Language Variety Translation as Cultural Interpretation. Social Media as a Showcase for the Ivorian Francophonie

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Abstract: This article addresses the issue of cultural transfer on social networks through linguistic variation. By analysing the example of Ivorian French, the paper will show how speakers highlight their linguistic variety in Facebook posts and comments. On the one hand, it will be illustrated what means are used in order to stage linguistic variation, from the lexicon to the graphic representation of certain regional phonetic specificities. Secondly, the study will explore the cultural values that the linguistic variety analysed conveys in the eyes of its speakers. Furthermore, the various attitudes that speakers adopt towards the promotion of Ivorian French on the Internet will be discussed. All these topics revolve around the question of "translation" between language varieties, which becomes necessary for the transfer of meaning, but at the same time the choice whether and how to translate conceals itself a cultural transfer.
Keywords: *Ivorian French, Nouchi, social media, cultural translation, language varieties.*

1. Introduction

Beyond the "high" dimension of culture (artistic, literary, etc.), there are cultural transfers that take place at a "lower" level, in everyday interactions between individuals who inevitably take part in a *culture*, concept which is to be understood not just in terms of its products, but rather as "how and why human beings differ in their forms of life" (Ingold 2003: 329). According to Ingold, "people *live culturally*" rather than "*in cultures*" (2003: 330), to the extent that culture does not simply represent an environment that people inhabit, but rather a manner of inhabiting the environment. The present article will focus on the awareness of *living culturally* and its enhancement in the expression area provided by social media. More precisely, it will focus on the way language variation is acknowledged by the Ivorian speakers of French and embraced as a vehicle for their specific cultural identity, which they can share with the rest of the French-speaking world via social media platforms. In the following we will briefly introduce the sociolinguistic context of the Ivory Coast, before discussing a series of examples of Facebook posts in which Ivorian linguistic, as well as

more broadly cultural characteristics are emphasised and sometimes "translated" for the rest of the Francophonie.

2. The Ivory Coast and Its French Language

As in the case of other African countries whose official language nowadays is French, the history of the Ivory Coast was marked by the colonial era. Its territory had been progressively occupied by the Europeans for several centuries, and it became officially a French colony in 1893 (Daddieh 2016: xli). The French language was thus introduced by the colonial administration, and it maintained its official status after the 7th of August 1960, when the country won its independence by non-violent means. This choice was motivated not only by the already existing state apparatus entirely based on French, but also by the great variety of indigenous languages, none of which being sufficiently widespread in order to become politically dominant without generating inter-ethnic conflicts. The first inventory of the languages spoken in the Ivory Coast, made by Maurice Delafosse (1904), counted around 60 different idioms, an approximate number that is still accepted by researchers (Boutin and Kouadio 2013: 121). These languages belong to four different groups, almost equally spread around the territory: the Gur languages in the north-east, the Kwa in the south-east, the Kru in the south-west and the Mande in the north-west and centre-west (Lafage 1982: 9-10). Among these languages, Dyula (Mande group) and Baoulé (Kwa group) are the most widespread, serving as inter-ethnic vehicular languages at regional level (Kouamé and Djè 2020).

However, it is French that has won the battle for the role of main vehicular language in the Ivory Coast. The economic development that followed the independence led to rapid urban growth, and the city of Abidjan, the capital of that time, expanded quickly. People coming from all over the country, as well as from the neighbouring countries, gathered there in search for better economic conditions. But in order to gain access to a wider range of jobs, French language was a requirement. It is thus in this context of language contact and informal learning that French has developed in the direction of an endogenous variety, marked by a high degree of heterogeneity in usage (Ploog 2001: 425-426). Researchers have given different names to the linguistic realities they were observing, and this is not the place to reopen the debate. The term "Ivorian French" will be used in the following in its widest sense, in order to denote the whole range of French language practices in the Ivory Coast. However, one specific variety is worth mentioning, given that speakers use the term themselves to describe it: the "Nouchi". This idiom emerged as slang in the marginal communities from Abidjan in the 70s, mixing a French grammatical structure with a number of borrowings from indigenous languages and hybrid lexical constructions (Kouadio 1990). Nouchi spread rapidly afterwards among young people through a music genre called "zouglou" and became a vector for the Ivorian culture, since it brings together elements from several of the country's languages, thus suggesting national unity (Boutin and Kouadio 2015: 261-262). Nowadays, the original slang has considerably evolved, and social media represent a new area of expansion, offering international visibility to this

self-claimed endogenous variety of French. However, there is no clear linguistic distinction between "Nouchi" and "Ivorian French" in a wider sense. In fact, what speakers call "Nouchi" covers a continuum of different practices, for which reason we will avoid defining as "Nouchi" the whole of the discourse subject to the analysis.

3. Research Corpus and Methodology

The present study concerns primarily the showcase of language specificity in an environment which supports a very wide transfer of information: the internet allows virtually anyone to connect with any other point on Earth, making the potential audience numerous and diverse. Moreover, social media in particular offers a rather free field of expression for non-standard language, being exempt from the constraints that other types of digital communication might impose – for instance, e-mails, newspapers' websites, etc. Therefore, social media platforms allow speakers to promote language variation more broadly. In fact, far from generating linguistic or cultural uniformisation, such platforms rather offer new means of expression for cultural particularities, as we are going to show in the following through the Ivorian example. Instead of leading to the fading of linguistic variation throughout the Francophonie, the technological resources are mobilised by speakers in order to highlight the regional distinctiveness of their discourse. Our hypothesis echoes Ingold's statement:

> Predictions that local diversity would be swamped by a homogeneous 'mass culture' of worldwide distribution show no signs of being borne out. On the contrary, new forms of local distinctiveness are forever being constructed and asserted: however, the materials from which such identities are composed, far from being of exclusively local provenance, can come from almost anywhere. (Ingold 2003: 347)

The platform our study focuses on is Facebook, one of the social network websites belonging to the Meta company. Working on the principle that content is published and interacted with by a network of users, Facebook is at the top of the social media rankings in terms of the number of active users worldwide (Dutot 2022: 6). Interaction can either take the form of "reacting" to a post, through the widely known "like" button, or its recent versions ("love", "haha", "wow", etc.), of adding a "comment", or "sharing" it. Moreover, users who post something on Facebook can decide which audience has access to their post: their "friends", "friends of friends", "public", etc., as well as who can comment on it. Apart from the personal profiles, there are Facebook "pages", which are public, and instead of "friends" have a number of "followers". Users can see posts from their friends and from the pages they follow in the "newsfeed" and thus interact with them.

The corpus investigated in this article includes two posts of an Ivorian Facebook page, *Gbich Le Journal D'humour*, and is part of the more extensive research corpus of our PhD thesis in progress. Using a Python script, we have collected both the posts and the associated lists of comments, conserving the three-level structure of the latter: comment, reply to comment and reply to reply.

The posts included in our corpus were set to "public" at the time the data was collected (16/05/2024), and implicitly the corresponding comments. However, we decided to anonymise the corpus by automatically replacing usernames with pseudonyms such as "L00001". The Python script allowed us to collect data in the form of a series of CSV files (tables), which were subsequently converted into a corpus suitable for the TXM software (Heiden 2010). Moreover, we have collected separately the images contained by each post, images that cannot be processed by TXM but play an essential role in overall understanding of the ensuing dialogues. The posts we will focus on are the following:

1. gbich01_23_01_24: https://www.facebook.com/Gbichhumour/posts/pfbid02rhNMxh1C1Zmz5U9VnVfKrzPcj4A1D3i2UGYP3ntXHB9NeN54gVZeRojVxRwWYzg9l, posted on 24/01/2023.
2. gbich30_23_03_23: https://www.facebook.com/Gbichhumour/posts/pfbid0zXGxXHJDCKxmjv1gkx1tE7bjzwsqdXTHxHEgx1BKv8ZxjNUW1LGs89aEGauQY6bAl, posted on 23/03/2023.

Gbich Le Journal D'humour is originally an Ivorian newspaper in paper format that publishes humorous content. The Facebook page describes itself as such: "Gbich est un journal satirique ivoirien célèbre, d'actualité, de BD et de blagues sur un ton d'humour à vous procurer la bonne humeur."[1] It has 358k likes and 422k followers. Its content often features references to Ivorian culture and is written in a language that might not always be understood by a French speaker who is not familiar with this regional variety. Therefore, the audience of this page is mainly Ivorian. However, there are also users from other countries who follow *Gbich* for the humorous posts and thus get in contact with the cultural aspects promoted by the authors. In fact, this international dimension of social media platforms gives way to an open and conscious staging of Ivorian culture, which is often achieved through language. In the analysis of the above-mentioned posts, we will show what strategies are adopted by their authors and how the Ivorian and international audiences react to them.

4. Staging Ivorian French

4.1. Language varieties in contrast

The first type of post we will focus on features a clear comparison between two distinct language varieties: Ivorian French and "central" or close-to-standard French (as the speakers imagine it)[2]. The following post consists of

[1] "Gbich is a famous Ivorian satirical newspaper, with news, comics and jokes in a humorous tone that will put you in a good mood." (our translation).

[2] We have already addressed the question of contrasting language in Facebook posts following this pattern, as part of a scientific paper presented at the "Kaleidoscope" Conference (Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi, Romania, 31 May – 2 June 2023): "Le français local contre la norme exogène : mises en contraste dans les publications de Nouchi.com". We have mainly examined the linguistic aspects of variation between the contrasting sequences. In this paper, we will focus more on the generated reactions and their role in the cultural transfer dynamic on social media.

a short description: "Éhééé #ivoiriens CI💪😂😂😂" and an image including the following text:

(1) FR j'ai eu Arthur on s'est pas compris.
I had Arthur and we didn't agree.[3]
CI Arthur me met ici,il me met la bas,que non!!!que c'est Mami c'est loto ,que kohan kohan... Arthur Doucement (gbich01_23_01_24)
Arthur puts me here, he puts me there, but no!!! he says nonsense, that so and so... Arthur slowly

While both sentences suggest a misunderstanding between the imaginary speaker and Arthur, the first one is written in a neutral register of standard French, while the second showcases the typical expressiveness of the Ivorian variety, by using regional expressions (*c'est Mami c'est loto*), as well as punctuation (the repeated exclamation mark in order to emphasise intensity). Ivorian French is thus presented as a more "colourful" language, more suitable for the expression of emotions than the standard variety, pictured here as neutral, although easily comprehensible, in contrast to the encrypted character of the other sentence. These characteristics are acknowledged by the users who comment on the post. Their reactions can be grouped into several categories. First of all, some users recognise the Ivorian specificities:

(2) La technique varie mais le message est le même, fier d'être ivoirien 💪🏿 😁
The technique varies but the message is the same, proud to be Ivorian
(3) 🤣🤣🤣 il faut être ivoirien pour comprendre ça dêh
One must be Ivorian to understand this dêh
(4) 😂😂😂😂 j'adore mon pays 😂😂😂 CI CI CI CI CI
I love my country

While most of these comments are written in standard French, in the example (3) one can notice the discourse marker *dêh*, used by Ivorian speakers (Drabo 2017). Other users, instead of simply stating that they understand or identify the Ivorian variety, suggest it by writing themselves comments in the same variety. While examples (5) to (8) paraphrase or continue the sentence, example (9) recreates another similar comparison between standard and Ivorian French:

(5) Arthur ç'est un vrai bodakrou il voulait bori avec ton âme djidji il n'a pas sciensé
Arthur is a real trickster he wanted to play with your soul but he didn't think it through

[3] Translation of language varieties is never an easy task, and choices must be made according to its aim. Here, we have chosen to translate in a manner that conveys the meaning clearly, while remaining close to the literal form of the original examples, considering that they are subsequently discussed. Thus, interjections will not be translated, and in order to avoid overloading the text, emojis will not appear in the translation.

(6) Arthur même c'est un malo. il me met dans les qui Yayi et me prend pour un fouinnnn, comme si j'etais un nabobiė. mais le jour je vais le Sri, il va connaître qui a mis l'eau dans coco. 😂😂😂😅😅😅
Arthur is a dishonest man. He tells me lies and treats me like a fool, as if I were an idiot. but when I catch him, he will see who's the best

(7) Arthur fait comme si ya cailloux dans son zoreille
Arthur acts as if there were pebbles in his ear

(8) Moi je parle de mon djai à Arthur epuis il me bouai
I tell Arthur about my money and then he ignores me

(9) FR : Franck n'est pas du tout sérieux, il refuse de donner mon argent. CI : depuis là je parle de mon jeton il me tourne tourne.
FR: Franck isn't serious at all, he refuses to give me the money back. CI: since I've been telling him about my money he avoids the question

The examples above include a number of words and structures characteristic of Ivorian French: *bori* (flee, escape), *malo* (dishonest), *sri* (or *siri*, catch), *djai* (money), *il va connaître qui a mis l'eau dans coco* (he will see who's the best)[4], etc. The lexical aspect is the first one noticeable in this type of discourse, given its frequency. Moreover, it is the lexicon that marks a difference between Nouchi and other varieties of French spoken in the Ivory Coast. As Lafage stated, Nouchi can be seen as "un texte français rendu hermétique par le lexique"[5] (1991: 97). Speakers, in this case, play with the lexical resources in order to stage their proficiency. However, this is not the only dimension that contributes to illustrating the regional variety. Even though speakers only have access to the written language, they manage to recreate the typical Ivorian pronunciation: by writing *zoreille* instead of *oreille*, the author of the comment (7) evokes the residual consonant that resulted from a liaison in the definite plural form *les oreilles* and was deciphered as the onset of the noun by speakers with a lower level of education, this form being adopted afterwards as a typically Ivorian pronunciation. In the example (6), the repetition of the letter *n* suggests a specific prosody, with a high pitch and the lengthening of the final vowel (ɛ̃). The example (9), more than just staging proficiency in Ivorian French/Nouchi, creates a parallel example to the one in the post, following the same principle: a sentence is given in (standard) French and then "translated" into Ivorian French. However, the standard version, as it is given by the speaker, does not correspond to the real standard language, which should have been *il refuse de me donner l'argent*.

Another interesting part of the comment section is represented by a short dialogue sequence evolving around the comment of one of the users who does not understand the post:

(10) **L03554:** Je n'ai absolument rien compris 🤣

[4] For the explanation of Nouchi words we have used the dictionary established by Kadi [2017], as well as the one available on the website nouchi.com [nouchi n. d.].
[5] "a French text made hermetic by its lexicon" (our translation).

I understood absolutely nothing

Reply of L03555 to comment of L03554: L03554 😂😂😂

Reply of L03556 to comment of L03554: L03554 Est-ce que ti es un enfant ! ? Ti ris, çaé dire que tu as compris.

Are you a child!? You laugh, this means you understood.

Reply of L03557 to reply of L03556: L03556 bro, tchai on dirait que mousso la n'est pas de babi hein toi même faut la zieux tu vas voir. 🤣🤣👍👍

Bro, it looks like the girl is not from Abidjan, you need eyes to see

Reply of L03554 to reply of L03557: L03557 je suis belge. C'est gentil de demander.

I am Belgian. It's nice to ask.

Reply of L03558 to reply of L03554: L03554 c'est le nouchi, faut être dans le wéh pour decrou ça sinon tia joué bidé 😅

It's nouchi, you have to be a local to understand, otherwise you messed up

Reply of L03559 to reply of L03554: L03554 il me met ici il me met là-bas (il me fait tourner en bourrique) C'est mami c'est loto (il me raconte sa vie) C'est kohan kohan (c'est comme si c'est comme ça, des arguments qui ne tiennent pas.)

He puts me here he puts me there (he's driving me crazy), it's mami *it's* loto *(he tells me his life story), it's* kohan kohan *(it's so so, arguments that don't hold up)*

Reply of L03554 to reply of L03559: L03559 okay ! Là c'est plus clair ! 😊 Merci.

Okay! Now it's more clear! Thank you.

This sequence illustrates a non-Ivorian French speaker (L03554) who admits not understanding the message, which generates a series of different reactions from people who do understand it. The most common reaction is that of staging proficiency once more: the contrast is clear between the standard French – one might even say "careful" – of L03554, and replies such as that of L03557 or L03558, who play on the lexicon they master: *mousso* (woman), *babi* (Abidjan), *decrou* (decode), etc. L03556 uses a different strategy in order to showcase the Ivorian variety: although no specific Nouchi word or expression is used, the spelling is meant to reflect a very specific pronunciation: the delabialisation of vowels: *ti* (ti) instead of *tu* (ty); the same phenomenon preceded by the elision of the consonant (v) in *çaé* (sae) instead of *ça veut* (savø). A similar spelling occurs in L03558's reply: *tia* for *tu as*. These speakers decide thus to make their messages even more difficult to understand for someone who is not familiar with Ivorian French, in order to showcase the cryptic potential of their language. In contrast, L03559 chooses to translate the message sequence by sequence, in order to make it accessible to the Belgian speaker, which is a different manner of promoting the Ivorian variety. However, the fact that speakers decide to stage their language proves that they attach positive values to proficiency in it. Indeed, while in the early era of Nouchi, this variety was associated with delinquency and lack of education, it has slowly gained a different signification as a national symbol, becoming thus more valued by some people, while others still despise it: "Le nouchi est appelé aujourd'hui 'langue' par ses militants, et 'argot' par ses opposants."[6] (Boutin and Kouadio 2015: 262). The devaluing attitude towards local French – whether

[6] "Nouchi is nowadays called a 'language' by its activists and 'slang' by its opponents." (our translation).

it is explicitly called "Nouchi" or not – is related to the fact that it denotes a lack of education, in contrast with the "standard" French promoted by school. This is what L03666 is criticising in the following sequence:

> (11) **L03666:** Voici comment certains médias de la côte d'ivoire ont décidé de prendre leur part dans l'éducation du citoyen ivoirien. Vous pensez distraire mais derrière votre acte de cache volonté de d'éduquer le jeune ivoirien. Vous pouvez continuer dans ce sens car cela est aussi bon pour vos enfants. merci à vous, Et surtout merci au Ministère de la communication de la côte d'ivoire et à tous ses organes en charge du digital en côte d'ivoire. 🚶‍♂️ 🧿
>
> *This is how certain media in the Ivory Coast have decided to play their part in educating Ivorian citizens. You think you're entertaining, but behind your act lies a desire to educate young Ivorians. You can continue in this direction because it is also good for your children. Thank you, and especially thank you to the Ministry of communication of the Ivory Coast and all its members in charge of digital in the Ivory Coast.*
>
> **Reply of L02447 to comment of L03666:** L03666 lol l'éducation Tolède tout un chacun c'est à la maison. Le poste Il y a quoi de mal ici ? Donc les pages doivent plus jouer la comédie ? 😂 😂 😂 😂
>
> *lol the education for everyone is at home. The post what's wrong with it? So pages are no longer allowed to make fun anymore?*
>
> **Reply of Gbich Le Journal D'humour to comment of L03666:** L03666 Aux dernières nouvelles plusieurs mot de l'argot ivoirien (nouchi) ont fait leur entrée dans des dictionnaires français ... Et pour ceux qui ne le savent pas, vous êtes à Gbich ! LE JOURNAL d'HUMOUR Mais c'est votre avis, et nous le respectons ! 🙏
>
> *The latest news is that several Ivorian slang words (nouchi) have made their way into French dictionaries ... And for those who don't know it, you are at Gbich ! LE JOURNAL d'HUMOUR But it's your opinion, and we respect it!*

L03666 is trying to suggest that beyond the humorous nature of the posts, *Gbich* is trying to educate Ivorian youth in a way that contradicts the objectives that the school system (as the promoter of "good" French) should have. The speaker also suggests that the government has something to do with what appears to be a decline in education[7]. In fact, the textual comment itself does not explicitly state any discontent; one might even interpret it as a positive "thank you" comment. It is only by seeing the emojis at the end that one might understand the real meaning of the message. Among the two replies to this comment, the first one suggests that humour should be free, as it is not related to education. The second comment comes from the author of the post (*Gbich Le Journal D'humour*). On the one hand, it conveys a message of tolerance and respect, while on the other hand, it supports the validity of Nouchi, *l'argot ivoirien* (the Ivorian slang), giving the argument of its official recognition by inclusion in the dictionary – indeed, the verb *s'enjailler*, for instance, appears in Larousse, with the following definition:

[7] While it is true that most Ivorian students no longer discern between the non-standard (or "Nouchi") and standard French, which often generates decline in school performance, Adopo (2019) suggests that the non-standard varieties should be used as resources in teaching the standard, and not simply rejected as unacceptable.

s'enjailler *verbe pronominal* (mot nouchi, altération de l'anglais *to enjoy*, s'amuser) Familier. En Côte d'Ivoire, faire la fête, s'amuser : Aller s'enjailler en boîte de nuit. (Le terme tend à se répandre en France, dans le vocabulaire des jeunes.) (Larousse n. d.)

s'enjailler *pronominal verb (Nouchi word, an alteration of the English word* to enjoy*) Familiar. In the Ivory Coast, to party, to have fun: Go* s'enjailler *in a nightclub. (The term is becoming more widespread in France, in the vocabulary of young people.)*

The introduction of Ivorian words in French dictionaries is considered to be valorising because the origin of the word is mentioned – otherwise, it might have been perceived by the speakers as an illegitimate appropriation. It represents another example of cultural transfer – linguistic, and more precisely lexical in this case – from Ivorian French/Nouchi to the rest of the Francophonie, one that takes place on the level of the "high" or officially recognised culture, but which is ultimately based on a series of actions of Nouchi promotion at the "lower" level, through mass media.

4.2. Language varieties in conflict

The previous Facebook post we have analysed featured the two varieties of French *in contrast*, in the form of a "translation" into Ivorian French/Nouchi. In the following we will focus on a different example, exposing the two varieties *in conflict*, i.e. in interaction. The post gbich30_23_03_23 consists of a WhatsApp screenshot of a (most probably staged) dialogue. The description accompanying the image includes the hashtag "#nouchi", the author suggesting that this variety is involved:

(12) **L1:** Je suis Franck Walter. J'étais à la recherche d'un cuisinier et quelqu'un m'a donné votre numéro. Je suis un homme d'affaire et je voyage beaucoup. Mais je suis fréquent au Canada. Si vraiment vous êtes intéressé et vous m'épatez réellement avec votre cuisine, je vous amenerai avec moi

I am Frank Walter. I was looking for a cook and somebody gave me your number. I am a businessman and I travel a lot. But I am often in Canada. If you are really interested and you really amaze me with your cooking, I will take you with me

L2: Je cuisine mal même.

I cook terrifically

L2: Mon repas est mal doux même

My cooking is really good

L1: Ok merci pour votre franchise, je me trouverai un autre cuisinier (gbich30_23_03_23)

Ok thank you for your honesty, I'll find myself another cook

The speaker we called L1 represents a rich businessman, his status justifying his use of a high register of French even in a WhatsApp conversation. He offers a great job opportunity to an Ivorian cook – the cultural implication one has to understand in order to decode the message is that immigrating to Canada is something like an impossible dream for many Ivorians. Therefore, L2 tries to highlight his cooking skills, but in order to do so, he uses the language

variety he is familiar to, i.e. what the author of the post calls Nouchi, which causes the comic misunderstanding: *mal* means 'bad' in French, but in Ivorian French it became an emphatic marker with the opposite meaning, especially in this case, where it is followed by the discourse marker *même*. The main aim of the post is to provoke laughter, since it belongs to a humour page. However, the staged dialogue is interpreted in different ways by the followers. While some of them simply recognise the language variety and identify themselves with it (examples (13), (14) and (15)), others find here an opportunity to showcase their proficiency (example (16)).

(13) C'est le français Ivoirien oooh !
It's the Ivorian French oooh!
(14) Ivoirien et fier 🤣🖤
Ivorian and proud
(15) Nouchi même quoi
Nouchi itself right
(16) Il n'est pas fait pour bosser avec l'homme d'affaire ci. Sinon qu'il est mal barbière dans cuisine. Et son dabali est mal doux. Côte d'Ivoire.
He's not made to work with this businessman. But he is really great at cooking. And his food is really good. Ivory Coast.

The speaker in the last example tries to explain the situation illustrated in the post, but in doing so, he resorts to words and structures typical to Ivorian French. While the verb *bosser* belongs to familiar French in general, *mal barbière* is an Ivorian expression referring (here) to an expert in a certain domain. Similarly, *dabali* is a Nouchi lexical creation, from the Nouchi word *daba* 'to eat' (unknown origin) and the Dioula suffix *li* (Ahua 2006: 151). The examples above illustrate a positive reaction to the use of the local language variety, the comic situation being dealt with as such. However, this is not the attitude of all the followers. Some of them see in this post an argument against the use of Nouchi/Ivorian French:

(17) Quand on vous dit souvent de bien s exprimer là, vous voyez maintenant non 😞😔😔😞😞😒
When you are often told to express yourself correctly, you see now don't you
(18) Il a perdu boulot comme ça avec ses âneries 😅😅. Kooo je cuisine mal même 😅
He lost his job like that with his nonsense. He says je cuisine mal même
(19) Les accidents linguistiques de la côte d'ivoire. Et voilà les retombées. Vraiment apprenez à vous exprimer normalement et voyez le contexte.
The linguistic accidents of the Ivory Coast. And that's the fallout. Really learn to express yourself normally and see the context.

Emojis used in (17) and (18) can lead to an interpretation of the comments as ironic. While they suggest that L2 should not have used the local variety in that situation, they do not seem to despise it in general. In contrast, the author of (19) seems to be serious: there is no hint that he might be joking when he states that one must learn to speak "correctly" – i.e., using standard

French. Moreover, the use of the word *accident* to describe language practices in the Ivory Coast might suggest that his argument against Nouchi is serious.

Another series of comments comes more or less close to what we might call "epilinguistic discourse":

(20) C'est le mot Mal qui a tout gaché 😂
It's the word Mal *that destroyed everything*
(21) Les gens d'adjamé et de cocody ne parlent pas forcément le même langage 😂😂
People from Adjamé and Cocody don't necessarily speak the same language
(22) Registre sous familier ou orphelin 😂😂😂
Sub colloquial or orphan register
(23) Ce n'est pas le nouchi, mais le français ivoirien
It's not Nouchi, but Ivorian French

In the first example, the speaker tries to explain the misunderstanding, simply pointing to the word *mal,* without clarifying its double meaning. The following comment refers to a sociolinguistic difference: Adjamé and Cocody are two very different districts of Abidjan. The first one represents what has been called *quartier populaire* (popular neighbourhood), bringing together people with a low income and little education – the typical Nouchi speakers, like L2 – while Cocody is the wealthy district whose inhabitants value proficiency in closer-to-standard French. The same distinction between a "high" and a "low" register is highlighted in (22), where Nouchi is associated with devaluing attributes: lower than colloquial and "orphan" – in relation to the original Nouchi speakers, the *enfants de la rue* (street children) (Boutin and Dangui 2020). It should be remembered that the association between the word Nouchi and the language of L2 has been made by the author of the post, through the hashtag used in the description. Most of the followers who commented on the post confirmed the association in different ways. One of them, however, disagrees: according to the comment (23), the language used by L2 is Ivorian French, without being Nouchi. We recall the fact that researchers did not agree upon a clear distinction between the two varieties, given that the real language practices are highly heterogeneous (Ploog 2000: 105). The fact that the speaker in the example insists on marking the difference could possibly be explained by the fact that he associates the term "Nouchi" either with certain lexical creations, like some of those we have mentioned above, or with the slang used by a limited category of the population, and not with common practices of Ivorian speakers of French, like the one illustrated in the post.

One last example is worth mentioning in the perspective of cultural exchanges:

(24) Au Cameroun quand on dit " mal " on ajoute encore " mauvais " sur ça.
In Cameroun when we say "mal" *we also add* "mauvais" *to it*

The example above suggests that the strategies used by *Gbich Le Journal D'humour* in order to promote the Ivorian culture and language are

actually effective, since they reach an international audience. The Cameroonian follower points to a similarity in the French variety from his own country, called "Camfranglais" (De Féral 1994): the use of the word *mal* with the same meaning, as well as to a difference: the fact that the sequence must also include the word *mauvais* 'bad'. Such remarks prove that social media can be an effective space for linguistic, as well as cultural exchange in a broader sense.

5. Conclusion

The examples analysed above show that Facebook provides a channel for the expansion of Ivorian French – whether or not one calls it Nouchi – and, along with the language, of a whole series of elements that make up the Ivorian culture. Different strategies are used in order to promote it, humour being a key element in each case. The two posts chosen as examples resort either to a contrasting picture of Ivorian and standard French, or to a "conflictual" one, in the sense that language is exposed in interaction, but the eventual aim remains that of highlighting contrast. Moreover, "translation" is also used in order to emphasise the contrast, but also to ensure access to the meaning for French speakers unfamiliar with the Ivorian practices. However, the translation that takes place here is not a barely textual one. One should rather speak of a sort of *cultural* and *culturally marked translation*. Firstly, it is *cultural* in the sense that it not simply transposes a certain meaning in another language or variety, but rather tries to highlight the cultural characteristics attached to that specific variety. This explains why the sentence preceded by the Ivorian flag emoji in example (1) has a very different structure compared to the previous one: Ivorian French is shown as inseparable from a certain level of expressiveness and emotionality, considered by the authors as an Ivorian cultural element uncommon to French speakers from Europe, or particularly from France, whose language is pictured on a rather neutral tone. Secondly, the translation is *culturally marked* because even the depiction of central French evokes in fact the cultural representations of the Ivorian author about it, rather than the real language use in France.

Another aspect that is worth mentioning, and that results from the analysis of the comments, is a fairly high level of linguistic reflection among speakers. They often comment on the language use, even though this is not always linked to greater linguistic awareness, some of the comments being rather naive. However, they do develop a certain epilinguistic discourse without being explicitly invited to do so. Even more commonly, speakers simply show off as "experts" of their language, creating examples that appear as highly hermetic for other French speakers. In fact, speakers alternate between the desire for an open cultural transfer of their idiom and the attempt to preserve its secret character, comprehensible only to the initiated – i.e. the Ivorians. The original cryptic nature of Nouchi, that some of its speakers still try to preserve, might actually slow down the transfer towards the rest of the Francophonie, but either way it cannot stop it, since the desire to showcase this language variety is higher. This, as well as the epilinguistic discourse, might come from the fact that Ivorian speakers are aware that "Nouchi", as they call it, belongs to them: it

was the Ivorians who created and developed this variety, and this is why they are determined to claim it as such and to oppose the endogenous non-standard to an exogenous standard language they no longer need. Referring to the situation of French in Africa, Louis-Jean Calvet (2010) described it as a *langue en copropriété* (language in co-propriety). His assertion is true regarding the fact that African people have not only adopted, but also adapted the language that once had been imposed, so that now it also belongs to them. In this sense, the example of Ivorian French on social media shows that the cultural transfer in the French speaking world is now going the other way.

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