

## ***Names U ma puce: multilingual texting in Senegal***

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### **Abstract**

Multilingualism is an important aspect of African urban life, also of the lives of students in Dakar. While the students usually write monolingual texts, mainly in French, their text messages involve the use of African languages too, in particular of the majority language Wolof, as well as Arabic and English, often mixed in one and the same message. With the rapid rise in the use of mobile phones, texting is becoming increasingly central as a means of communication for the students, and the social network with whom they text is growing.

This working paper investigates texting as literacy practices (*cf.* Barton & Hamilton 1998), putting the accent on language choices: what role do they play in constructing these new practices? What are the motivations and the functions of the students' language choices? The analysis is based on six months of fieldwork in Dakar, during which I collected 496 SMS and interviewed and observed the 15 students who had sent and received the messages. I will focus on the practices of three of the students: Baba Yaro, a Fula-speaker born outside Dakar who has come to the Senegalese capital to undertake his studies, Christine, a Joola-speaker born in Dakar, and the Wolof-speaker Ousmane, from the suburb. I argue that in order to manage relationships and express different aspects of their identity, the students both exploit and challenge dominant language attitudes in their texting.

### **Introduction**

Research on texting and mobile phone use tends to focus either on the texts and on linguistic aspects of these (Anis 2007, Crystal 2008, Cougnon and Ledegen 2009) or on social practices linked to the technology (Ling 2004, Horst and Miller 2006, Ekine 2010). In my PhD thesis (Lexander 2010), the goal is to combine these two perspectives in order to understand how language choices are made to construct texting as a literacy practice, or literacy practices, among students in Senegal, and how this can influence other literacy practices.

The extremely rapid growth in mobile phone use in Africa has changed communication on the continent, reproducing "social stratifications even as it is actively transforming them through the

creativity and innovation that it provokes or condones" (de Bruijn *et al.* 2009b: 15). "It is a whole new vehicle of identity and identification for all walks of life" (*op.cit.* 14). The diversity of roles given to mobile phone communication is expressed through linguistic diversity, freedom of speech, of language choice and of orthography. The SMS gives room for the written expression of different aspects of identity, for written communication of social, discursive and narrative choices (*cf.* Pavlenko *et* Blackledge's definition of identity, 2004: 19). Through managing different relationships, be they romantic, family-based or linked to the university milieu, identities are co-constructed in texting.

In a multilingual context, different languages are used to express different aspects of identity and the few existing studies of text messaging and mobile phone use in Africa show that, despite dominance of English and French in the written domain, also African languages, usually associated with spoken communication, are used to write SMS messages (Deumert and Masinyana 2008). The texters code-switch (Taiwo 2009) and use mixed codes (Feussi 2007) in these multilingual text messages, and even people who often are considered as illiterate use SMS messages to give and get information (Kibora 2009). Multilingual texting is also common among university students in Senegal, who usually only read and write in French, but who use Wolof and other African languages in their text messages. My hypothesis is that the students' use of African languages in texting contributes to a breakthrough for these languages as written languages. When it comes to marginalized languages and languages normally used for oral communication, several studies point to the use of these in different written electronic communication (Kitalong and Kitalong 2000, Warschauer 2003, Hinrichs 2006), while some researchers stay pessimistic when it comes to the use of African languages on the Internet (Paolillo 2007).

To examine the use of Wolof and Pulaar in texting, ethnographic data collected among students at the University of Dakar are object of a threefold analysis: statistical analysis of the corpus of SMS messages, analysis of the practices of each informant and of individual texts. The aim is to identify motivations for using the two national languages Wolof and Fula, or Pulaar, the name that will be used here, as well as the values and roles assigned these languages in texting. In the following, the theoretical orientation of my work is first briefly presented, second, the context of texting in African languages is discussed in terms of the differences between what I will call activist, imposed and popular literacy, before turning to the methods used for data collection and analysis. An analysis of practices and texts of three university students, Baba Yaro, Christine and Ousmane then follows.

## **Electronic literacy practices**

The research presented here relies on the theoretical framework of the New Literacy Studies (NLS), and is in particular inspired by David Barton and Mary Hamilton's study of literacy practices in Lancaster (1998). Their work highlights the importance of vernacular literacies, everyday literacies, in people's lives, and shows the utility of considering reading and writing through specific people. The core concept of this and other work within the NLS, is that of literacy practices, "the general cultural ways of utilising written language that people draw upon in their lives" (*op.cit.* 6), including "values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships" (*ibid.*). In their social theory of literacy, Barton and Hamilton, emphasizes how different literacies are patterned by social institutions, power relationships, and history, and how they are embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices. When studying the texting of Senegalese students, I am thus interested in the making of the texts, in the intentions of the writers and the reactions of the people who read them. The examination of how

social institutions influence the making of texts and what cultural norms and practices are involved is necessary to situate the text messages in the more general context of social interaction. While the NLS often treat texts like artifacts, the present study joins others who put more weight on the making of the texts and on the analysis of them (e.g. Lee 2007, Mbodj-Pouye 2007).

Language choices and code-switching are usually studied from a spoken language-perspective, but linguistic studies of electronic communication have enhanced the research on written expressions of multilingualism, as “linguistic diversity is gaining an unprecedented visibility in the mediascapes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century” (Androutsopoulos 2007a). These studies have shown how complex the language question is for the negotiation of identities on the Internet (Androutsopoulos 2007b), how language choice is topic-related and used for particular expressions (Atifi 2007) as well as for didactic and pedagogical purposes (Kitalong and Kitalong 2000, Warschauer 2003). The studies of multilingualism in electronic communication often make use of quantitative analysis (Siebenhaar 2006), sometimes in combination with qualitative methods (Androutsopoulos 2007b), and often with reference to theories based on spoken language. Mark Sebba (forthcoming 2011) argues that theories constructed for the analysis of spoken language cannot fully account for written multilingualism and calls for a theoretical framework for the study of all kinds of multilingual texts. This framework should imply the use of ethnographic tools and make use of the notion of literacy practices, and the visual should be included in the analysis. These principles are sought taken into account in the following analysis of Senegalese SMS messages.

Personal communication via the Internet is often similar to texting when it comes to norms for language choices and orthography (see e.g. Anis’ comparative analysis of different types of communication), and it is therefore useful to compare different electronic literacy practices in order to seize norms on a level going beyond texting. In my research, I have therefore collected other texts and data on other electronic literacy practices. If the significance of texting is related to other electronic literacy practices, its significance as an African language literacy practice is also related to other literacy practices in African languages.

### **The context of texting in African languages**

African language literacy is in principle marginalized in Senegal, literacy practices in French being dominant. However, there are several types of literacy practices that make use of national languages only or where national languages are being used together with other languages. These can be divided into three groups, according to the motivation for the language choice: activist literacy, imposed literacy and popular literacy.

Activist, or ideological, literacy is related to arts, religion, and politics. It is rooted in the nationalist movement and the movement for independence during French colonial rule. The goal is to promote Wolof, *lingua franca* in the country, spoken by 80-90% of the population as a first or a second language (McLaughlin 2008), or other national languages, like Pulaar, the biggest minority language. The language choice is thus ideological. Activist literacy is often in opposition to both the political power and to formal social institutions. It usually follows standard orthography and is more or less monolingual. When it comes to Wolof, activist literacy is materialized in novels (e.g. Diop 2003) and poems (e.g. Ndiaye 2003) in Wolof, written by and read by a small group of people. The Pulaar movement (Humery-Dieng 2001) has succeeded in associating literacy in Pulaar with cultural revitalization and resistance against Wolofization, turning Pulaar literacy classes into activist literacy,

following an ideological model of literacy (*cf.* Street 1984). Activist literacy is closely related to imposed literacy in Wolof, as some of the activist writers became part of the political power after Senegal's independence in 1960.

Imposed literacy is still somehow the opposite of activist writing, initiated by those who retain political and financial power, and controlled by formal social institutions. It is related to informal education, literacy classes, and university education, as well as experimental classes within the formal sector. There is legislation related to this writing, concerning the status of the language and its spelling, and it is rooted in national and international goals, to "erase" literacy, for instance. It is imposed literacy because the writers do not necessarily choose to write in national languages themselves, the initiative comes from outside the group of participants.

Literacy classes for adults and young people are taught in national languages, and for some studies in university it is compulsory to study a national language. The Wolof taught is a Wolof rather free from French influence that is quite different from the Wolof-French mixed code that dominates spoken communication in Dakar (Swigart 1992, McLaughlin 2008) and that the students usually speak. They do thus not necessarily relate to it, or identify with it. Many students find the spelling difficult, as it is not an orthography based on a tradition of writing, but constructed by linguists to reflect exact pronunciation and seldom used. In primary school, there have been experimental classes where national languages, mainly Wolof, are introduced as language of instruction, but parents are often reluctant to having Wolof as the language of instruction, fearing that it will give their children less opportunities.

While both activist and imposed literacy are linked to standard orthography and monolingualism, popular literacy is highly multilingual and the spelling only rarely follows the standard. These literacy practices are related to different domains of the lives of the writers, like personal life, news, music and business. The writer is in power, as this kind of literacy is more or less independent from social institutions, the initiative comes from the writers themselves, just like in activist literacy, but the motivation for using national languages is slightly different. Popular literacy in Wolof is often creative writing, like comics, and it also comprises shop signs, writing on buses, publicity and political campaigns. What makes this different from activist literacy is that Wolof is not chosen for the sake of promoting it as a language, but for other reasons, for instance to sell. Comics are often much funnier to read with Wolof words inserted, many Wolof speakers would argue, and slogans may sound better in Wolof. The choice of Wolof and the writing is often inspired by, and sometimes interacts directly with, spoken language. The same slogans in Wolof are used in publicity on television and radio, in newspapers and on posters, and comics represent the spoken communication of the characters. Because of this relation to spoken language, popular literacy is often multilingual. In opposition to activist and imposed literacy, based on a Wolof rather free from French influence, spoken in rural areas, popular writing is frequently inspired by urban Wolof, the mixed Wolof-French code spoken in Dakar and other cities. The social goals of popular literacy are individual, depending on the writer, and a range of different cultural practices are reflected.

Electronic communication is an important arena for popular literacy. Not all electronic communication is popular writing, of course. Use of Wolof in discussion forums, on web sites, on facebook, and in blogs can be both activist and popular. But when it comes to instant messaging, personal emails, chatting in chat-rooms, and text messages, Wolof is chosen for the purpose of the

writers' communicational goals. And this is what makes popular writing in Wolof powerful, compared to activist and imposed writing: the writers choose to use Wolof because it has a practical value. In addition, many writers are concerned. Activist writing concerns a small number of activists, imposed writing concerns students, participants in literacy classes and experimental classes, while popular writing does not concern particular groups. Because of the freedom of popular writing, when it comes to language mixing and orthography, for instance, it is open to larger groups of the population and does not demand particular language skills. With the advent of information and communication technologies (ICT) and in particular the expansion of the cell phone, popular writing is becoming increasingly popular. In December 2010, the number of mobile phone subscriptions was 8,34 million, a number corresponding to 68% of the Senegalese population (Osiris 2011). A growing number of people participate in literacy linked to ICT, and among the most eager users, we find young people in Dakar.

## Methods

University students were therefore chosen as informants. Since they read and write in French every day and constitute the future elite, their practices are particularly interesting. Data for the study were collected in Dakar between 2005 and 2007. Through snowball sampling, seven women and eight men were recruited: ten university students, three students in high school (*lycée*) and two other young people. During my first meeting with each informant, pictures were taken of all text messages saved on his or her phone, and an interview concerning the immediate context, as well as the informant's interpretation of the language choices in the texts were discussed. Later interaction with the informants was less formal; different literacy practices, electronic and non-electronic, were observed and discussed. Two informants were also asked to keep record of their daily literacy practices for a short period. Finally, two focus groups were executed, where different subjects linked to electronic communication and languages were discussed. The final corpus is made up of 496 text messages, 30 emails, 10 instant messaging conversations and other texts collected where African languages are being used.

Quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined in order to analyze these texts and the practices in which they play a role. Statistical analysis is undertaken to measure the amount of African languages and eventually identify correlations between social parameters and language choice, while the qualitative analysis concerns both individual practices and individual texts. The profiles of the different informants and the code-switching and language choices in the text messages are analyzed. In the following, I will focus on practices and texts of three students, Baba Yaro, Christine and Ousmane, and references to the quantitative analysis will be made to consider the texts in relation to different characteristics of the corpus.

## Ousmane

Ousmane was born in 1978. His mother is Wolof and his father is Saraxole, and he declares himself "more Saraxole than Wolof" even if he does not speak the language (Sooninke). He lives in the suburb and traffic problems make it difficult to predict the time of his arrivals in the city; the mobile phone makes it easier to organize his social life. The social network with whom he texts is important, and includes his girlfriend Rama, friends from the neighbourhood and from university, young and old relatives. He calls his mobile phone "my friend" and he uses it to keep record of things, as an additional record to his personal diary, keeping text messages in different folders with different names. One of the types of text messages that he likes to keep are those written to or by Rama,

named “*Ma femme*” (‘my girl’) in his list of contacts. Text messages make up an important means of communication for romantic dialogue (Ling 2004, Horst and Miller 2006, Brinkman *et al.* 2009) and texting is also essential to Rama and Ousmane’s relationship, being cheaper and often more private than phone calls. As they live far from each other and Rama is not allowed to stay out late at night with her boyfriend, an important part of their interaction takes place through SMS messages. The couple has constructed a particular code for their romantic discourse: abbreviated French mixed with single English and Wolof words, and the abbreviation *jtm* (*je t’aime*, ‘I love you’) ending each message. Even when they quarrel, this signature is used.

#### SMS 1



*Je préfère que tu déprimes, plutôt que de rentrer tard. Tout comme moi, t’as à travailler demain et il fait tard. Sois raisonnable. Je t’aime<sup>1</sup>*

‘I prefer that you become depressed, instead of coming home late. Just like me you have to work tomorrow and it is late. Be reasonable. I love you’.

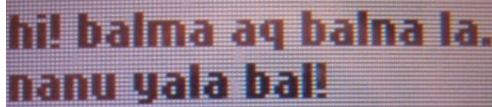
The creation of their particular romantic discourse started already when Ousmane was trying to seduce Rama, among other things with text messages. This discourse can be played with in order to impress the receiver. The corpus contains two poems of love in Wolof, where the writer exploits the markedness of the choice of this language for romantic purposes, to surprise and impress the receiver. The way that the texters play with language choice in texting make the language use more or less unpredictable. The unpredictability is also evident from the statistical analysis, that shows that both French and national languages are used in text messages to communicate the same topics.

There are, however, some tendencies to seize from the statistical analysis. French is more used in messages between women and men than between men and between women. This seems to be a result not of gender differences, but of the labelling of French as the romantic language. The majority of messages sent between women and men are romantic messages, in fact this kind of communication make up 17% of the corpus, the second biggest group of messages. The only group that is even more important is that of greetings. Greetings for religious feasts make up 18% of the messages, and they are the messages where national languages are the most used (80% of the 83 messages of greetings for religious feasts contain national languages), like in SMS 2.

#### SMS 2

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<sup>1</sup> All messages are transcribed into a standard orthography, with *French words in italics*, Wolof underlined, **Pulaar in bold** and English in regular font, followed by the English translation within single quotation marks.

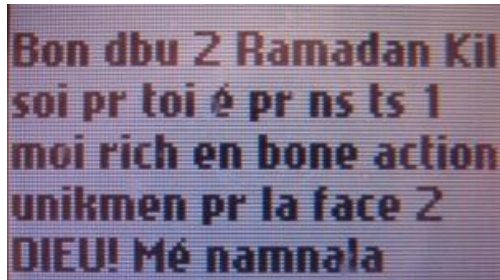
A screenshot of an SMS message with a dark background and light-colored text. The text reads: "hi! balma aq balna la. nanu yala baal!"

Hi! Baal ma àq, baal naa la. Nanu Yàlla baal!

'Hi! Forgive me my sins, I have forgiven you. May God forgive us!'

Even if these messages often are written with the use of fixed expressions in national languages, they can also be written in French, with switching to a national language marking the shift from the greeting to a more informal salutation, like in the SMS 3. Just like SMS 2, Ousmane received it from a friend in the beginning of the month of Ramadan.

### SMS 3

A screenshot of an SMS message with a dark background and light-colored text. The text reads: "Bon dbu 2 Ramadan Kil soi pr toi é pr ns ts 1 moi rich en bone action unikmen pr la face 2 DIEU! Mé namnala"

*Bon début de Ramadan. Qu'il soit pour toi et pour nous tous un mois riche en bonne action uniquement pour la face de Dieu. Me namm naa la.*

'Happy start of Ramadan. May it be for you and for all of us a month that is rich in good deeds only for God's face. But<sup>2</sup>, I miss you'

This message shows that solemn content also can be communicated through unconventional orthography. This only concerns French, however. While French usually appears in unconventional spelling in the corpus, Wolof words are rarely abbreviated. The turn into a less formal greeting is marked by the switching into Wolof. *Namm naa la* is a typical greeting, with a meaning similar to "long time no see" and if the spelling is rarely unconventional, this expression is often played with. It appears in the form *G ta 90.3*, where 90.3 is used to refer to *nostalgie*. The radio station Nostalgie is to be found on the frequency 90.3 and *J'ai ta nostalgie* means 'I miss you' in Senegalese French. Another way of writing 'I miss you' is *names u*. Here *-es* is added to *namm* in order to make it look English, English words being markers of youth language. When Ousmane writes *names u ma puce* in his messages for Rama, he thus makes use of three languages in one single expression.

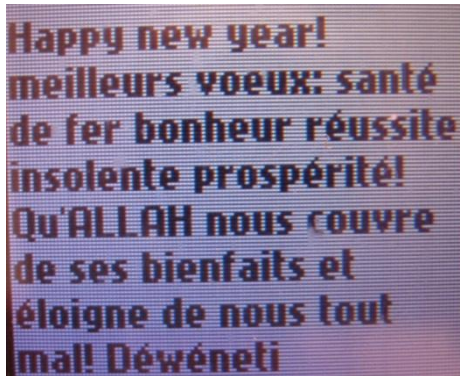
While greetings for religious feasts usually are written with the use of national languages, the statistical analysis shows that greetings for non-religious occasions, like the New Year starting on January 1<sup>st</sup>, generally are written in French and/or English. This can be played with, like in the SMS 4,

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<sup>2</sup> Here 'But' does not refer to an opposition. In urban Wolof *mais* is used to introduce clauses, without referring to a particular lexical meaning. See also SMS 7.

where one of Ousmane's friends use the expression used for the Muslim New Year in a greeting for the new calendar year:

#### SMS 4



Happy New Year! *Meilleurs vœux : santé de fer, bonheur, réussite, insolente prospérité ! Qu'Allah nous couvre de ses bienfaits et éloigne de nous tout mal ! Déwénéti.*

'Happy New Year! Best wishes: iron health, happiness, success, unashamed prosperity! May God cover us with his kind deeds and take us away from all evil! Happy New Year.'

In this message, fixed expressions in three languages are used to compose a creative greeting, an intellectual and funny message to say 'happy New Year'. *Déwénéti*, the Wolof word for happy New Year, used for the Muslim New Year, is written in concordance with standard Wolof orthography, the two accents are correctly placed, and this underlines the sophisticated composition of the message. The writer shows that he knows what he is doing

Even if Ousmane uses Wolof when he texts, he says that he prefers using French in his messages; even if he has studied Wolof in university, he finds it easier to write in French. For many students, French is the first language of the written expression of identity. It is the langue in which they learnt to read and write and it is the language in which they usually read and write, the language that they see in the written environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that 47% of the text messages collected are written in French. However, some, like Baba Yaro and Christine, say that they find it easier to express themselves in Wolof when they communicate via SMS.

### Baba Yaro

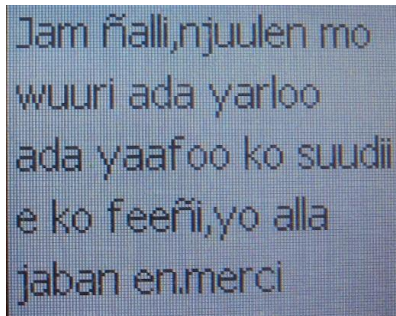
Baba Yaro was born in Richard Toll, in northern Senegal, in 1980, and is Haalpulaar. He came to Dakar to study geography and pedagogy at the university. His text messages are highly multilingual, in Pulaar, Wolof, French, Arabic and English, with up to four different languages in one text. He exploits the totality of his linguistic repertoire in this literacy practice, for different purposes.

Baba is attached to his first language, Pulaar. In his teens, he attended literacy classes in Pulaar and learnt to read and write this language. He uses it when texting with members of his family: his uncle,



a tailor at one of the markets of Dakar, his sister in Mauritania, a cousin, the writer of SMS 5, and others. “I find it more significant” he says, “They quickly understand what you want to say”<sup>3</sup>.

#### SMS 5



Jam ñalli, njuulen mo  
wuuri ada yarloo  
ada yaafoo ko suudi  
e ko feeñi, yo alla  
jaban en. merci

**Jam ñalli. Njuulen mowuri. Ada yarloo ada yaafoo ko suudi e ko feeñi. Yo Alla jaban en.  
*Merci.***

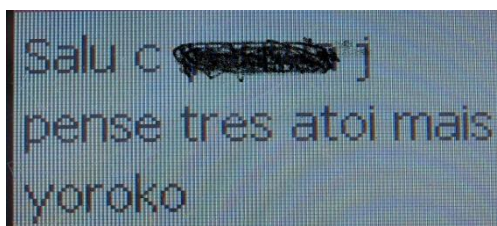
‘Hello. Happy New Year. Be clement to me, forgive me, for all that is invisible and visible. May God accept [our worship]. Thank you.’

The SMS 5 was sent from a cousin who, Baba claims, has never been to school, neither attended literacy classes. Still he texts in Pulaar. Thus, texting breaks with many other types of written communication, where those who only read and write in an African language are excluded.

The message from Baba’s cousin is also another example of greetings for religious feasts, a typical kind of message where Pulaar is used. Baba had received greetings for the Muslim New Year where different languages were combined; the ones from Pulaar-speaking friends and relatives often being at least partly in Pulaar. The SMS messages in this language make up a small minority in the corpus (3% of the messages), also in the corpus provided by Baba Yaro. When other subjects than greetings are communicated, even Pulaar-speakers write in Wolof. Baba also uses Wolof and French with Pulaar-speaking relatives, friends and with his Pulaar-speaking girlfriend.

This liberty of choice and the multilingualism of the texters is exploited to emphasize and nuance the meaning of the text messages. In SMS 6, written by Baba’s fiancé when she was angry with him, switching between French and Wolof is used to contrast the girlfriend’s feelings (‘I think a lot of you’), with Baba’s behavior (‘you are nothing’), expressing that she is not satisfied with how he behaves towards her.

#### SMS 6



Salu c [redacted]  
pense tres atoi mais  
yoroko

<sup>3</sup> Original “Je trouve ça plus significatif. Ils comprennent plus vite ce que vous voulez dire”.

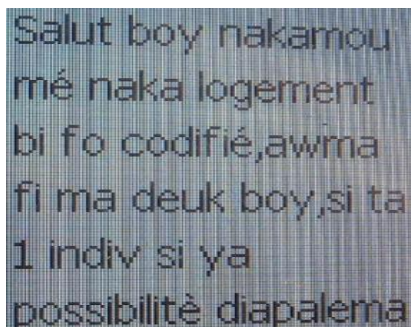
*Salut, c'est NN. Je pense très à toi, mais yoru ko.*

'Hi, it's NN. I think a lot of you, but you are nothing.'

The switching of codes here is used to mark the switching of voices, *voice* referring to different perspectives on the world in the Bakhtinian sense,. Baba's girlfriend switches from an emotive voice, to a conative voice (cf. Jakobson's functions, 1963: 214-216). The conative voice, oriented at the receiver, is used by the writer to awake certain feelings (bad consciousness) and as an attempt to provoke certain actions (more attention from the receiver). It is contrasted with the emotive voice, oriented towards the writer, the loyal fiancé. The message of the emotive voice is reinforced by the use of French, the romantic language.

Code-switching does not necessarily have a contrastive function; it can also be linked to spoken languages and the mixed Wolof-French code that dominates spoken language in Dakar, like we see an example of in SMS 7. Here, Baba Yaro is asking a friend for help, searching for a possibility of staying at the campus, where "individual rooms" often are shared.

SMS 7



Salut boy nakamou  
mé naka logement  
bi fo codifié,awma  
fi ma deuk boy,si ta  
1 indiv si ya  
possibilité diapalema

*Salut boy/booy, naka mu ? Me naka logement bi, foo codifié ? Awma fi ma dëkk boy/booy, si t'as une individuelle, s'il y a [une] possibilité, j'appale ma.*

'Hi pal, how is it? But what about the accommodation, where have you codified? I don't have a room here, my friend, if you have an individual room, if there's a possibility, help me [let's stand together].'

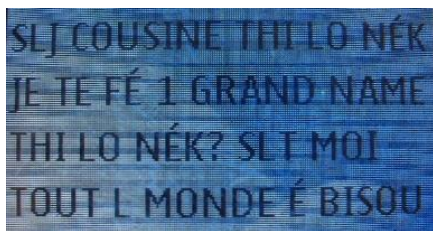
In this message, the switching can be interpreted to be functional: *diapalema* is used instead of *aide-moi*, to make references to solidarity and not to dependence. But even more, the switching seems to refer to the mixed Wolof-French code. Typical words of this code are used: *boy* ('pal', can be used for both men and women), *mé* (mais, 'but', to introduce a clause, without pointing to an opposition, like in SMS 3), French words are integrated into Wolof clauses, and Wolof words are integrated into a French clause. Some of the most obvious examples of use of this mixed code in the corpus are to be found in text-messages written by Baba Yaro. It shows that he is indeed associating himself to Dakar life, deliberately or unconsciously, while, at the same time, he uses and valorizes Pulaar, as we have seen in SMS 5. Pulaar is used to manage relationships with particular relatives and express Baba's ethnic identity, while urban Wolof is used to show integration to urban life in Dakar. This is a typical and important aspect of the Wolofisation, of the de-eticization of the Wolof language is taking place as it is used both for practical reasons, and for the expression of a de-eticized urban identity. It can even be considered that "Something like a nation is [...] constructed from below" (Cruise O'Brien 1998: 30). Other mixed codes from different parts of the world are also found to be

used in text messages: Tenglish (mixing Tagalog, English and Spanish, Rafael 2003 in Castells *et al.* 2007 : 180) and Bahasa Gaul (mixing Indonesian, English and Javanese, Barendregt 2005 in *ibid.*) and French-English, *Francanglais*, in Cameroun (Feussi 2007). The written expression of Senegalese nationhood is also evident in Christine's messages.

## Christine

Christine is Joola. She was born in 1983; her family is originally from southern Senegal, but she spent her childhood in Dakar. While Baba Yaro uses Wolof and Pulaar, Christine, without rejecting her ethnic identity, prefers Wolof to her own language, like in SMS 8, a French-Wolof message for a cousin (who is also Joola):

### SMS 8



*Salut cousine, ci loo nekk? Je te fais un grand namm, ci loo nekk ? Salue-moi tout le monde et bisous.*

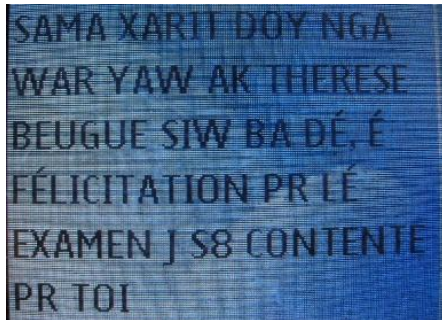
'Hello cousin, how are you? I miss you a lot, how are you? Say hello to everybody and kiss'.

"When we communicate, to simplify things, I address her in Wolof", Christine says, and she claims that she never uses Joola in her electronic communication. Together with Baba Yaro, Christine is one of the most eager users of Wolof. As she studies sociology, it was compulsory for her to study a national language in her first two years in university. She chose Wolof and not Joola, partly because it is the Fougny dialect and not her dialect, Kasa, that is taught. Christine associates Wolof with accessibility, with simplicity, with pleasure and with freedom. She uses it both in texting and in her email-communication, with her fiancé and with other friends. Her boyfriend is Sereer, and even if she does not speak the Sereer language, and only understands certain words of it, Christine uses it in messages for her boyfriend. Such crossing (Rampton 1995), use of single elements of a language that the writer only understands parts of and that belongs to a group that the writer normally is not associated with, is also found elsewhere in the corpus. Small pieces of languages that the texters don't really understand are used in the messages, be they national languages or exogenous languages (like Spanish).

When Christine speaks with her father, however, she never uses Wolof, only French and Joola, to show respect. But while her father's authority never is challenged in speech, she writes like she wants when she texts for him, on his phone. Even if her father tells her to write correctly, she abbreviates and makes use of unconventional spelling in the messages she writes for him. Christine is not the only one to act as a go-between in texting. The students teach their parents how to text or do it for them. This way, the students influence the texting of the older generations; in this communication the authority is somehow transferred to the young.

Christine, like Baba Yaro's girlfriend, plays with code-switching to alternate different voices. SMS x was sent to a friend of Christine who had been interviewed in the newspaper. Christine teases her for trying to become famous, in Wolof, before turning to French to congratulate her with her exam results.

#### SMS 9



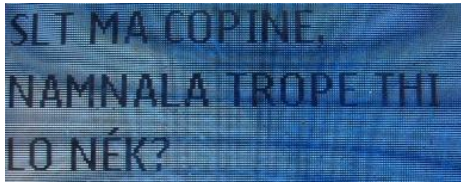
Sama xarit, doy nga waar. Yow ak NN bëgge siw ba de. Et félicitations pour les examens, je suis contente pour toi.

'My friend, you are really surprising. You and NN, you really want to be famous. Congratulations with your exams, I'm happy for you.'

In the first part of the message, a humorous voice, in Wolof, is activated. The switching to French underlines the change of topic and the shift from a teasing voice into a serious, caring one. The funny voice is often expressed in Wolof in the corpus, whether the voice is used in one message as a whole or in parts of a message. This correlates with other studies of topic and code alternation in electronic communication: vernacular languages, home languages, Creole languages are often used to tell jokes or to be funny in other ways (Androutsopoulos 2007, Warschauer et al 2007, Ledegen and Richard 2007).

One aspect that makes texting, and some other types of electronic communication, special, is the variety of spelling, of unconventional spelling. Studies of large corpuses show that words are written in a multiplicity of different spellings (Fairon *et al.* 2007). In the Senegalese corpus, there is a striking difference between French, written with all sorts of unconventional spellings (like we see in most messages presented here and in the corpus as a whole), and Wolof and Pulaar, hardly ever abbreviated and often written in a French-like orthography, with silent letters, in a very "un-economic" way. Sometimes the orthography is mixed: in SMS 9, *xarit* is written with the *x* of standard orthography (often this sound is represented by *kh* in the corpus), while *bëgge* is written *beugue*, with silent *u*, and *eu* instead of *ë*. Deumert and Masinyana (2008) also found that the African languages, used in their South-African SMS corpus, were written without abbreviations, and in Rotimi Taiwo's corpus from Nigeria (2009), Yoruba is used without abbreviations or unconventional spelling. There are, however, some examples of creative spelling of Wolof words: sometimes letters are multiplied in order to increase expressivity (*cf.* Lienard 2007) and there are some examples of abbreviations. This seems to indicate that with time, more economic and more creative orthography may come into use among Senegalese texters. Still, popular literacy is dominated by French-like orthography; there seems to be more writing of Wolof in such orthography than in standard orthography. In the SMS 10, we even find French orthographic rules applied on a French word in a way that distinguishes it from standard French, to indicate Senegalese pronunciation.

## SMS 10



Salut ma copine, namm naa la trop/torop. Ci loo nekk ?

'Hello my friend, I miss you too much. How are you?'

In SMS 10, the word *trop* ('too much') is written *trope*, with a silent *e*, to indicate that the *p* is pronounced, that is, Senegalese pronunciation of the word is signaled. In another message, the word is written *torop*, putting the accent on the Senegalese pronunciation of the first part of the word. These orthographies signal that *trop* is considered as an integrated borrowing into Wolof, at least into urban Wolof. The freedom of orthography that characterizes texting makes it possible to use spelling to convey different messages.

## Conclusion

The profiles of Ousmane, Baba Yaro and Christine show how multilingual literacy practices are constructed through complex use of different languages. The three students declare themselves more or less non-Wolof, but still they use Wolof to express core aspects of their identity, in spoken language as in texting. At the same time French is used for very private matters. If it is a formal language and sometimes considered as a sign of cultural alienation when used its use in speech is exaggerated, it is used to express feelings and identity in writing.

Managing relationships is the main aim of the texting and this is intermingled with identity as different identities are co-constructed in the interaction: Ousmane and Rama negotiate their identity as a couple through their romantic discourse, Baba Yaro's girlfriend points to her identity as a the caring woman with a careless boyfriend, Christine plays with ethnic identity through using the language of her boyfriend's ethnic group. This way, the writers exploit the totality of their linguistic repertoire when texting. Attitudes concerning the norms of written language are challenged as texters use languages they only speak as well as languages they don't know how to speak. However, texting does not totally break with other practices in which the students engage. French is still the dominant language, still the written language *par excellence*.

The motivations and functions of the students' languages choices are not necessarily linked to identity issues. Code-switching is used for instance as a compositional feature in the short texts and playfulness is another important factor inspiring language choices. The African languages, and more generally multilingualism, are given value as elements in written communication, in written construction and negotiation of identities. This way, texting nourishes popular writing, perhaps leading to an actual breakthrough for a popular culture of writing in Wolof and in other African languages.

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