

The Parrot's Two Feet: Teaching French in Contact with Arabic

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*Un marchand vendait un perroquet assez spécial.
Un jour, une femme demande au marchand ce qu'il a pour être spécial.
Le marchand répond que lorsqu'on tire sur sa patte droite, il parle arabe.
Et quand on tire sur la patte gauche, il parle français.
La femme demande: Qu'est-ce qui se passe lorsqu'on tire sur les 2 pattes?
Le perroquet répond: "JTOMBE A HMARA"*

A street vendor was selling a special parrot.
One day, a woman asks the vendor what makes him so special.
The street vendor replies that when you pull on his right foot, he speaks Arabic.
And when you pull on his left foot he speaks French.
The woman asks: "What happens when you pull on both feet?"
The parrot replies: "I FALL, JACKASS!"

From the Algerian online discussion forum [Wled el Bahdja](#).

The story of French language contact with Arabic is often left untold in the language classroom. Instead, the use of French in North Africa and the Middle East – as with its use in former colonies around the world – is marked as a *presence*. This presence may be located in the maps that are featured in French language textbooks, such as *Réseau*, where different colors indicate whether French is an “official and/or native language,” an “official or administrative language,” a “privileged language of instruction,” or spoken by “francophone minorities.” This presence also has a name: *Francophonie*.

As the joke above shows, however, Francophonie is often more complicated than textbooks are willing to admit. Given the sparseness of its telling, this anecdote leaves open questions about the identity of the characters, where the exchange takes place, and how the parrot knows both languages. These are the contextual cues that we use to talk about the national, sociocultural, linguistic, and other identities of bilinguals in the real world. Moreover, the hostility of the Arabic word “*Hmara*” (politely translated here as “Jackass”) and its appearance as the only Arabic word in a joke told in French, point to the uneasiness of the parrot’s bilingual universe. This joke also shows how, by representing only one face – or one foot, if you will – of a bilingual (and often multilingual) environment, the standard textbook presentation of Francophonie as the presence of French *outside of France* unmoors it from its multiple communicative contexts. In this study, I argue for the incorporation of bilingual or multilingual texts and media in the

typically monolingual French classroom. By providing examples of lesson plans based on texts and media where French is used in contact with Arabic, I will show how students of French may be encouraged to piece together a bigger picture, not only about francophone countries in the Middle East and North Africa, but also about the lives and cultures in these societies.

Who speaks French today?

In a chapter entitled *La francophonie*, the intermediate textbook *Interaction* uses a cultural rubric to ask the question “*Qui parle français actuellement?*” [Who speaks French today?] It answers this question for North Africa, stating “*en Afrique du Nord (le Maghreb: l’Algérie, le Maroc, la Tunisie) – l’arabe y est la langue officielle, mais le français est souvent une langue d’enseignement à statut privilégié, employée dans les milieux diplomatiques et administratifs.*” [In North Africa (the Maghreb: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) – Arabic is the official language, but French is often a privileged language of education, used in diplomatic and administrative milieus.] (p. 311) At the bottom of the same page, the authors advise students to “*Cherchez sur Internet un site qui vous donne plus de précisions sur l’un de ces pays.*” [Look on the Internet for a site that gives you more details on one of these countries.] The description of Francophone countries provided by the textbook thus displays the limitations of the legalistic and administrative compartmentalizations used to *confine* French speakers outside of France. Based on the guidelines provided, the student has few indications of how communicating in French would be useful or appropriate in social and professional settings in these countries. As for searching for more information about the country, the student may conclude that, since the official language is Arabic, he or she may as well – short of learning Arabic – consult English websites. Further, by answering the question “Who speaks French today?” at the national level, the textbook leaves out such individual-level questions as “who speaks what to whom and when?”

Although the big picture, as seen in *Interaction*, can deflect deeper investigations into language use, a macro-level perspective can nonetheless help us to move away from more limited depictions of the francophone world. For example, the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* notes that there are a minimum of 220 million francophones in the world (2010). Africa and the Middle East account for two-thirds of the world’s “French language learners” (*apprenants de français*), a designation that includes foreign language and second language learners, and those studying in French-medium schools (*OIF*, 2010). This suggests that the overwhelming majority of French language users live outside of the Hexagon (the territorial confines of continental France). As importantly, there

are an estimated 3 million Arabic speakers living in France itself (*Langues et cité*, 2009). Given these statistics, it is safe to say that there are many rich sites of language contact between French and Arabic. These sites should serve as resources to instructors to better depict the heterogeneity of French language use today.

Behind these numbers also lie day-to-day attitudes, practices and behaviors that condition the use of French in situations of contact with Arabic. These include the unequal application of Arabization policies to different sectors of the government and the economy in Algeria (Bouchérit, 2002); the expression by Moroccan university students of greater confidence in using French than in Arabic as a medium of instruction (Ennaji, 2002); and the circulation in Lebanon of French as a language of elites, not only – as traditionally perceived – among Christians, but also among Muslims, and the use of French and the hybrid dialect *franbanais* as markers of national identity (Al Batal, 2002). In France, the North African Arabic dialect *darja* has gained prominence in popular music, comedy routines, and film, and words such as *walou* (nothing) and *kiffer* (to like) have entered into everyday use among a generation of French speakers in the Hexagon (Caubet, 2004). While these phenomena bear an obvious interest to researchers, their implications for the French teacher should also be clear. It is not enough merely to gesture toward the fact that French is spoken in different places by people with different home languages; teaching French also requires addressing its complex interrelations with these speakers and their languages in such a way that students situate French in *multilingual* contexts.

Multilingualism in the classroom

An ecological approach needs to be adopted in order to fold French in contact with Arabic into the French curriculum. An ecological approach conceptualizes language as “relations between people and the world” (van Lier, 2004, p. 4) and its users as “subject to their social, political and historical contexts” (Blackledge, 2008, p. 28). Applied to the classroom, such an approach conceives of “language learning as ways of relating more effectively to people and the world” (van Lier, 2004, p.4). The emphasis of such an approach, then, is to present language not only as more than a set of rules and vocabulary, but also as more than the monolithic representation of a nation with a homogenous culture. By addressing the heterogeneity of the use of French in the world, students will not just acquire a more realistic sense of French in the world, but also hopefully be able to reflect on their own immediate universe, where contact contexts are increasingly the norm.

The benefits of discarding the model of the monolingual classroom in favor of a multilingual model that adopts the principles of language ecologies are increasingly finding their expression in recent scholarship. Jaspers and Verscheuren (2011) challenge the “persistent monolingual view on language acquisition, literacy and codification,” (p. 1158) and Stephen May (2011) offers up a model TESOL program founded on an additive conceptualization of bilingualism, overcoming the “monolingual bias” inherent in SLA and TESOL research. Most recently, Claire Kramsch gave a keynote address at the 6th Biennial Conference of the University of California Language Consortium entitled “Multilingual Practices in the Monolingual Classroom.” In sum, current scholarship shows a growing recognition that heterogeneity and multilingualism more realistically reflect the world in which both language learners and target language speakers would interact.

Teaching the Multilingual Text

Bringing the multilingual text into the classroom opens up rich possibilities to address the complexities of language. By embracing multilingualism, these texts – whether fictional compositions or occurring in conversation – often offer self-conscious reflections on language and identity that are not apparent in monolingual texts. In this way, multilingual text and media can foster more productive discussions around the assumptions and frustrations harbored by language learners in the classroom. With the support of a fellowship from the Berkeley Language Center, I developed several lesson plans from January to May 2012 based on text and media where French is used in contact with Arabic. After a summary of the texts selected for lesson plans, I will detail two lesson plans that used different sources. The first example, taken from an online discussion forum, will illustrate the choices made in order to develop questions about language form and culture using a bilingual text. The second example presents a film clip (taken from the [LFLFC](#)) that was used to prompt reflection about metalinguistic issues and language choice in an intermediate French language classroom at a large public university in Northern California. It is important to note here that, while there are many sites of contact between French and Arabic, I have focused on materials that come from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and the immigrant communities of France, because these draw upon my own professional experience, interests, and familiarity with North African dialects of Arabic.

Designing lesson plans around bilingual or multilingual texts and media offers many challenges. This is not a service for which textbooks are well adapted. More to the point, though, traditional sources for classroom materials, such as published fiction and non-fiction books still cater to an assumed monolingual readership;

and American and European feature films, including many of those incorporated into the BLC Library of Foreign Language Film Clips, take place in monolingually imagined settings (sometimes, even the Martians speak English).

There exist nonetheless many rich sources for texts and media showing French in contact with Arabic. These include, of course, some literary texts and feature films, especially those with protagonists who are North African, Lebanese, or French immigrants of Arabic descent. In addition, jokes, such as the one about the parrot cited above, may be easily found in online community forums, often explicitly including cross-linguistic puns or language play. Comedy routines by artists such as the Algerian Mohamed Fellag or the Moroccan-born Gad Elmaleh, can also easily be found on [YouTube](#) (Caubet, 2002). Raï and Hip-hop songs from both Arab nations and France often use code-switching between French and Arabic, and even English (Bentahila & Davies, 2002, 2006). The song [Système primitif](#) by the Algerian rap group MBS overlays a Modern Standard Arabic voice recording with lyrics in French, *darja*, and English, revealing interesting code-switches (Bentahila & Davies, 2006). Candid videos, news programming, and documentaries also provide examples of code-switching between French and Arabic in naturalistic settings. Yasmina Benguigui's documentary about the immigrant experience of Algerian workers and their family members in France, *Mémoires d'immigrés*, is one example of a film that may be used for this purpose. The Algerian daily [El Watan](#) offers a frequently updated feed of man-on-the-street interviews on its [Daily Motion channel](#). Here, as in other news programming from North Africa, the interviewees often switch between French and Arabic dialect.

Among the lesson plans I developed, one draws upon a two-and-a-half minute interview segment from a French-language [Algerian political news program](#) on Canal Algérie, a state-owned satellite network that features programming in Arabic, French, and Berber languages. The interviews followed the *microtrottoir* [man-on-the-street] interview format familiar to students through textbook exercises. Centered on the subject, "Are Algerian youth interested in politics?" the video showcases several instances of code-switching and highlights the linguistic diversity of Algiers. Two other lesson plans were based on clips from the 2005 film *La Graine et le mulet* [*The Secret of the Grain*] directed by Abdellatif Kechiche about a family of Tunisian immigrants living in Toulon, France. All three of these lesson plans were piloted in the intermediate-level French classroom described above. The teacher implementing each lesson plan was a Graduate Student Instructor who has never studied Arabic.

Another lesson plan juxtaposes the use of Arabic in two literary texts, the 1831 fantasy novel *La Peau de Chagrin* by Honoré de Balzac, and the 2004 bestseller *Kiffe kiffe demain* by Faïza Guène, about the life of a second generation Moroccan immigrant living in the housing projects on the outskirts of Paris. Additional lesson plan materials included Moroccan and Algerian hip-hop songs, comedy sequences from YouTube, personal ads, and Algerian jokes, which I also collected for the purpose of this study.

Finally, I utilized the [Facebook page](#) of Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a [Tunisian online discussion forum](#), and an Algerian [online forum](#) for soccer fans as the basis for other lesson plans. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, and online discussion forums such as *Wled el Bahdja*, provide especially fruitful sources of multilingual texts. Part of the appeal of these two latter web-based sources for lesson plans lies in the *readability* of the Arabic language. As recent studies have shown, online environments have fostered a new type of Arabic script that is romanized, read from right to left, and involves a substantial amount of code-switching (Warschauer, El Said & Zohry, 2002; Palfreyman, 2006). This romanized Arabic provides a transliteration that students could sound out without knowledge of Arabic script. It also places the Arabic in line with French and English on the screen, which enhances the student's ability to analyze the movement between languages. Moreover, in their study of the use of public Internet discussion forums by language learners, Barbara Hanna and Juliana de Nooy (2009) show how this medium cultivates:

“[t]he ability to position oneself strategically in relation to others, to avoid tethering oneself to a defensive and/or subordinate position and to shift position in response to feedback[, which] are vital skills, not just in Internet forums but in intercultural interaction more generally.” (p. 152)

In fact, the use of online discussion forums in the following example will demonstrate how discussion forum interactions may be used to discuss how individual participants situate their identity within different national, local, gender-specific, and affective frames of reference. These different positions assumed by individuals online and the reactions they encounter can guide students toward broader implications about language use and identity.

Below are two examples of lesson plans that were developed using materials where French and Arabic are found in contact. The first is an online discussion forum interaction, and I have detailed the steps in which the material would be presented to students in a classroom. The second example presents a film clip that was piloted in a French classroom and reflects both my own objectives and the

adjustments made by the teacher while presenting the material. In both cases, Arabic words have been bolded in transcriptions and translations.

Meeting the future Mother-in-Law

On the first day of November 2011, a self-identified Lyonnaise of Tunisian origin, registers with the handle *MlleNoor* and [posts a message](#) (Figure 1) to an online discussion forum for the Tunisian community, *Ma Tunisie (My Tunisia)*, seeking advice. She plans to marry a man living in Tunisia but has yet to meet her future mother-in-law. Her mother insists that she should not meet her prospective fiance's mother until he comes with his family to ask for her hand in marriage. However, with the Muslim holiday of Aïd al-Adha coming up on November 7, Mlle Noor would like to call on that day to wish her an « Aïd Mabrouk ».

This lesson opens avenues for students in an intermediate French class to discuss different forms of giving advice, online expressions of opinion and identity, cultural expectations of family and romantic relationships, and formulations of greeting and sympathy.



Figure 1

*“J’aimerais savoir si vous avez rencontré vos belles mère avant **el Sotba** ou non.”*
[I would like to know if you met your [plural] mother-in-law [incorrect formation of the plural] before **the engagement** or not?]

In response, another relatively new member, using the handle *nostalgique* and identified as living in Tunisia, offers the following advice (Figure 2):



Figure 2

Nostalgique concludes (Arabic bolded): “*Donc ça se fait de plus en plus de rencontrer sa belle mère avant les fiancailles **mafihèch 3ib** quoi du moment que la relation est sérieuse. Bonne continuation MelleNour **w rabbi ywassil bissèlma***” [So it happens more and more to meet one’s mother-in-law before the engagement **there’s no shame** really as long as the relationship is serious. Keep at it MessNour [sic] and **may the Lord keep you in peace.**]

Another longstanding member of the forum, *didon*, who claims to be from Tunis chimes in on November 6 to agree with *nostalgique* and to add to her expression of encouragement (Figure 3):



Figure 3

“*bonsoir,*” she begins, and continues “*je suis de l avis de nostalgique, en plus puisque c est ton futur fiancé qui te le demande, il connait très bien ce que pensera sa mère de votre visite... je vous souhaite plein de bonheur!! **rabi ysahhelelkom!***” [Good evening, i share the same opinion as *nostalgique*, also since it s your future fiancé who is making the request of you, he knows very well

what his mother will think of your visit... I wish you both great happiness and **may the Lord pave the way for you both.**]

On November 6, *MlleNoor* returns to the forum and thanks the participants who have shared their advice. She adds, “*Au passage 3idkom mabrouk*” [By the way, **Happy Aïd to you all**]. *Didon* writes back two days later with a winking emoticon and her own holiday greetings: (*aidek mabrouk w snin deyma*) [Happy Aïd to you [singular] and longlasting years]. The last expression, “*snin deyma*,” is an idiomatic holiday greeting specific to Tunisian dialect.

This lesson plan requires that the instructor be provided with a fully glossed version of the exchanges in Arabic dialect, and an Arabic pronunciation guide (**Appendix A**) and preliminary vocabulary list. The lesson begins with the projection of the only first post by *MlleNoor*. This is used in order to elicit student responses to her questions. Students can practice giving the types of advice that *MlleNoor* might receive, and formulate this advice in the conditional mood – “*Vous devriez...*” (You should) and “*Vous pourriez...*” (You could), for example – and in the subjunctive mood – “*Il faut que vous...*” (you must), for example – as this is how they have learned to give advice in textbook presentations of verbal moods. The responses by the different forum participants would allow students to discuss the different modes of engaging in a forum and how advice is given in this context: with expressions of opinion and personal anecdotes, represented here by the use of the first-person pronoun “*Je*.”

The lesson proceeds to a next level of analysis by opening discussion among students about the Tunisian cultural attitudes about family relations and relationships they have gleaned from the exchange. The instructor would highlight the use of the Arabic words *el 5otba* (the engagement) and *3ib* (shame) despite the forum participants’ predominant use of French. They can discuss the cultural load that these terms carry and their place in defining family relations.

Further, the discussion forum, with its ability to bring together Tunisians living overseas and Tunisians living in the country, can be used by the teacher as a metaphor for the situation of the French language learner and target language speakers. The notion that a French woman of Tunisian origin would seek the advice of Tunisians on a forum to resolve a family issue allows students to discuss and challenge the weight that the instructor, the textbook and their classmates place on the “native” target language speaker as an expert informant on cultural matters. In terms of cultural information, the instructor would then use the discussion on the forum to talk about the Muslim holiday of Aïd al-Adha and the importance placed upon it by the forum’s participants. This would represent an

important shift in the language classroom that displaces French culture from an unmarked Christian domain.

Finally, the instructor can use the forum to teach pragmatics for North African social contexts. Students can learn the different Arabic expressions of holiday greetings and encouragement as lexical chunks and use the forum to make assumptions about socially appropriate moments to use these with bilingual French-Arabic speakers.

Is it Love or 3ichra?

Using the BLC Library of Foreign Language Film Clips, I prepared two clips from the film *La Graine et le mulet* to be used in the classroom. Both of these were shown by the Graduate Student Instructor mentioned earlier to students in an intermediate French class. Of the nine students in the classroom on the day the clip was shown, six had exposure to a home language other than English. These home languages included Creole, Russian, Armenian, and Korean. Both clips were excerpted from a roughly twenty minute sequence in the film where Souad, the divorced matriarch of a Tunisian immigrant family, has gathered her adult children, their families and their friends together for a Sunday lunch of couscous. This scene provides for several seemingly spontaneous and naturalistic conversations to unfold. In the first clip, a mixed couple, a French husband and a Tunisian wife, and their son discuss their use of Arabic at home and the husband's attempt to learn Arabic.

The students discussed the situations in which the mother was said to use Arabic: when she was angry, when she spoke with her mother or her friends; and the words that she was trying to teach her husband in Arabic: "I love you, my darling." The teacher prompted small group discussion with the following questions: "Why would one speak Arabic in these types of situations?" and "What is the importance of the mother tongue or the family language in these situations?" These questions, as well as the clip, resonated with the students, who responded with their own experiences and the languages their mothers spoke when they were angry.

The teacher then used the second clip as a prompt for the students' language journals. The second clip is drawn from the same scene as the family lunch, but takes place at the moment in which the meal is winding down (Figure 4):



Figure 4

In this scene, Souad talks about her ex-husband, the film's main protagonist Slimane. She has prepared a generous plate of couscous for her sons to take to him after the meal. Her children all want to know if this lovingly prepared plate of couscous is a sign that there is still love between their divorced parents. The tone of the conversation is light-hearted and teasing:

Sarah: *En tout cas lui, il y a un qui en vaut la peine, tu vois. Ce n'est pas comme certains. En plus il nous manque dans le quartier, tu ne peux pas t'imaginer grave!*

Anyway, him [Slimane], there's one who's worth something. It's not like some others. Also, we miss having him around the neighborhood, you can't imagine – seriously!

Souad: *Qu'est-ce que tu veux c'est la vie hein?*
What do you expect, that's life, right?

Olfa: *Ah! L'amour! L'amour!*
Ah! Love! Love!

[Laughter]

Souad: *L'amour hein? **Khasra 3alek!** C'est pas ça l'amour.*
Love, huh? **What's wrong with you!** That ain't love.

- Olfa: *Mais si, Maman, c'est un geste d'amour ça non? C'est un geste d'amour.*
But it is, Mom, it's a gesture of love, right? It's a gesture of love.
- Souad: [shakes her head] mnh-mnh.
- Man's voice: *Mais quand-même!*
Come on!
- Olfa: *C'est quoi alors?*
What is it then?
- Souad: *L'amour ahh –*
Love, um --
- Olfa: [interrupts] *C'est de l'amour!*
It's love!
- Latifa: [under her breath] *Elle fait tout le temps le contraire.*
She always contradicts everyone.
- Souad: [over Latifa] *Ça c'est la **3ichra** ça – d'toufaçon la **3ichra** c'est plus fort que l'amour. L'habitude, c'est – La **3ichra** il y a de tout dedans: l'amour, l'amitié, tout tout tout...*
That's **3ichra** – i-anycase 3ichra is stronger than love. Habit, it's – 3ichra, it's got everything: love, friendship, everything everything everything...

There are two Arabic expressions in this one excerpt of dialogue: *khasra 3alek* and *3ichra*, neither of which has a direct translation into French or English. Souad, however, goes on to explain the concept of *3ichra*, which describes the bond between husband and wife, whereas *khasra 3alek* remains an irritated outburst. Souad will use the word *maziah*, which means duty, later on in the clip to explain away her ex-husband's kindness. By drawing students' awareness to the use of these words, the teacher can prompt the following questions: Does Souad use these terms because

- they have no direct equivalent in French?
- she associates her mother tongue, Arabic, with the emotional register? or
- she reverts automatically to these concepts which she has learned in Arabic?

These are questions, of course, which no instructor can answer, but which encourage students to take an ecological approach to language by looking at its relational and cultural contexts.

The instructor who used this clip as a journal prompt asked students to consider why Souad used these terms in Arabic and also what that might reveal about the relationship between a mother tongue and a learned language. The students had several strong reactions, among them (translated into English):

“There is a beauty to the Arabic words that Souad uses. They are more specific than the French words. For example, “*l’amour*” is quite a vague sentence [sic]. The word *ichra* is more expressive. When one wants to speak strongly with words of power, one speaks in the mother tongue.” - Student 1

“Normally, there is difficulty to translate because of cultural difference. If we have two cultures that are very different from one another as [sic], there is probably a concept in one culture that is totally unknown in the other.”- Student 2

The latter reaction shows the student forming hypotheses about the relationship between language and culture. The former displays sensitivity both to language’s aesthetic qualities and to its ability to confer power on a speaker. Through their engagement with bilingual texts, the students are developing *symbolic competence*, defined by Kramersch (2008) as “a particularly acute ability to play with various linguistic codes and with the various spatial and temporal resonances of these codes.” (p. 400) Kramersch further notes the practical implications of this ability, as one that allows the language learner to “shape the very context in which the language is learned and used.” (p. 400) Because this ability is characteristic of speakers in multilingual settings, students’ acquisition of symbolic competence enriches their language learning experience and renders them more apt for navigating the settings in which they will use the target language.

More than providing a frame through which the students can understand the multilingual cultural context of bilingual French-Arabic speakers, though, the film clip sparked many personal associations for the students. Some connected Souad’s use of Arabic in a French setting to their own experiences of growing up in multilingual environments:

“The conversation in the clip reminds me of my personal experience speaking with my family. Sometimes, there are concepts that I cannot express clearly in Korean because the concept doesn’t really exist in Korea” – Student 3

“When I was eight years old, my family lived in Italy. The first months, I couldn’t speak Italian, and the communication was very difficult. When I was angry or wanted to be understood, I slipped into English.” – Student 4

One student discusses how immersion in English generates a linguistic and cultural distance between the student and her or his parents. The other reflects on the process of learning a foreign language in an immersive environment. Overall, students associated the mother tongue with a deeply affective register of language use. These reactions demonstrate how multilingual texts and media prompt students to reflect upon notions of identity, the social and aesthetic resonances of their own experiences of multilingualism, and the limits and possibilities of learning another language.

Discussion

Teaching French in contact with Arabic encourages reflection on culture, identity and competence in a way that decenters French pedagogy. Rather than focusing on France and incorporating capsules of information from peripheral former colonies in an ad hoc manner, French language instruction that systematically uses multilingual text and media builds a bridge between the French taught in the classroom and its wider, more complex circulation in the world. As seen above, this decentering can take place by placing Muslim holidays at the center of a conversation, or by shifting the source of cultural expertise from a monitor in Lyon to a laptop in Tunis. Implicit in this wider circulation of French, is the required negotiation of cultural identity and vocabulary to meet the social and emotional needs of the moment. In the film clip from *La Graine et le Mulet*, this negotiation is made explicit through the careful explanation of a seemingly untranslatable concept. By exploring moments of negotiation of Arabic within a French conversation, decentered pedagogy facilitates not only a broader appreciation of French in the world, but also affirms the place of the students’ own lived experiences of language learning and multilingualism. The benefits of teaching French in contact with Arabic, then, may be found in this dual movement of, on the one hand, the incorporation of *francophonie* as a lived fact of French circulation, and, on the other hand, bringing to the surface the reality of multilingualism in language learning.

Students’ own experiences of multilingualism – even if only as a language learner – also acts as an important resource for the instructor using French-Arabic bilingual text and media. In introducing the first clip from *La Graine et le mulet*, the Graduate Student Instructor asked students first, “Who will speak French over Spring Break?” then, “Who will speak a language other than French or English

over Spring Break?” This scaffolding naturalized the scene about a mixed family that the students were about to watch and revealed how the teacher can reframe the use of French in contact in Arabic within the classroom. Instead of perceiving the task as teaching French and Arabic, the instructor perceptively shifted the focus to teaching French for shared multilingual contexts. This might be more difficult to carry off with a text with significant chunks of Arabic, such as the exchange on *Ma Tunisie*. Unlike a subtitled film, this is not a text that can be glossed independently by the instructor. By structuring the lesson plan around Tunisian culture, family relations, and pragmatics, the lesson plan meets the reservations that an instructor might have about “having to teaching Arabic.” In fact, the discussion forum here is used to situate the study of Tunisian culture on equal footing and along a continuum with French culture in the French classroom. This is justified, no less, by the lines of communication established in the exchange between Lyon and Tunis. In summary, then, the greater adjustment required of the instructor using multilingual texts is not the expansion of her or his linguistic repertoire, but to accommodate his or her teaching methods to the circulation of language students and French speakers within multilingual spaces in the familial, social, and national spheres.

Conclusion

By rigorously exploring the choices about identity, culture, and nationality activated in multilingual texts, the French classroom can restore the pluralism inherent in “*Francophonie*.” One of the concerns in such a project, however, is that the insertion of Arabic into the curricula may become a cosmetic exercise that showcases difference, or one that reinforces frontiers and power differentials between France and its former colonies by substituting surface inclusion for cultural awareness. Multilingualism carries with it the power relations, histories of conflict, and imbalances that are expressed in the parrot’s words, “I fall!”

Another challenge to implementing lessons using French in contact with Arabic are teacher and student apprehensions about the introduction of a non-target language in the classroom. A student does not enroll in a French class to learn Arabic, and French teachers most likely do not aspire to teach Arabic. Non-Arabic speaking French teachers may feel uncomfortable ceding their expertise and control over the language used in the classroom by incorporating texts that are prepared and glossed for them by bilingual speakers. In most cases, the teacher would not be able to develop these lessons plans independently. These challenges call for judicious decision-making about how much Arabic should be represented in selected texts and media, what genres will be included, and with which sources.

Collaborative frameworks in which French teachers reach across departments to pair up with Arabic teachers and develop joint lesson plans would be one response to this challenge. This would allow students from the corresponding classes to pair up either in the same classroom, outside of class, or via computer-mediated communication and engage in jigsaw tasks, such as working to decipher and explain to each other a North African hip-hop song, a film clip or a political debate on Facebook. Not restricted to exercises in translation, though, such collaboration could open up spaces for debate in English about culture and the colonial legacy of French in Arab countries. Another means of overcoming the question of bilingual expertise is to have students engage, themselves, in online discussion forums, where they may use other bilingual participants as informants who guide them toward culturally appropriate forms of interaction and assist them with understanding the Arabic vocabulary and phrases interspersed in French exchanges.

In order to mitigate these concerns, then, instructors need to be willing to: let go of expertise, collaborate across departments, and reconceptualize language itself. These challenges and their potential solutions are daunting. However, reaching outside the French classroom to teach multilingual texts provides students with a way to reconceive language learning as an activity that better connects them to their world. As Kramsch (2008) asserts, rather than teaching our students to “exchange information precisely, accurately, and appropriately in monolingual conversations with speakers of standard national languages,” we should “develop in them a much more flexible capacity to read people, situations and events based on a deep understanding of the historical and subjective dimensions of human experience.” (pp. 390-91) This is the aim of teaching French in contact with Arabic, and one that would serve other language classrooms as well. By bringing the parrot’s two feet into the language classroom, the parrot will not have to fall. In fact, it is only then that it will be able to *fly*.

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Appendix A

Brief guide to pronunciation of romanized, North African Arabic:

- 3 = guttural vowel that is pronounced by tightening the back of the throat.
- 5 = *kh*
- 7 = aspirated *H* pronounced with a burst of breath from the back of the throat.
- 9 = guttural *q* pronounced at the back of the throat.
- ‘ = creates a pause in the middle of a word.

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