From Linguistic Seduction to Language De-generation:
The Case of Excessive Borrowings.

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Introduction

According to the 11th edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2008: 1301), seduction is defined as an act of seducing someone with a tempting or attractive thing. From this definition, we can define seduction as the way of luring the attention of someone with or towards something.

Seduction is an attitudinal concept noticeable in most of the social interaction between individuals. We can even note that in most social interactions, seduction is the core element of any social act. In fact, whatsoever an individual undertakes, his first concern always goes with how this undertaking might be considered, that is, how will it be appreciated by other members of the society. The whole life of the individual, then, leans on the concept of seduction: moving from within genders to outside genders, the individual is always concerned with how, for instance, the cleanness of his complexion, his ways of dressing, his way of walking, his profession, his material possession and mainly the words he mouths, that is his linguistic performance. In the trend of our analysis, our focus will be on the concept of seduction in the trend of the language use.

Language is not only defined as a means of communication between individuals, but it is also an activity involved in the creation and maintenance of social control over other members of the society. In fact, the act of luring is identifiable to the act of controlling. In trying to control others, we are always in need of canning strategies that should not be straightly perceptible, but which indirectly impacts on other individuals, as in the case of a girl trying to attract the attention of a man, she will not simply or directly call him and tell him that she is aiming at seducing him, but rather she will indulge in ways to have him attracted. However, it seems that the act of controlling is not always controlled since the lost of values sometimes befalls. Hence the topic: "from linguistic seduction to language de-generation". In fact, discourse processing and the norm in language are not stable. They are liable to change in the framework of seeming stability. In the trend of this analysis, as it can

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be fancied, the concept of seduction will be analyzed, not only as a means to revealing the linguistic competence and/or performance of a speaker, but as a premise to language degeneration. However, how does seduction comes over? Is seduction an oppressive language or the possibility for a true dialogue or complicity between speakers? What are the elements at stake in the construction of the linguistic seduction? These are questions, among others, those to which we will try to answer in the trend of our analysis.

I-   Competence and the construction of seduction.

In the chomskian perspective, competence is the set of rules that are stored in the brain of individuals and which they use to speak the language they know. They also lean on their competence to judge others' verbal production. There are many types of competences, but, a special focus will rather be on the communicative competence.

According to Muriel (1996:363) Communicative competence involves knowing not only the language code but also what to say to whom, and how to say it "appropriately" in a given situation. She moves on to defining communication competence as extending to both "knowledge" and "expectation" of who may or may not speak in a certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, whom one may speak to, how one may talk to people of different statuses and roles, what nonverbal behaviors are appropriate in various context; that is in short, everything involving the use of language and other communicative dimensions in particular social settings. However, the linguistic competence of an individual can also call for what Houdebine (1996:93) calls "the linguistic guilt" of the speaker. In the present analysis, the linguistic guilt at stake does not necessarily consist in the one defined by Lafont R, making account of situations of diglossia where at least two variants of the same language or even two different languages co-exist. The "linguistic guilt" we would like to underline is specific to the deliberate choice of the speaker to resort to word(s) from one language into another one despite his awareness and competence in both languages. In this case, what are at stake are not the prescriptive, systemic and systematic norms (to use the terms of Houdebine (1996:93), but rather the "fictive or communicational norms" which account for the "normative linguistic imaginary" of speakers. Therefore, it consists in an ideal language led by aesthetic arguments as they are produced by the speaker. Aesthetic arguments in the perspective of the sudden resort of the speaker to words taken from one language into another go along with what we can refer to, in some way, as the quest for seduction in language. For,

through the use of language, in this perspective, the speaker's aim is to showing his competence not only in the main code which underlies his speech, but also in the other from which he is using words. But under these circumstances, since there is a grasp of the speaker upon the two codes, one cannot qualify it as a case of language attrition. Language attrition can be defined as the situation of a speaker who is not capable of building a whole sentence structure in a given language without resorting to another language in which he also has some knowledge. In cases of language attrition, speakers simultaneously use the two codes unconsciously.

Language use with the intention to seduce can somehow be paralleled with cases of borrowing even if it does not exactly correspond to it. In fact, borrowing in language can be seen as a linguistic situation whereby a speaker takes from another language, words which do not exist in a given language, during his speech act. In the case of what we can refer to as seduction in language, words taken from a language do have their equivalents in the target language. So, the main aim in case of the linguistic seduction is just to playing with the systems of the two languages. Here, the speaker seduces by showing his competence in the functional systems of the languages at stake through the performances he makes by making interpenetrating structures of the languages in use. By interpenetrating structures of languages, the speaker acts as if the systems of the two languages work together. In this way, it is as if he were endowed with a summative competence made of rules of both languages and which he uses in the trend of discourse. In fact, seduction is like a competence that includes knowing the alternatives and switching between them.

Human beings are constituted with various cultural tissues, consequence of his participation in various social settings. It comes out that the linguistic repertoire of an individual is made of the interpenetration of the various cultures he associates with; that is, the interpenetration of the various identities and each identity is associated with a number of appropriate verbal forms of expressions. But it may also comes out that in the trend of verbal productions, the various identities interpenetrate. In fact, nowadays, it would sound odd to speak of "the" identity of an individual, for individuals are no more products of a single identity but rather, they are made of various identities that overlap in their daily life. Identity is not a clear-cut reality. It is a continuum built upon the individual's liability to associate with various groups. It is a construct that results from the association of an individual with other individuals or groups that are more or less large, more or less diverse and more or less stratified. So, the individual is set in a relational environment and his attitudes account for his

various memberships. The decision to belong to a group is motivated by free needs: the need for assimilation (the common specificity of members of a group is to give an importance to a sign), the need for differentiation, and the need for opposition (Béatrice Galinon-Mélénec (2003:31). Whatsoever we may do or say somehow reveals our identity. Houdebine (1996:106), quoting Léon P., will talk about the identification function of language. According to her, in the course of discourse, an individual reveals his identity, that is, his social background, status, sex and his level of education.

Seduction in language can be analyzed under the frame of the new linguistic field of study, called the ethnography of communication. This linguistic field is interested in the interpenetration of language and culture, mainly the way in which social meaning is conveyed, constructed and negotiated Muriel (1996:351). Its goals are said to be guided by the quest for the "diverse ways of speaking" as legitimate contribution to knowledge in its own right. In that case, we can even speak of what sociolinguistic refers to as "language variation". The language variation I'm interested in, as already mentioned, is the decision of the speaker, in spite of his awareness, to break suddenly the norm of the language in use, in the view of not only attracting more attention on what he is saying, but also to indicate his awareness of the functional system of the languages at stake. Here are some few examples to illustrate our idea:

1- For Olson (1986) it is not a matter of writing **tout cour**, but rather of some deeper involvement in literate tradition (Carol Fleisher Feldman, 1991:47)

2- Homer, the bard, never tried and rejected **"le mot juste."**(Ivan Illich, 1991:35)

3- (…) il ya dans les collectivités humaines une puissance de création, une **vis formandis** que j'appelle l'imaginaire social instituant. (Catherine Pascal, 2003:13)

4- Dans la république de Weima, la tendance (**mainstream**) de la politique éducative et de la réforme scolaire était à contre-courant d'une politique libérale envers les minorités. (Marianene Krüger-potratz, 1999 :77)

5- (…) ces allemands qui, malgré qu'ils vivent parfois déjà depuis des générations à l'étranger (**in der fremde**), ont le mal du pays mais y restent, ambassadeurs et intermédiaires de la culture allemande (**der deustchen kulturerleistungen**)((Marianene Krüger-potratz, 1999 :79))

In the examples above, we can notice that authors have deliberately resorted to other languages in their trend of speaking. In (1) and (2) the source language is English and authors integrated words from French. But, contrarily to the last three examples, from (3) to (5), whereby the source language is French, authors of these structures make use respectively of English in (3) and German in (4) and (5), "foreign words are preceded by their explanations, that is, "tendance" for **mainstream** in (3); "à l'étranger" for **in der fremde** and "la culture allemande" for **der deustchen kulturerleistungen.**

In either case, that is, making preceded the borrowed word or not, the aim remains the same; the will is to showing some awareness of the language from which words are borrowed. These communication strategies can well be explained in the terms by Catherine Pascal (2003). According to her, transformation of information into communication is operated when the speaker matches individual appropriation to organizational project. So, in discourse, a speaker may construct meaning through the use of different languages and distinct strategies by means of transfer of some representations noticed as "*foreign*" through the explicit recognition of its difference. It is then worth mentioning that the logic of creativity, based on the quest for independence and pleasure sometimes prevail in communication. However, how does this communicational strategy come over? What is at stake when a speaker deliberately decides to mix code for the sake of mixing them? Does these communicational strategies always entails that the speaker has a perfect grasp of the functional systems of the languages used in the trend of his communication? What is the social value of this communication strategy?

II-   Seduction in language and its social by-values

Seduction in language is a case of linguistic variation. Linguistic variation is the extent to which language in speech varies depending on the speaker or simply the situation of speech. It is a synchronic reality, in the sense of how people use language or behave towards it. Linguistic variation can also be analyzed from the point of view of the language itself, because a speaker has many possibilities to express an idea. However, the main purpose of seduction in language is motivated by the quest for more social consideration, hence, for a social positioning. The use of language can be regarded as an activity involving the creation and maintenance of social inequalities simply because social systems are unmakeable without language. In fact, language is used to create boundaries between individuals. Creation of

meaning in the language practice depends on the material conditions of the social existence of speakers. It is this meaning creation that Bernstein (1990) referred to as "coding orientation". According to Bernstein, the coding orientation of dominant classes in a society is critically different from those of the dominated ones. It is important to recognize this form of linguistic variation as it allows us to appreciate the complexities of speaking within what might be called the same speech community.

Besides, the seduction tendency in language can also be regarded as a strategy to create high potential load of social meaning. In communication, it is often said that the higher the probability of occurrence of an element the less its meaning effects, and reversely the less the probability of occurrence of an element the more its meaning effects. So, being aware of this communication strategy, speakers most often resort to the interpenetration of languages in the view of creating more potential meaning. In communicating, one of the more important elements is to having control over a sign system with a higher potential. The potentiality of a sign system can be estimated by reference to how the system impinges on the significant life situation of a community. This can be evidenced, for instance, through the interpenetration of French and Ivorian languages. In our traditional communities, that is, in the domestic settings of speech communities such as those we find in Côte d'Ivoire, the interpenetration of French and Ivorian languages has some psychological impacts either vertically and horizontally on both the speaker and co-speakers. Is it vertically in the sense that the one who introduces French in his mother tongue has some over estimation of his self-image. In fact, in Côte d'Ivoire, French is the language of colonizers and at the same time the official language. So, it is the language used for education and promotion. With regards to these qualifications, the French language is often associated with prestige. Therefore, in using their mother tongues, speakers very often resort to the use of some French words which they insert in the systems of their mother tongues. Horizontally, in the same perspective, co-speakers also have some high consideration to he who uses words from the "prestigious" language, in the sense that not anybody is capable of using the prestigious language, unless he is educated in it. For speakers of non dominant languages, using words from the prestigious language is to showing awareness of this language and to having an added-value to their communicative repertoire. In fact, the handling of linguistic units in a given language provides with an interesting reflection of the culture of the individual who speaks. In my use of this term, culture should be understood both in the sense of the original background of an individual and his level of

education. In the language use, that is mainly seduction-oriented, the term culture is rather more inclined to underlining how literate individual speakers are. Literacy can be defined as the production and reproduction of knowledge. Literacy does not consist only in the process of learning to read and learning to write, it also to be initiated to the ability of creating meaning. As a matter of fact, literacy is a means of introducing individuals to some norms of discourse and of knowledge. As we can see, literacy can be defined as the development of discursive ability. The interpenetration of languages, not in the sense of borrowing but rather in the sense of seducing co-speakers, can be regarded as the result of the influence of literacy on individuals who aim at creating patterns of power and prestige in language. It is in this perspective that we can understand the definition of literacy by Halliday (1996:339) according to whom "literacy is a driving force by which our society is kept on going and by which it may also modified and changed". However, it is reasonable to state that literacy always positively modifies and changes languages? Does languages interpenetration always entails mastery of the functional systems of the languages involved in the construction of seduction?

III- Linguistic Seduction and Language Degeneration

It is often admitted and mainly along with the identification function of language that in speaking, an individual reveals his identity, that is, he gives clues on his social and cultural background, his status, sex and mainly his level of education. It is true that the level of education of individuals does influence their way of speaking and this can be illustrated in the two ways: firstly, a literate individual, being aware of the functional systems will tend to seduce by showing mastery of the norm(s), for literacy emphasizes the commonalities between the different classes of signs of the languages at stake in the discursive process of the speaker. Therefore, at any moment, the speaker knows the due time to switch from the signs of the basic language to those of the alternative language. In fact, the linguistic knowledge of a speaker is equated with speech in the following way: the grammar includes everything speakers know about their language.

In addition, another justification might also be the fact that literacy may equally help the speaker to be aware that in the same way there are no perfect synonyms when we refer to the same language, but all the same, many words do not mean exactly the same thing as their translation equivalents in other languages. So, in referring to the cultural background of a language during speech, the speaker might feel obliged to used words from the language of

the culture he is referring in case there is a difference with the use language. However, there are many controversies about literacy among which only one facet is important and the others are safely ignored (Theo van & Sally Humphrey (1996:29). Even if it is true that introduces individuals to some norms of discourse and of knowledge, it might also paradoxically be source of linguistic looseness. In fact, literacy may bring a speaker to produce necessarily a discourse underlining complicity between speakers, but an oppressive language made of diverse codes which co-speakers might not easily decipher or simply know mainly when the borrowed words are preceded or followed by their explanation, like in our examples (1) and (3). In these cases, seduction instead of creating attraction rather creates problems to co-speakers. The worst aspect of the linguistic seduction is when speakers make use of what we can call excessive borrowings where items in a given language are forcibly replaced by items from other languages and in the long run, are systematically used in the functional system of the basic language, despite the existence of their equivalents in this language. Under these circumstances, the basic structure of the referent language is modified, that is, degenerated to the profit of a new structure, hence, the phenomenon of language degeneration. Such is, for instance, the case of an illiterate individual, in the Ivorian context: if it is possible for him to have grasp on the functional systems of a neighboring language to which he may resort to in the construction of seduction, this is not necessarily obvious for the official language. He may resort to the official language, not because he masters this language but simply in the view of showing oneself off, for the official language is just like a mirror through which speakers may appreciate themselves. In the domestic setting of Ivorian speech communities, it is becoming almost rare to come across individual expressing themselves in their mother tongues without reference to the functional words taken from French which is our official language. Word like "bon, parce que, mais, donc…" are frequent in speeches as if these functional words do not have equivalents in the local languages. What to conclude?

In a nutshell, one can say that, just like in any other social interaction, seduction is also noticeable in the linguistic practices of speakers. Used as a strategy of communication, this linguistic practice can give right to an unexpected phenomenon; the structural disorganization of the language at stake. It is as if the multiplicity of meaning ascribed to seduction suggests that it is a multi-faced process embracing phenomena of different and opposite kinds, in this strategy of communication, order and chaos are the two sides of the same coin.

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