejudice their behaviour. However, in January 2017, once all the data had been collected, all the page administrators were contacted by phone. Likewise, hundreds of people who left their *comments* were informed of the investigation via the researcher's own personal Facebook page. Fortunately, none of them expressed any disagreement.

Even though the data collection process was easily carried out, certain challenges were met both beforehand and afterward. Most beforehand challenges were mainly methodological, as they were essentially related to netnographic ethics. On the other hand, with no computer-specialized tool available to carry

---

2. The Facebook pages selected were all held and administered by Congolese citizens who have become famous for the materials they share on Facebook.

out data collection easily, and organize *updates* and *comments*, the current study was a fully pen-and-paper research. All participants' photographs (pictures accompanying their profiles), names as well as *likes* and *emojis* were removed; excerpts to appear in the analysis were all translated from the original language into English, and all names of public figures were anonymized.

In addition, it is important to note that the translation of the excerpts to appear throughout the study was another major challenge that the researcher faced, since some *updates* and *comments* (see table 1 below), as they were originally posted on the Facebook pages aforementioned, failed to follow fundamental language rules such as grammatical rules (e.g. subject-verb agreement), punctuation rules (e.g. period, commas, semicolons). This failure along with the fact that other excerpts were multilingual made it rather difficult for the researcher to figure out the exact meaning of an *update* and/or a *comment*. The research has, therefore, to provide the translation which most closely seemed to describe the illocutionary force of the utterance. Finally, it is also important to mention that the researcher was fortunate enough to be able to contact native speakers whenever an *update* and/or *comment* was written in some ethnic languages (that the researcher has no good skill at) for the sake of an accurate meaning.

- **Characteristics of data**

The type of data analysed in this study is of text-like Facebook interaction. However, there were texts digitally written inside certain images describing the context of the post. This combination of text and image was considered in the corpus, and as such referred to as *commented-picture updates/or comments*. Nevertheless, only texts were extracted and illustrated whenever the combination of both image and text made reference to a public figure. Table 1 presents Facebook updates and the related comments.

Table 1. *Updates* and their related *comments*

	Instances of CS	Number of comments
Multilingual updates	52	2.372
One-language updates	210	6.952

For the sake of clarity, the translation of the excerpts appearing in the data description, analysis and discussion is presented as follows. Firstly, the original

*update* is always followed by a translation (in italicized brackets) from the original language into English. Secondly, the translation of every *comment* following up an *update* is provided in brackets after each of the *comments*. Thirdly, U refers to the users and the number they occupy in the intervention. For example, when a user intervenes in the fourth place in an exchange, s/he will be referred to as U4. Fourthly, all cases of CS found in both *updates* and *comments* appear in bold. Finally, all the excerpts are left in their original typography (e.g. font, exclamation marks, and so on).

#### IV. Findings and analysis

The research question previously posed at the outset is answered by examining three patterns believed to provide better realisation of communication accommodation in Facebook interaction; these patterns include, *multilingual Facebook updates which trigger language alternation in comments*, *one-language Facebook updates which lead to multilingual comments*, and *multilingual Facebook updates which only generate one-language comments*. As shown in table 1 above, 52 out of 262 updates were more-than-one language updates, whereas 210 updates were one-language updates.

The occurrences of language alternation in *comments* seem to be independent of that in *updates*. In other words, multilingual *Facebook updates* do not necessarily trigger language alternation in the threads of *comments*. Neither do monolingual *Facebook updates* necessarily generate CS in *comments*. Even languages used while posting *updates* do not necessarily determine languages in a *comment*.

- **Multilingual Facebook updates which trigger CS in the comments**

Table 2 presents multilingual Facebook update and their respective comments.

Table 2. Multilingual updates: *CS in comments* versus *no CS in comments*

Case-of-CS in updates		Number of tokens	Ratio (%)
52	CS in comments	348	14.67%
	No CS in comments	2,024	85.32%
<b>Total</b>		2,372	100%

Table 2 shows that 14.67 % of the *comments* triggered by multilingual updates are multilingual cases. The remaining 85.32 % of *comments* were one-language, meaning that they are all written in French. This shows to some extent that the link between cases of CS in *updates* and *comments* is subtle, at least in terms of *comments* generated, since the number of CS in *comments* is smaller than *no CS* in *comments*. In excerpt 1 below the *update* is a more-than-one-language *update* under which both monolingual and multilingual *comments* are observed.

(1) Excerpt 1.

En direct de la Mairie centrale de Brazzaville, votre humble serviteur bien installé dès son arrivée, pour la session ordinaire du Comité directeur de la dynamique citoyenne *PO NA EKOLO- SAMU NA BWALA*, qui débutera dans 1h, sous le haut patronage de son Coordonnateur général, LUTHER, représentant le président RICHARDS, empêché.

[*Live from Central Mayor of Brazzaville, your humble servant has already arrived to take part in a regular session of the Executive Committee of the dynamic of the citizen. For the love of the country. The session will start within an hour and is going to be led by the general coordinator, LUTHER, representing the president RICHARDS, prevented.*]

This excerpt consists of 1 case of CS. The *update* is an initially multilingual utterance, involving three languages, French, Kituba and Lingala. The expression *po na ekolo* [Lingala, for the love of the country], *SAMU NABWALA* [Kituba, for the love of the country] is important as it describes a political party whose ideology is based on the vision of saving the country from the supposedly current drift. Posting the message in French with a slogan in both nationally widespread languages, Lingala and Kituba, shows the patriotism this party intends to convey. In addition, using Kituba and Lingala means putting the focus and objective of the party on people's interests.

The first shift of language is observed not in the first *comment*, but in the second *comment* (U2). The *comment* combines French and English.

U2. Mon très cher U1, Diaf est irrécupérable *lol*

[*My dearest U2, Diaf is irrecoverable LOL*]

This *comment* expresses some sense of irony as the user employs a laughter LOL after having made remarks of a fellow citizen. Excerpt 2 below also describes how the languages used in *Facebook update* do not necessarily direct the languages in which the users post a *comment*.

## (2) Excerpt 2.

URGENT BRAZZAVILLE. (...) Des hommes fortement armés empêchent les journalistes et les membres de l'opposition et sympathisants d'accéder dans la salle. #FreeJONSON.

[URGENT BRAZZAVILLE. *Heavily armed men prevent journalists and members of the opposition and supporters from accessing the room. # FreeJONSON.*]

## Comments

U1. Vraiment jusqu'à quand on va Continuer à vivre ainsi, je le savais... et c pas encore fini, ils vont faire les coincés par voies et moyens... à l'opposition de sortir le grand jeu... Mr 8% lui est tellement sûr de lui qu'il fait tout à sa guise et en plus...

[*Really? How much longer are we going to continue living this way? I knew that it was not finished yet. They will make them pay by ways and means. The opposition should review their strategy. Mr 8% is very confident that he has whatever at his disposal...*]

This excerpt prompted 54 *comments*. As in excerpt 1, excerpt 2 is a multi-lingual Facebook *update* featuring French and English. The *update* as a whole is an utterance posted as breaking news. It aims to inform the public of what is about to happen to the opposition. One of the former presidential candidates is about to be arrested. The shift to English – #*freeJONSON* – can be assimilated to a way to create a social movement that could be strong enough to resist the army oppression or prevent the arrest. However, the expression #*freeJONSON* can also be regarded as an alert to the public at large. The fact that the *update* is written in English may be seen as an indication of the fact the alert may be directed to people other than those living within the national borders who might not necessarily speak or understand English. Further examination of the English expression may reveal some valuable insights.

Firstly, JONSON, a candidate ahead of the 2016-presidential election for the political opposition, was facing criminal charges. These charges appeared as a threat to the entire political opposition who saw it as an attempt by the sitting administration to shut down all voices. The opposition leaders, who were still free from judiciary charges, were certainly concerned about both the fate of their colleague and their own safety and fate. The only way to prevent this oppression may have been by the power of their supporters once out in the street or by securing the intervention of international institutions. This message could have been written in one of the local languages if the public targeted was local citizens. The possibly true meaning of the use of English may be a deliberate desire to use an apparently common and worldwide slogan as a means to target outside intervention as will be explained below.

Secondly, one could assert that this *update* appeared as a way of exposing the sitting administration to the outside world, as if freedom of speech were not guaranteed in Congo; Citizens live under oppression and dictatorship. Given this, English – as a global language – best fits the issue of an alert to, for example, NGOs<sup>3</sup> fighting for freedom of speech all over the world.

As regards the *comments* subsequent to the *updates*, four *comments* out of these 54 are multilingual. These four multilingual *comments* feature different languages which visibly happen to diverge from the language in the *Facebook update*. The first multilingual *comment* was introduced by U28.

U28. Peuple du congo *to fungula misso*, ne sotions pas surpris, ça devrait arriver que 'armée allait empêcher' c'est très clair et le fameux plan «b» soyons sérieux *wa ba wuna... we na messo*.

[Let's keep our eyes open, do not be surprised, it may happen the army stop plan b; Let's trust the army while keeping our eyes open.]

This *comment* involves three languages, French, Lingala and an ethnic language (i.e. Laari). The *comment* appears as a direction given to the Congolese people whose eyes were apparently closed until then. The user warns their fellow Congolese how important it would be if everyone supported the opposition leaders as they direct a legitimate fight not just for freedom of the former candidate, but for the progress of the nation in general. CS in this *comment* conveys a rather patriotic meaning through the exclusive use of local languages. By using Lingala – *to fungula misso* [let's keep our eyes open] –, the user might seek to gain the attention of most Congolese who speak the language. The motive behind the use of this ethnic language – *wa ba wuna... we na messo* [no one can lie to anyone who has eyes to see or one cannot deceive one who has open eyes] – may not be easily disclosed. On the one hand, Laari is an ethnic language mostly spoken in the areas surrounding Brazzaville City. On the other hand, it seems fair to argue that few users are capable of understanding the language and the message written in it because of its less known social status. However, the contextual meaning in the use of this language is understood as if this user is calling for the awareness of fellow citizens. Seemingly, She/he wants the fellow citizens to see themselves as exposed to something harmful. The sitting regime is aggressive in the means it employs to restrain the liberty of protesters.

---

3 Non-governmental organizations.

The second multilingual *comment* was posted by U36. It features French and Kituba.

U36. Le développement passe par les routes *kiekiekie* depuis que tu fais tes routes tu as développé Quoi ? *kiadi* le développement passe par la démocratie dis le lui. Dans la démocratie il y'a la transparencele respect des loisla liberté d'expressionla bonne...

[*Do you think building road infrastructures means developing a nation? Hahahaha. Ever since you started these policies what have you improved so far? Sad. Development is connected with democracy. Let him know that. A democratic country allows transparency and freedom of speech...*]

In this *comment* the user describes the development of the country, trying to point out that the only way to achieve progress and prosperity is by taking into account the ebb and flow of democracy. In other words, for this user infrastructures, such as roads, are insufficient to serve as a real basis for development. With respect to language alternation, while the use of laughter – *kiekiekie* [hahahaha] – may be seen as an expression of irony, by shifting into Kituba –*Kiadi* [what a sham] – U36 may be expressing their disappointment.

The third bilingual *comment* is an English/French CS case. It was introduced by user 43.

U43. Je savais déjà que ça devrait arriver. **What a pity country!**  
[*I knew this was going to happen. What a pity country!*]

By switching languages, U43 may, to some extent, have tried to recall her/his forethought – *je savais déjà que ça devrait arriver* [I knew this would happen]. The recall of the forethought here may also be described as an expression of regret over the undesirable situation. In this respect, the shift to English – *What a pity country* – may be seen as an explicit expression of disappointment.

The last case of CS in this *Facebook update* is introduced as a *comment* by U53. It all comes up in English – *no comment*. The *comment* may be on its own very clear since the user prefers to adopt a neutral position to taking part in the ongoing interaction even though by posting this *comment*, she/he is already taking part as a Facebook user. This is a manifestation of irony, defined as the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite. The user may have posted this *comment* for humorous and emphatic effect. However, a closer look at the *comment* may raise more questions than answers as



to whether the user by posting this *comment* goes along with what others have said or just wants to oppose.

Most cases of CS following up this *Facebook update* may be seen as an indication of how alarming and deplorable the political situation in Congo is, and that it merits serious attention. The languages used besides French, the unmarked choice, include English, Lingala, Kituba and Laari. Lingala and Laari might have used in the first *comments* to raise awareness that, as the country's fate is being decided, citizens have a great responsibility to take if they want to secure change. In the second and the third *comments*, both Kituba and English express sadness and disappointment as the nation seems not to be taking a rightful democratic direction.

- **One-language Facebook updates which lead to language alternation in comments**

Having examined the correlation between multilingual *updates* and their follow-up *comments*, it was also reasonable to determine the correlation of language alternation between monolingual *updates* and their follow-up *comments*. Table 3 below presents one-language Facebook updates that triggered language alternation in the comments.

Table 3. One-Language updates: *CS in comments* versus *no CS in comments*

No-Cases-of-es in updates		Number of tokens	Ratio (%)
210	CS in comments	916	13.16%
	No CS in comments	6.024	86.83%
	<b>Total</b>	6.958	100%

In Table 3, the one-language *updates* also generated CS in their following-up-comment threads. In other words, language alternation in *comments* manifests differently in both *comments* and *updates*. Both multilingual and monolingual *updates* can generate both monolingual and/or multilingual comments. For example, excerpt 3 is a monolingual *Facebook update* which generated bilingual *comments*.

(3) Excerpt 3.

Dans les quartiers nord de Brazzaville. Quand je vous dis que ce type un diable.

[In the northern neighbourhoods of Brazzaville. I usually tell you this guy is a devil]

### Comments

U1. C'est de la communication calmez vous

[*Calm down, it is just communication*]

U2. me c pas vrai ya U1

[*That is not true my elderly brother/sister (addresses U1)*]

U3. Ok, c compris. C'est pour éveillez les gens qui ne se bouge pas

[*Okay, Understood. That is how to mobilise those who don't move*]

U4. ok ta raison me cmn Brazzaville

[*Okay, you're right; so how are things going in Brazzaville?*]

U5. Kel communication

[*What kind of communication?*]

U6. De Brazzaville sa marche cmn maintenant

[*How does it work in Brazzaville?*]

U7. **Kiekiekie bastard** la main dans le sac ma chère

[*hahahaha. A bastard caught shoplifting my darling*]

The two cases of language alternation occurring in the *comments* appear in Kituba – i.e. U2. **me c pas vrai ya U1** [That's not true my elderly brother U1] and English – i.e. **Kiekiekie bastard la main dans le sac ma chère** [hahahaha]. A bastard caught shoplifting my darling]. This seems to stand as an indication of the independence of *updates* and *comments* with regard to the language alternation.

However, looking closely at the meanings conveyed in the two cases of CS appearing in the thread of *comments*, it appears as if U2, by shifting to Kituba through the use of **ya** [elderly brother/sister], seems to deliver a respectful message to U1, whom she/he might know personally. As Leech explains (2014: 4), «(...) people normally will not behave politely unless there is a reason to be polite, even if the reason is somewhat vague». The alternation of language is thus related to the desire to signal respect by employing an honorific word **ya** [elderly brother/sister]. Regarding the second case of CS, it appears as if U7 is trying to make fun out of the content of the *update* as her/his *comment* begins with laughter – **kiekiekie** [hahahah].

Excerpt 4 below is another one-language update which generated both monolingual and multilingual *comments*. The *update* describes a demonstration underway in Brazzaville City.

#### (4) Excerpt 4.

Congo-Brazza: Situation tendue, internet mobile et signal RFI coupés

[*Congo-Brazza. Intense situation, shutdown of the Internet mobile and RFI signal*]

Excerpt 4 prompted 91 *comments* out of which 29 were cases of CS. The first more-than-one-language *comment* was introduced by U4 as an expression of support to the demonstration. The *comment* is a French/Lingala post.

U4. Qu'ils viennent coupé aussi le signale à kin du n'importe quoi j'en invite les congolais d'en face de n'ai pas baissez les bras à kin nous sommes de coeur avec vous pour preuve *botinda a.t.c na bish ngobila po tochargelé bino ba pneuds na ba nzeté.*

[I'm waiting for them to shutdown signals here in Kin (Kinshasa) as well. I invite you the Congolese people. Do not give up. Here from Kin we all stand with you. If you need proof, just send us a boat of ATC company to the beach Ngobila (Port) so we can send you back tyres and woods.]

U4 starts the *comment* in French to send out a message of encouragement to the protesters, and then she/he switches to Lingala in the last sentence of the utterance to amplify their support and expresses their willingness to offer help in case the protesters need it.

Another multilingual *comment* was made by U10. The user, who might also be supportive of the demonstration, sends out an encouraging message to the protesters.

U10. Du courage ls brazzavilloi *bobengana ye*  
[Have courage the people of Brazzaville city. Make him go]

As for U4, U10 adjusts her/his *comments* to that of U4 by the use of both Lingala and French. The *comment* is also an expression of encouragement to the protesters.

U12 below posts a new *comment* in Lingala and French. The message is also an expression of giving protesters support, confidence and hope. However, U12 starts the *comment* in Lingala in order apparently to fortify and amplify the words of encouragement to protesters.

U12. *Bolebate akokima tjr toza sima na bino toboyi* bâ président a vie  
[Never give up. He will step down. We are behind you. We don't need a president for life anymore]

The language used by U4, U10 and U12 are both French and Lingala. The common use of Lingala to offer encouragement is, on the one hand, not only as an indication of a conversational adjustment of speech between these users,

but more importantly, the sharing of the same linguistic knowledge that enables these users to understand each other's *comment*. On the other hand, the use of Lingala in these *comments* may also be seen as an indication of political engagement motivated by the desire and hope to bring about change. In fact, while U4 expresses words of support and their willingness to help protesters by any means possible, both U10 and U12 reiterate those words of encouragement and confidence as if the ongoing demonstration may be an effective way for change to take place.

However, the *comment* posted by U59 under the same *update*, as can be observed below, is entirely written in English.

U59. *All that because they don't want to step down i don't know what's going on with africans leaders seriously they're crazy.*

U59, who is apparently concerned about the attitude of African leaders, posts an English *comment* in which she/he utters a flame to these leaders who apparently have habits of not peacefully passing on power. Unlike U4, U10 and U12 who sent out encouragements to the protesters in Brazzaville, U59 puts the blame upon all African leaders. The use of English connects this user to the desire to characterise the political disarray not just as a typical country-related issue, but as a common fact observed in other African countries as well.

Excerpt 5 below is another monolingual *update* entirely written in French. As for excerpts 4 and 5, this excerpt prompted both one-language and multilingual *comments*.

(5) Excerpt 5.

#BRAZZAVILLE

Victoire au peuple, la pluie s'invite à la libération du Congo.

[*#BRAZZAVILLE. victory for the people. Rain is participating in the liberation of Congo*]

This *update* generated 11 *comments* out of which 6 were cases of CS. This is another example of the autonomy of language alternation in the Facebook interaction involving Congolese users. The first multilingual *comment* under this *update* was introduced by U2. The *comment* is an English/French message apparently written with the intention to ironically make jokes of the other political side.

U2. *Mais où sont passés les médicaments des féticheurs de la majorité ? Lol.*  
[*But where are the drugs prescribed by which doctors of the majority fetishists. LOL*]

The use of LOL by U2 may be an appealing to one of the commonly Internet-based expressions with the intention to make jokes at the other political side. However, joke telling, as has been demonstrated in the literature, can be seen as a «positive politeness strategy and an invitation to demonstrate membership and solidarity» (Maíz-Arévalo, 2017a: 592). As people harmoniously engage in an interaction, joke telling can be a smooth way to promote a joyful environment in the process of understanding one another.

Likewise, the *comment* introduced by U4 below is a two-language utterance featuring French and Lingala.

U4. Meme la nature n'est pas avec eux, *esa mawa mingui*  
[Even mother nature has abandoned them. This is too Sad]

U4 might have shifted to Lingala – *esa mawa botika* [this is too sad] with the intention to express displeasure caused by the non-fulfilment of hope and expectations.

U7 below also made a two-language *comment* featuring Lingala and French.

U7. NZAMBE A SAMBELAKA TEHHH, A KO SAMBELA NAN? a suivre!!!!  
[GOD NEVER PRAYS, WHO WOULD HE PRAY FOR? To be continued !!!!]

This switching appears as a proverb – well-known among Lingala speakers – meaning that there are limits in everything human beings can do. In other word, God – as the creator and ruler of the universe and source of all moral authority – is the ultimate being who has power and force over human fortunes.

Excerpt 6 below is a further example of one-language *update* under which both monolingual and multilingual *comments* are observed.

(6) Excerpt 6.

Pression psychologique sur mineur à Brazzaville. Le pouvoir a exigé aux enseignants de toutes les écoles de Brazzaville de conduire leurs élèves au mini meeting du PCT (venir en civil). Une solide prime est réservée à tout enseignant qui drainera le plus d'enfants (...)

[Mind game on minors in Brazzaville. The sitting administration just ordered all teachers of all schools in Brazzaville to take their students to the PCT<sup>4</sup> rally (come without uniform). Teachers who bring most students will get a reward (...)]

---

4 PCT is a political party in Congo.

This monolingual *update* generated 42 *comments* out of which 5 were more-than-one-language *comments*. These 5 multilingual *comments* appear in different languages. For example, the *comment* posted by U17 below is made of French and Kituba as shown below.

U17. les parents n'ont qu'à interdire les enfants d'aller à l'école le jour-j. On verra si claudia et kiki viendront les chercher chez eux... VRAI BUZOBA

[Parents should prevent their children from going to school that day and we will see whether CHLOE and kiki will go to take them at home. FOOLISHNESS]

U17 starts the *comment* in French as she/he alerts parents not to allow their children to go to school on the scheduled day of the PCT's rally. The Kituba expression BUZOBA [FOOLISHNESS] may have been used here as a catchphrase to describe some behaviour that shows a lack of good judgement.

U41. *Essili...*

[It's the end... It's over...]

Another multilingual *comment* was introduced by U41. The *comment* is written in Lingala. The communicative intention of this utterance can be assimilated to the desire to create a political movement to fight against anti-values, such as corruption, in the country. This interpretation goes along with the fact that the *update* made mention of some sort of reward reserved for teachers who would bring the most students to the rally. Therefore, *Essili* [it's the end... it's over...] is arguably a way of emphasising that the time of corruption is over.

- **Multilingual Facebook updates which only generate one-language comments**

It is reasonable to argue that multilingual *updates* do not always trigger CS in *comments*. More-than-one-language *updates* can also be followed up by one-language *comments* only. To illustrate this, excerpt 7 below is a more-than-one-language *updates* initially posted as a combination of Lingala and French.

(7) Excerpt 7.

*Ba combatants ya nsala* bandes des collabos. Le seul loisir au Congo c'est faire l'amour dans des hôtels «le sports en chambre»

[Such hungry activists acting as groups of collaborators. The only entertainment in Congo is «sex in hotel rooms».]

Excerpt 7 generated 26 comments. The switching in this excerpt is a critical analysis of the abnormal behaviour of some fellow citizens who seem no longer to play the role they used to. These fellow citizens have moved to another political side they used to blame for the disarray of the economy of the country.

The Facebook user who posted this *update* may have made use of Lingala, with the intention to indicate such disreputable conduct. In other words, Lingala – as local language – is apparently a perfect tool to denounce this disloyal behaviour of the fellow citizens. As such, language alternation stands for a strategy by which a Facebook user expresses disappointment and disapproval.

Excerpt 8 is another three-language *update* under which *comments* were all monolingual. The *update* features Laari, English and French.

(8) Excerpt 8.

*MBONGUI SHOW A SUIVRE* : Invité : Les combattants de Paris c'est la diaspora de la honte... Diaspora : à quoi ça sert de dérouler vos intelligences sur les réseaux sociaux uniquement ?...

[*TALK SHOW TO BE CONTINUED*: Guest: Paris activists are shameful... Diaspora: what impact have your intelligences got when you display them on social media only...]

This excerpt prompted 9 *comments* out of which none was more-than-one language. All the *comments* were entirely written in French.

However, the cases of CS in the *update* are worth examining in depth. On the one hand, the Laari word *MBONGUI* means a space or platform of dialogue and exchange symbolized by a tree under which the whole village meets to deal with and share their opinions about their affairs and particular situations. On the other hand, the English word *SHOW* can be described as a (TV, Radio, Facebook, etc) programme on which guests participate in discussions about a particular topic or may be interviewed about.

Both expressions appear to have slightly the same meaning in both languages. A *SHOW* can be described as *MBONGUI* in Laari and vice versa. In other words, these words might have been used in this post as an analogy. It seems evident that the Facebook user who posted this *update* may have some knowledge of the meaning of the two words in both languages.

On the other hand, *MBONGUI* and *SHOW* appear as examples of loan translation in that they appear as an adaptation by one language of a word literally translated with a corresponding meaning in another language.

Furthermore, excerpt 9 below is a combination of French and English. The switch appears in the final position of the utterance with a hashtag.

## (9) Excerpt 9.

**BrazzaNews** Maître Tric, avocat de notre Général JONSON annonce le renforcement de la désobéissance civile qui se fera avec les partenaires sociaux et les syndicats. Il définit les conditions du dialogue dont nous exigeons tous la tenue en terrain neutre, en Suisse. #FreeJONSON.

[*BrazzaNews. Attorney Tric, the advocate for General JONSON announces the strengthening of civil disobedience that will be done with the social partners and the unions. He defines the conditions of the dialogue which we all require to be held in neutral place such as Switzerland. #freeJONSON*]

The use of a hashtag may suggest that the intention of the Facebook user who posted the *update* is arguably the desire to accommodate to some of the most common and worldwide slogans, *free*. In fact, while the term *free* appears as a common expression, its use among Congolese Facebook – who may or may not speak English – is certainly a way of desperately seeking for relief from other countries. Within the *update* for example, the user, who posted excerpt above, poses some preconditions under which a political dialogue would be possible between all the political forces of the country. This user picked Switzerland as a perfect place for a dialogue.

The *update*, however, prompted no more-than-one-language *comments*, though the post was written in more than one language. All the 9 *comments* under this excerpt were written in French. This is another illustration of the autonomy of the occurrence of CS in *updates* as opposed to that in *comment*.

## V. Discussion and conclusion

The present study set out to examine communication accommodation in Facebook interaction by Congolese users, in order to determine patterns of the occurrences of CS in *Facebook updates* as opposed to CS in *Facebook comments*. From the research question posted earlier, «what are the patterns of the occurrences of CS in *Facebook updates* as opposed to CS in *Facebook comments*?», it is fair to conclude that there is no cause-effect relation between the manifestation of CS in *updates* as opposed to *comment*. The examination of the results indicates that language use in Facebook does not necessarily affect language use in *comments* as both monolingual and multilingual *updates* trigger either monolingual or multilingual *comments*. In this regard, the findings tested negative the hypothesis advanced at the outset – multilingual *Facebook updates* could trigger even more cases of CS in *Facebook comments* than one language *Facebook updates* because of communication accommodation.



Convergence and divergence are, however, both communicative strategies Facebook users tend to opt for when posting *comments*. Thus, interaction between Congolese Facebook users is certainly a process through which interactants adjust to and distance from each other in order to make their speech and that of others communicatively meaningful (Giles & Coupland, 1991b). The analysis of the findings has demonstrated motives why Congolese Facebook users accommodate one another. It has, for instance, shown that politeness can be a trigger to alternate languages. Politeness in some cases of CS consists on showing respect while distancing from the main language of the interaction. This can be assimilated to affective motives, which are related to the desire to ease comprehension and increase communicative efficiency and understanding. It was also demonstrated that other CS incidences can be cognitively driven language choices made by users as they want to exhibit their sociolinguistic identities. The use of *MBOUNGUI* and *SHOW* in excerpt 9 falls within the cognitively driven CS, since the user seems to show off their ability to communicate their thought through the use of English and Laari. This ability constitutes a speaker's grasp of linguistic conventions.

In addition, the first case of CS kicking off the *comment* thread under an *update* does not ultimately prompt other *comments* in the same language. The analysis has indicated that any language can be used while writing the first *comment* following an *update*. Within the comment threads, however, some *comments* appeared as an adjustment to the previous ones, since they happen to be written in the same language, whereas others appeared different as they are, in some cases, written in different languages.

Self-consciousness, the awareness of the self as both an individual and a member of the Facebook community (Zhao et al., 2008; Maíz-Arévalo, 2017a), is a basic motive behind the choice of language in certain cases. A Facebook user who chooses one language over the other is certainly conscious of the fact that her/his message needs to be read and understood by the fellow users in order to gain credit. In this regard, CS is a common multilingual practice that is used not only as a conversational tool, but also, as a way of establishing, maintaining and delineating ethnic boundaries and identities. As has been indicated, Facebook users employ CS as a communicative means to express their genuine feelings and emotions concerning national affairs and the future of the country, regardless of whether all users understand all these languages. These feelings have been identified as anger, disappointment, irony, sadness, etc.

However, the occurrences of CS on Facebook, as has been suggested throughout the analysis, do not ultimately point to the argument that the interaction on Facebook is entirely multilingual since *more-than-one-language up-*

*dates* accounts for 210 occurrences (80.15%). This may be taken as an indication of the fact that Facebook communication among Congolese users is still a dominantly monolingual exchange. Most interactions are steadily carried out in French. A plausible explanation may be twofold: on the one hand, not only are Facebook interactions still mostly written-based, but more importantly, international languages (e.g. English, French, Spanish, etc.) are still dominant in online interactions (Georgakopoulou, 1997; Huang, 2009; Golbarg, 2009; Eldin, 2014; Halim & Maros, 2014; Bukhari et al., 2015; Lee & Zuercher, 2017). On the other hand, French, as mentioned earlier, remains the only language constitutionally regarded as the main means of written communication. Thus, it seems easier to carry out a mostly written-based interaction in French rather than in any other language

Language alternation is a two-way-communicative strategy since it may lead to misunderstandings between speakers sharing different linguistic backgrounds. CS also leads to mutual understanding between speakers of the same linguistic background. In this regard, CS appears as a linguistic manifestation falling within what Gumperz (1982a) calls *we code* and *they code*. As two speakers get involved in the language alteration process their act is first and foremost motivated against the backdrop which shows their linguistic experience and knowledge of one another. Speakers of one language may shift languages in the course of interaction because they are aware that their interlocutors will or will not understand the meaning and/or the message intended. In fact, the phenomenon of switching languages in the course of the interaction is, assumingly, a strategy whereby interlocutors, who share a similar or different linguistic past, can inclusively or exclusively make use of a language as a marker of solidarity and/or distance enhancement. This goes in line with Crystal's (2001, p.166) argument that «in multilingual groups, the other CS will be an important index of identity. Maintaining the identity of the group is the important thing, especially as there is no other sort of identity to rely upon, given that anonymity is the norm». In the same line, Hok-Shing Chan (2009, p. 182) argues that CS is «a resource that bilinguals tactfully utilize to achieve various communicative effects, to index social roles and identities, and/or to manage ongoing talk».

At least five languages have been identified in both *updates* and *comments* analysed. These languages include the unmarked language, French and the marked languages, Lingala, English, Kituba, and Laari. The use of these five languages is one indication that language is more than a simple communicative tool. Each of these languages plays a specific role within this community. Facebook may, on the other hand, be understood in terms of a safe platform on which freedom of speech and actions may be well guaranteed. The findings

have suggested – in some excerpts and *comments* – the aggressiveness in the use of language as Facebook users overtly utter emotions, criticisms and insults. These users may certainly have behaved differently if the interaction turned out to be in a traditional offline context where respect and dignity are more likely to be expected. Zhao et al. for example, argue

in localized face-to-face interactions, identity is constructed under a unique set of constraints. The presence of the corporal body in social encounters prevents people from claiming identities that are inconsistent with the visible part of their physical characteristics (e.g., sex, race, and looks), and the shared knowledge of each other's social background and personality attributes renders it difficult for an individual to pretend to be what he or she is not. (2008, p. 1817)

The presence of the English language is also to discuss in depth as Congo-Brazzaville is a non-English-speaking country. The English language is noticeable on Facebook. As has been suggested in the analysis, some cases of language alternation were purposefully uttered with the intention to express humour and irony, whereas others, used as slogans, conveyed some sort of political and social engagements. Furthermore, it is important to point out that most English words or expressions analysed appeared as most common and worldwide slogans such as *LOL*, *Free*, and so on. The use of these well-known expressions indicates the dominance of English in CMC, since their use among Congolese Facebook users shows an appeal to their common values and fame. However, beyond these explicit communicative functions, there might be some implicit message conveyed in using English on Facebook. *Facebook updates* and *comments* may be written in English by Congolese people not only to address their fellow citizens, who might or might not have limited skills in the language, but with the intention of reaching other linguistic communities beyond national borders. For example, the *comment* made by U59 under excerpt 4, which was entirely written in English, described the political disarray not just as a typical country-related issue, but as a common fact observed in other African countries as well.

Finally, the lack of face-to-face contact between the researcher and Facebook users probably hid many further motives behind the use of language on Facebook. It would be interesting for future investigations to find a way to collect both online and offline data from the exact same participants by interviewing them. Future research also could investigate both offline and Facebook behaviours, relating the online to the traditional face-to-face findings.

## References

- Auer, P. (1984a). *Bilingual conversation: Pragmatics and Beyond*. Parret & Verschueren.
- (January 1984b). On the Meaning of Conversational Code-Switching. *Interpretive Sociolinguistics*, 87-112.
- Beebe, L. M., & Giles, H. (1984). Speech accommodation theories: a discussion in second language acquisition. *Int'l. J. Soc. Lang.* 46, 5-32.
- Bourhis, R. Y., Giles, H., Leyens, J. P., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Psycholinguistic Distinctiveness: Language Divergence in Belgium. In H. Giles & R. St-Clair (Eds.), *Language and Social Psychology* (pp. 158-185). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Bowler Jr, G. M. (2010). Netnography: A method specifically designed to study cultures and communities online. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(5), 1270-1275.
- Bukhari, N. I. B., Anuar, A.F., Kazim, M. K., and Aziz, T. M. F. B. T. A. (2015). English-Malay code-mixing innovation in Facebook among Malaysian University students. *Researchers World-Journal of Arts, Sciences & commerce*, 4(4).
- Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dragojevic, M. (2016). Communication Accommodation Theory. *The International Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Communication*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Eldin, A. A. S. (2014). Socio Linguistic Study of Code Switching of the Arabic Language Speakers on Social Networking. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 4(6), 1923-8703.
- Ellison, N. B., & Boyd, D. (2013). Sociality through Social Network Sites. In W. H. Dutton (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies* (pp 151-172). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Farzadnia, S., & Giles, H. (2015). Patient-Provider Health Interactions: A Communication Accommodation Theory Perspective. *International Journal of society, Culture and Language (IJSCL)*, 3(2), 17-34.
- Gardener-Chloros, P. (2009). *Code Switching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gasiorek, J., & Giles, H. (2013). Accommodating the interactional dynamics of conflict management. *Iranian Journal of Society, Culture, and Language*, 1, 10-21.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (1997). Self-presentation and interactional alignments in e-mail discourse: the style and code switches of Greek messages. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 141-164.
- Giles, H. (2009). Communication Accommodation Theory. In Harry T. Reis & S. Sprecher (Eds.), *Sage Encyclopaedia of Human Relationships*. Vol. 1 (pp. 265-267). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. doi:10.4135/9781412958479.n89.
- Giles, H., & Gasiorek, J. (2012). Parameters of Non-Accommodation: Redefining Elaborating Communication Accommodation Theory. In J. Forgas, J. László &

- V. Orsolya (Eds.), *Social cognition and communication* (pp. 155-172). New York: Psychology Press.
- Giles, H., Coupland, J., & Coupland, N. (1991). *Contexts of Accommodation: Developments in Applied Sociolinguistics*. England: Cambridge UP.
- Giles, H., & Johnson, P. (1987). Ethnolinguistic identity theory: A social psychological approach to language maintenance. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 68, 69-99. doi: 10.1515/ijsl.1987.68.69.
- Giles, H., Dragojevic, M., & Gasiorek, J. (2016b). Communication Accommodation Theory. In C. R. Berger & M. E. Roloff (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 1-20). John Wiley & Sons.
- Giles, H., Gallois, C., Gasiorek, J., and Soliz, J. (2016a). Communication Accommodation Theory: Integrations and New Framework Developments. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Communication Accommodation Theory: Negotiating Personal Relationships and Social Identities across Contexts* (pp. 192-210). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781316226537.010
- Giles, H., Coupland, J., and Coupland, N. (1991a). Accommodation Theory: Communication, Context, and Consequence. In H. Giles, J. Coupland, and N. Coupland (Eds.), *Contexts of Accommodation* (pp. 1-68). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Giles, H., & Coupland, N. (1991b). Accommodating Language. In H. Giles, & N. Coupland (Eds.), *Language: Contexts and Consequences* (pp. 60-99). Great Britain: Open University Press.
- Golbarg, R. H. (2009). Spanish-English in email communication. *Language @internet*, 6, 1-21. Retrieved from <http://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2009/2139> (consulted on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2017).
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982a). *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1982b). *Language and social identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halim, N. S., & Maros, M. (2014). The Functions of Code-switching in Facebook Interactions. In *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 118, 126-133 (March). Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273850755\\_The\\_Functions\\_of\\_Code-switching\\_in\\_Facebook\\_Interactions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273850755_The_Functions_of_Code-switching_in_Facebook_Interactions) (consulted on February 17<sup>th</sup> 2017).
- Herring, S. C., & Dainas, A. R. (2017). «Nice picture comment!» Graphicons in Facebook comment threads. *Proceedings of the Fiftieth Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-50)*. Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE. Retrieved from <http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/~herring/hicss.graphicons.pdf> (consulted on August, 30<sup>th</sup> 2017).
- Herring, S. C., Stein, D., & Virtanen, T. (Eds.). (2013). Introduction to the pragmatics of computer-mediated communication. In: *Handbook of computer-mediated communication* (pp. 1-32). Germany: De Gruyter Mouton.

- Hok-Shing Ch, B. (2009). Code-switching between typologically distinct languages. In B. E. Bullock and A. J. Toribio (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of linguistic code-switching* (pp. 182-196). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huang, D. L. J. (2009). Language use in asynchronous computer-mediated communication in Taiwan. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 32(2), 1-12.
- Jucker H. J., & Durcheid, C. (2012). The Linguistics of Keyboard-to-screen Communication. A New Terminological Framework. *Linguistik online* 56(6). Retrieved from [http://www.linguistik-online.de/56\\_12/juckerDuerscheid.html](http://www.linguistik-online.de/56_12/juckerDuerscheid.html) (consulted on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017).
- Koungat, J. (2013). *Les attitudes et représentation des populations de Talangai* (Mémoire pour l'obtention de la maîtrise de linguistique). Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines. Université Marien Ngouabi de Brazzaville.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002a). The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39 (February), 61-72.
- (2002b). Can consumers escape the marked? Emancipatory illuminations from burning man. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(June), 20-38.
- (2010). Netnography: The Marketer's Secret Ingredient. *MIT Technology Review*, October 14. Retrieve from <http://www.technologyreview.com/business/26434/>.
- (2012). Marketing Netnography: Prom/ot(ulgat)ing a New Research Method. *Methodological Innovations Online*, 7(1), 37-45.
- (2015a). *Netnography: Redefined* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- (2015b). Netnography. In: Robin Mansell and Peng Hwa Ang (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society* (pp. 653-660). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lee, S. A., & Zuercher, R. J. (2017). A current review of doctor-patient computer-mediated communication. *Journal of communication and Healthcare. Strategies, Media and Engagement in Global Health.*, 10, 22-30. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17538068.2017.1282184> (consulted on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017).
- Leech, G. (2014). *The pragmatics of politeness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maíz-Arévalo, C. (2015). Jocular mockery in Computer-mediated communication: A contrastive study of a Spanish and English Facebook community. *Journal of politeness Research*, 11(2), 289-327.
- (2017a). Getting «liked». In C. R. Hoffman and Wublitz (Eds.), *Pragmatics of Social Media* (pp. 575-606). Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- (2017b). Expressive Speech Acts in Educational e-chats. *Emotion and language «at work»: The discursive emotive/evaluative function in different texts and work contexts*. January 2017. *Pragmática sociocultural/Sociocultural pragmatics* 5 (2), pp. 1-28.

- Mamono-Ngolo, G. P. (2012). *Les Classes nominales du parler etyee [B73e] (District de Tsiaki, département de la Bouenza, Congo)* (Mémoire de Maîtrise, s/dir. de Ndamba, J. HDR). Département de Linguistique et Langues Africaines, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Brazzaville.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (1993). *Social motivations for codeswitching: Evidence from Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2006). *Multiple Voices: An introduction to Bilingualism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Ndamba, J. (2000). Des Véhiculaires aux vernaculaires à Brazzaville : la ville et les changements de fonctions linguistiques. In *Le Plurilinguisme urbain* (pp.135–145), actes du colloque de Libreville, 25-29 septembre 2000. Paris: Institut de la francophonie / Didier Erudition.
- Ndamba, J. (2008). Evaluation dialectométrique des langues et dialectes du département du Kouilou. *Revue gabonaise des sciences du langage*, 4 (July), 75-89.
- Ngoko, A. (2013). *Les Classes nominales dans le parler ibwïisi du Congo (B45)* (Mémoire de Maîtrise, s/dir. de J. Ndamba, HDR). Département de Linguistique et Langues Africaines, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Brazzaville.
- Ong'onda, N. A., Ongarora, D., and Oketch, O. (2013). Prosodic features in Facebook Communication. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 2(2) (April), 166-180.
- Perez-Sabater, C. (2012). The linguistics of Social Networking: A study of writing conversation on Facebook. *Linguistik online*, 56 (6/12), 83-91.
- Poplack, S. (1981). Syntactic structure and social function of code-switching. In R. P. Duran (Ed.), *Latino Discourse and Communication Behaviours* (pp. 169-184). New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Runciman, W. G. (1998). *The Social Animal*. Great Britain: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Shippey, S. S. (1997). *The role of Communication Accommodation in patient recall of Physicians' Treatment Recommendations*. (A thesis In Communication Studies. Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Texas Tech University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts).
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in Interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. London/ New York: Longman.
- Vătămănescu, E. M. (2010). The Social and Cultural Patterns in the Context of Global Interaction. An Overview on the Communication Accommodation Theory. *Preparing the Workforce for the Information Society, CIEA* (pp. 281-290). Iași: Universității «Alexandru Ioan Cuza» Publishing House (CD).
- Villi, M., & Matikainen, J. (2016). Participation in Social Media: Studying Explicit and Implicit Forms of Participation in Communicative Social Networks. *Media and communication*, 4(4), 109-117. doi:10.17645/mac.v4i4.578.

- Walther, J. B. (2002). Research ethics in internet-enabled research: Human subjects' issues and methodological myopia. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4, 205–216.
- Yus, F. R. (2011). *Cyberpragmatics. Internet-mediated Communication in Context*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S., & Martin, J. (2008). Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 24(5), 1816-1836.