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# CODE-USE AND IDENTITY IN *LA GRANDE ILLUSION* AND *XALA*

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Code-use creates and reflects a certain social identity. Though this phenomenon has been observed by a number of sociolinguists, how is this assumption of identity by association with/through a certain code manifest in films *La Grande Illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1938) and *Xala* (Ousmane Sembène, 1974) offer a number of points for the study of code choice and codeswitching. Whereas sociolinguistic studies center on the « real » use of language rather than its employment in fiction film, literary or semiotic analyses of film (particularly these two films) focus more upon sign systems and stylistics. This should be in no way surprising, but in this study I propose a mixture of these two critical genres, for, as Gal and Woolard point out, « *a focus on face-to-face interaction provides a subtle understanding of interpersonal power dynamics* » (1995 : 134). My approach provides a greater appreciation of code-use, identity, the films themselves, and the greater theoretical and ideological matters that underpin them.

This study begins by briefly defending my selection of texts to examine. The differences between the two films are striking, but the creation of an identity via linguistic practice takes place in highly disparate texts and that this sociolinguistic practice exists independent of an individual work. Similarities provide a basis for common analysis ; both films have multilingual settings that allow each director to foreground code-choice as representative of identity.

In the second section, I outline current sociolinguistic theories that surround code-choice and how it relates to one's social identity. Codeswitching is of particular interest. This linguistic phenomenon is practiced in a matrix of both morphosyntactic and social concerns, but always involves the « *negotiation of a public face* » (Myers-Scotton, 1993 : 476). This negotiation is possible because of the various identities available to speakers by association with Rights and Obligations Sets attributed to different codes. Codeswitching is an iconic and representative process, but is rarely – if ever – simple since it implies creating identities that can as easily exclude as include interlocutors. My analysis also examines formality, both linguistic and social.

Having established this theoretical basis, I turn to the films themselves in the third and fourth sections of this study. Code-use in *La Grande Illusion* takes place in a very complex matrix of associations and identities. Codes, primarily but not exclusively languages, serve both to unite and to divide the characters of the film, sometimes against traditional expectations. Renoir emphasizes the unifying potential of language, but only after

highlighting the negative ends of its exclusionary possibilities. Through language, the Self/Other binary inhabits *La Grande Illusion* in an intricate manner. By contrast, this dialectic is fore-grounded in *Xala*, where instead of solidarity – or at least its preferred possibility – code-use highlights a sinister disconnect between the common people of post-colonial Senegal and its new native leaders.

## Common and Uncommon Codes

At first glance, there seems little to relate Renoir's allegory of WWI French officers in a series of German prisoner-of-war camps to Sembène's post-colonial satire, beyond perhaps their common francophone nature[1]. Nonetheless, similarities are present and meaningful while both parallels and distinctions are equally salient to my analysis.

Differences abound, the stylistic ones being really of least importance here. *La Grande Illusion* is undoubtedly a Eurocentric work. With a continental setting and almost entirely European characters (there is a single Senegalese officer), the film addresses itself to a European audience and centralizes their concerns and history. On the other hand, *Xala* is unabashedly Afrocentric. Its setting is uniquely Senegal, and its characters are nearly all Senegalese[2]. (Of the few Frenchmen present, all are lackeys and only one is named : Dupont-Durand.) *Xala* immediately declares it post-colonial interests and firmly adheres to them. *La Grande Illusion* is a film that focuses on the collective. Characters are always associated with other characters, often in pairs. Individuals who break from the group refuse solidarity and also its inherent safety in a time of war. *Xala* has comparatively little space for group dynamics[3]. It focuses rather on the individual, but it does so in a manner which also belies the weakened social state of the singular unit, for the Self/Other relationship of the film is one of chronic disconnection and refusal (Chréacháin-Adelugba, 1979 : 92). Finally, *La Grande Illusion*'s tone is ultimately that of hope. Maréchal and Rosenthal escape ; love is always possible for the French Maréchal and the German Elsa. *Xala* contains no such utopian vision. It is a biting satire that ends not in the hope of virgin Swiss snow, but the pathetic image of a man covered in spittle.

Despite what separates these films, just as much unites them. Firstly, there is a common trait to each director that I call a « will to realism ». Jean Renoir is renowned as a director of « *réalisme poétique* », a genre of film founded in a tangible reality, but whose formal elements possess a certain poetry (or unreality). *La Grande Illusion* is true to form : its setting is very real, as attested by its rampant multilingualism. Sembène shares this realist esthetic, vowing early in his career to remain « *au plus près du réel et du peuple* » (Sembène, 1964 : 7) ; this esthetic is also then political, and though not without its own complications, serves as a guide for both the creation and analysis of Sembène's work at large. Indeed, a second point of comparison for these films is their overtly populist engagement. Renoir and Sembène are well aware of the interplay of class and race, and the complex social relationships of their characters. Allegory or satire, each director makes overt reference to sociopolitical realities that exist outside his film.

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[1] *Xala*'s francophone nature can itself be put in doubt. Though the novel upon which the film was based, Sembène's own, was written in French and certainly destined for a mainstream French readership, the film is dominated by Wolof rather than French and in turn seems to address itself to a Senegalese audience (Gugler & Diop, 1998 : 149-150).

[2] This is admittedly a gross simplification : there are dozens of distinct ethnicities in the nation of Senegal, but the film makes no real distinction.

[3] Two diametrical opposed groups are present, though largely relegated to secondary roles : the corrupt cabinet members and the grotesque band of beggars.

Most important to the present study is the fact that both films have polyglot settings. *La Grande Illusion*'s prisoner-of-war camps are a veritable Tower of Babel, where a multitude of codes are too often mutually unintelligible. A great deal of the film's tension arises from the presence of monoglots in such a setting, where one's language is an instant label, and the rare capacity to use more than one language is equally empowering and dangerous. *Xala*'s multilingual setting extends naturally from Sembène's will to realism : Senegal is a multilingual nation, where proficiency in two if not three distinct languages is commonplace. However, the normality of this multilingualism does not exempt the speakers there of the same labeling and tensions that inhabit *La Grande Illusion*. Identity as it is created through code-use is central in each film.

A vast gulf may seem to separate *La Grande Illusion* from *Xala*, but they share as many similarities as differences, all of which are equally important. Similarities provide a basis for comparative study while differences demonstrate that code-choice and its concomitant creation of a social identity take place in disparate settings.

## Code-Use and Identity

If one of the most salient similarities of these films is a multilingual setting from which the idea of code-use and identity is naturally fore-grounded, it is important to understand the sociolinguistic theory that surrounds this phenomenon. Common in real multilingual societies and visible in both *La Grande Illusion* and *Xala*, codeswitching is especially important.

In the simplest terms, codeswitching (hereafter CS) is « *the selection of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation* » (Myers-Scotton, 1991 : 96)[4]. The term « conversation » is key to understanding the more complex practices that are involved with CS. A conversation is more than an innocent exchange of idle chatter ; it is an engagement of another individual(s) often to gain something. The idea that CS is a conversational strategy, then, is not surprising. Moreover, it is a « *strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries ; to create, evolve or change interpersonal relations with their accompanying rights and obligations* » (Gal, 1998 : 247). CS in this way has highly dynamic possibilities as a linguistic and conversational tool that can quickly change the social positions of interlocutors. Thus, CS is a « *negotiation to change the social distance* » (Myers-Scotton, 1993 : 484). This change is possible in two directions : invoking authority associated with a certain code increases it while invoking solidarity implied by a shared code decreases it.

As intimated by the previous statement, this negotiation functions by association. Using a given code evokes its concomitant traits and changes the rights and obligations that the code implies for both speaker and listener. CS creates boundaries of personal allegiance which are often, but not always, expressions of ethnicity (Myers-Scotton, 1991 : 95). A codeswitcher then allies himself with a different R & O set in two ways : first, he evokes the set associated with a second (or third) code ; second, he also creates a codeswitcher identity as such. (As I will show, especially in *La Grande Illusion*, the capacity to codeswitch can be extraordinary, and therefore marked, creating a second-order identity for the codeswitcher.)

Moreover, « *a single factor can have different effects on language use in different parts of a political economic system* » (Gal, 1988 : 255). The practice of CS may have different, often contradictory, effects from one situation or society to the next. The possible negotiation of social distance is dependent on numerous factors that are linguistic, social, political and economic. It is even possible to increase social distance by total alienation of certain interlocutors, which CS can easily do in a unique way, since both monolinguals and/or non-

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[4] In this paper, I am using « code » instead of « linguistic variety », partially because the former is less weighty, but also because I will not always be talking about language *per se*.

speakers of a certain code can be excluded (i.e., distanced) with a single linguistic touch (*cf.* Gal, 1988 : 257 and Myers-Scotton, 1991 : 104).

Traits to which a speaker allies himself are not inherent to the code itself. Rather, they are created by a community of speakers, and this ideological normalization is an important factor in both the use and form of CS (Myers-Scotton, 1993 : 494). Important as well is the source of these ideologies, and the effects of their creation and perpetuation through CS and other linguistic practices, for these often « *create or buttress the legitimacy of specific political arrangements* » (Gal and Woolard, 1995 : 132). The community of speakers that assigns traits to various codes is a « *"public" : a crucial aspect [...] of power, figuring among the means for establishing inequality, imposing social hierarchy and mobilizing political action* » (Gal and Woolard, 1995 : 129). This public is fluid, and frequently anonymous, from which it derives much of its authority, parading as objectivity or majority consensus. CS is therefore, like all linguistic practices, tied closely to community norms and to the socioeconomic and political systems that surround it.

Considering power and its association to language through both ideology and practice brings one to consider formality in language. For, « *code structuring and situational formality are causally related, so that increased structuring of discourse necessarily brings about increased politeness and a greater display of respect for a traditional, normative social order* » (Irvine, quoting M. Bloch, 1979 : 775). The idea of linguistic formality plays an important role as well in *La Grande Illusion* and *Xala*.

Judith Irvine (1979) advances a conception of linguistic formality that I find useful for the present study. Irvine posits four separate but often interrelated aspects of formality in code-use. The first is that of increased code-structuring, « *the addition of extra rules or conventions to the code to organize behavior in a social setting* » (*op. cit.* : 776). The second is code-consistency. In contrast to less formal linguistic practices which are less consistent in tone or which even deliberately mix tones and registers, the code-consistent message must be taken seriously because it offers no alternatives of message or persona projected by the speaker. The third aspect deals with personal positions in a public event and places an emphasis on social distance, which can be achieved quite efficiently through CS, as I have shown. Increased formality in public events « *requires an open acknowledgement of* […] *persons whose positions are clearly ranked in a publicly known, apparently indisputable sense* » (*ibid.* : 778). The fourth and final aspect of linguistic formality involves the emergence of a central situational focus and « *the ways in which a main focus of attention* […] *is differentiated from side involvements* » (*ibid.* : 779). These aspects of formality will be applied to both *La Grande Illusion* and *Xala* in the latter sections dedicated to each film.

Code-use, especially codeswitching, is a way in which one creates and constantly negotiates a public identity. However, this is a complex process that is deeply imbricated with community ideologies about language and thus tied to larger economic and political power structures that surround and inhabit it. The form of a given code used, especially its level of formality, is also important. With this theoretical framework in mind, I will now turn to an analysis of how code-use and identity are manifest in *La Grande Illusion* and *Xala*.

## *La Grande Illusion* : Chimeras of Difference

Jean Renoir's 1938 *La Grande Illusion* is a brilliant character study and sociopolitical allegory. Code-use is of great importance in this film, highlighting the divisions not just between characters, but also those of the social and political realities outside the film (Triggs, 1988 : 70). In the following section, I will analyze the way code-use creates both solidarity and division amongst the film's allegorical characters. Music plays an important role as well,

and helps to point up Renoir's larger message. Language can divide, but the alterity suggests that this division is mythical and even dangerous. Language can also unite, and it is in this unison, represented by linguistic practice, where future hope lies.

The working class Maréchal and the aristocratic Bœldieu are French aerial reconnaissance officers during World War I. Their plane is shot down by Rauffenstein, who orders that his fellow officers be taken to the German mess to share a meal instead of being immediately imprisoned. Despite differences of nationality at a time of war, Bœldieu and Rauffenstein establish a simpatico, as do Maréchal and a German officer, both of whom were once mechanics. Maréchal and Bœldieu are removed to a prison camp. Helping the French officers to make the most of it is Rosenthal, the son of a Jewish banker, who shares the bounty of care packages sent by his family. The prisoners pass the time in two ways : digging a tunnel to physically escape, and preparing a vaudeville to mentally do so. The tunnel is a pipe dream : on the day of the escape, the prisoners are transferred.

Bœldieu and Maréchal are eventually transferred to Wintersborn, a wintry gothic castle isolated on a vertiginous hill. Rauffenstein is the camp commandant and Rosenthal is also present. Here, the shifts in character alliance and association intimated earlier come to fruition. The aristocrats have more commonalities than differences, conversing in English about horses, cocktail bars and mistresses. Maréchal senses his companion's drift away, relating to Rosenthal : « *Supposons un seul instant que toi et moi, on tombe dans la purée. Là on ne sera que deux puratins. Tandis que si cela arrive à lui, ben, il sera toujours* Monsieur *de Bœldieu.* » Monsieur de Bœldieu may agree, but he still sacrifices himself to allow Rosenthal and Maréchal to escape.

Traversing the German countryside, they find shelter in a barn and are discovered by Elsa, a farmer's wife and war-widow. Rather than denouncing the escapees to passing troops, Elsa takes them in. Despite the differences in culture and language, a romance blooms between Elsa and Maréchal. However, the French officers cannot shirk their duties. Followed closely by border guards, they escape into Switzerland, where the snow looks remarkably like that of Germany – or of France, for that matter.

Renoir's masterful characterization is the true heart of *La Grande Illusion*. The film's characters are grouped in several ways, and language is often the most identifiable trait of each category, performing an indexical and iconic function. Language is indexical because most speakers are monoglots, and therefore the tongue that one speaks instantly places one in a certain camp, literally. It is iconic because within the camp inhabited by all characters, there is a hierarchy ; it is a prison camp, after all, and only the German-speaking soldiers are permitted weapons and their accompanying authority.

Code-use creates solidarity amongst *La Grande Illusion*'s characters. French prisoners gather about each other, just as Russian and English prisoners do – and the German guards are a single group as well. Importantly, each of these groups is nearly exclusively comprised of monoglots. It is therefore language that unites them more than the common traits that they may share with other characters (they are all European soldiers, after all ; indeed, every one is an officer). In other circumstances, these common traits may be cause for solidarity across linguistic lines, but not in *La Grande Illusion*. Renoir reveals that this division by language can be overcome, but only by language itself. Rauffenstein and Bœldieu share an aristocratic heritage, but more importantly, they have a common proficiency in English. Thus it becomes something of their lingua franca, providing them an avenue to share experiences and create a unique solidarity that is denied to all other characters in the prison camp.

The presence of one unit indicates the presence of an Other, and this is certainly true in *La Grande Illusion*. What is remarkable is that this Self/Other dichotomy is represented and underlined more by code-use than any other trait. As the French officers discuss their incomprehension of the German guards, the audience is reminded that « *by not understanding*

*the "enemy's language," we deny him a name and make him invisible and therefore infinitely frightening* » (Triggs, 1988 : 71). Ideology, and the war that it is perpetuating, is revealed to have an investment in language, one that relates directly to the identity of a speaker and to the identity that he assigns to the Other, the « non-speaker ».

**Formality**

Division in *La Grande Illusion* is not restricted to camps of language-speakers such as French, German or Russian, which are also nationalities. Code-use, and specifically its formality, is also a divisive factor that arises even between characters of the same nationality. At a certain point, Maréchal and Bœldieu have a tense discussion ; at issue is Bœldieu's perceived distance from the rest of the French officers (and, in turn, his proximity to Rauffenstein, their enemy and captor).

What is most striking about this scene (and very French), is that Maréchal uses language as an index of solidarity and/or distance, specifically formality. He notes that Bœldieu insists on using « vous », the V or more formal register of the French language, while all the other officers use « tu », the T or informal register. Formality is fore-grounded, and here it seems that we are dealing mainly with the first aspect that Irvine posits, the increase of code-structuring. Additionally, Bœldieu's discourse is also more consistent, since he always uses the V form. He is therefore to be taken more seriously, since he offers a highly-formalized code-use and no alternate persona.

When confronted with this issue, Bœldieu's response is nonchalant but telling : he uses « vous » even with his wife and children. His real response is implicit, but understood by Maréchal : why should he use the T form with people less intimate than his own family ? Division, one that seems to violate the accepted norms (at least those of Maréchal and the other officers) is indicated by code-use. It is just as unexpected as the solidarity created – by language – between Rauffenstein and Bœldieu.

**Codeswitching**

Code-use, and specifically CS, is another way to create division and is highlighted in *La Grande Illusion*. At the film's opening, Bœldieu and Maréchal are brought in to share a meal with Rauffenstein. The German officer immediately reveals himself to be proficient in French, but it is Bœldieu who initiates a change to English. Social distance in the conversation is indeed negotiated, but in a complex manner : French decreases the social distance between all three, however English decreases the social distance between Rauffenstein and Bœldieu even more – at the cost of increasing their social distance from Maréchal. CS as a conversational strategy and its complicated nature are at their height here, even early in the film.

There is only one other multilingual protagonist, Rosenthal, who reveals his proficiency very late, only after he and Maréchal have escaped and must converse with the German Elsa. Rosenthal's multilingualism is a surprise to Maréchal, but Rosenthal has good reasons for hiding his abilities : taking a cue from the distrust placed upon Bœldieu, he sees that polyglots in the prison camp are not empowered by the officers' ideologies. However, when Rosenthal reveals his abilities, the circumstances are different, and he becomes not an exclusive codeswitcher (like Rauffenstein and Bœldieu), but an inclusive one, serving as an interpreter and even teacher for both Maréchal and Elsa.

**Diegetic Music**

Like codeswitching, diegetic music is deeply imbricated in *La Grande Illusion*'s investigations of identity and boundaries, performing three functions. It defines characters by

association ; it divides them into camps ; and finally, it liberates, often through a collective performance. The first function of diegetic music is formally the most important. The frivolous « Frou-Frou » defines Maréchal for the spectator even before he utters a single line of dialogue. The stately Strauss waltz in the German officer's mess is equally defining for Rauffenstein. « *[T]he circulation of music among characters draws connections between them, yet the differential use of music draws telling distinctions* » (Clayton, 2005 : 66). Definitions necessarily entail demarcating one thing from the Other. The French/German division in Hallbach is highlighted by the German celebration of the capture of Douaumont ; and even further emphasized by « La Marseillaise » in the following scene. Both scenes use a long take and Renoir's trademark mobile frame to depict their subjects in a similar way. This similarity is moreover negative, and the importance of this idea is pointed up by the coincidence of thematic and cinematographic concerns. One of the « grand illusions » Renoir seeks to deconstruct, that of nationalist, vertical, social organizations, is given one of its most powerful expressions in a combination of music and cinematography :

> « *Renoir analyse les besoins de puissance et de domination que servent les sentiments nationalistes, et dévoile leurs potentialités destructrices. Chaque nation ne peut que désirer sa revanche, transformant le triomphateur d'hier en l'humilié d'aujourd'hui, dans une alternance sans fin.* » (Serceau, 1985 : 71).

Definition and division are not the only functions of diegetic music. It « *serves both as means of demarcation and an opportunity for traversal of those boundaries* » (Clayton, 2005 : 66)[5]. If, like language and register, music is made collectively and used in good faith, it can be liberating. This possibility is fulfilled in Maréchal's and Rosenthal's escape from Wintersborn. The sacrifice made in the escape is not only Bœldieu's (though his is the most costly and important), but the entire prisoner population incurs harsh punishment for their « recital ». It seems that these men are enjoying themselves as they disrupt and disturb the mausoleum-like calm of Wintersborn, but they would also be keenly aware of the risks they are taking to help only two of their fellows to escape.

In *La Grande Illusion,* the use of English pushes away all but two characters ; an insistence on increased formality seems to indicate an unbridgeable gap ; music is most often a way to underscore difference rather than similarity. In these ways, code-use is more exclusive than inclusive, for even as it creates solidarity between certain characters, it simultaneously creates distance between others. However, this is a hopeful allegory. Ultimately, Renoir seems to espouse the idea that human difference is a myth, a socio-historic construct that human kind has willed into existence and for whose perpetuation it has created all manner of linguistic forms to naturalize. Moreover, those who insist on this difference do so even at mortal peril : Bœldieu, a character who traditionally may have been the most empowered (socially, economically and linguistically) is shot by Rauffenstein. They both become victims of the social system which formed them, and which is represented in the film largely by code-use, primarily their exclusionary use of English.

For Renoir then, code-use can potentially unite or divide. Bœldieu's death is not due to his solidarity with Rauffenstein, but because it seems that the only expression of solidarity with the other French prisoners he can make is a fatal one. The chimeras of class and nationality, of which code-use is a primary marker, turn on him. The old European aristocracy, with its exclusionary code-use does not hold the solution to the fundamental problem of human division that Renoir highlights in *La Grande Illusion* (Triggs, 1988 : 73). Rather, one must look to the unifying potential of language, the kind of will that unites the French working-

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[5] Clayton makes an excellent analysis of the gift of the harmonica to Maréchal by a German guard, a scene wherein the camera mimics the particular capacity of sound to transverse solid boundaries, like the cell door.

class Maréchal and the German farmer Elsa. Though they do not share a common code, like the aristocratic English, each begins to learn the other's code. Social unity and understanding must proceed along this path : a desire to constantly decrease the social distance rather than increase it.

## *Xala* : The Impotent Code

If for *La Grande Illusion* the ultimate difference of the Self/Other dialectic is a chimera, (and a dangerous one at that), this same difference is very real in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*. Identity is a central theme of the film, which is set during the dawn of Senegalese independence, when national identity was greatly in play. The constant, but realistic, interplay of codes (especially French and Wolof) is even more revealing of identity and allegiance than in *La Grande Illusion*. Identity is thus heavily dependent on code-use, and the Self/Other dialectic is one of repeated disconnection and refusal of recognition. The creation of identity is carried out via an impotent code, which is neither French nor Wolof, but that of commerce.

*Xala* follows the misadventures of Abdou Cader Bèye, known by the title « El Hadji ». He is a businessman and member of the new Senegalese government, a government that Sembène reveals to operate not with nationalistic pride, but with white money. El Hadji uses some of this money to marry a third wife, misappropriating funds just like his fellow « *honorables collègues* », and causing much chagrin to his first two wives and his nationalistic daughter, Rama. To his dismay, on his wedding night El Hadji finds himself afflicted with the « xala », a curse of impotence. It spreads in his life from his marriage-bed to his business, and El Hadji goes to cynically comic lengths to cure himself. The cause of the xala is finally revealed to be a disenfranchised relative, now accompanied by a pack of equally disenfranchised and grotesque beggars whose fates are all tied to El Hadji's self-centered disconnection with the common people of his own nation. To « become a man again » El Hadji must submit to a humiliating ritual : the final image of the film is a freeze frame of the erstwhile functionary covered in the beggars' spittle.

Identity is a central theme of *Xala*, imbricated directly in its historical and geographical setting. The establishment of a post-colonial identity is a complex process, one that is haunted by past ghosts and often complicated by simple human opportunism, as embodied by El Hadji. Sembène's film highlights the fact that the privileged classes of Senegal, in particular the intellectual bourgeoisie, were marked more by former French domination than by independent and nationalistic thought (Robinson, 1980 : 147). They were an imitative (and thus oppressive) breed that continued to function and prosper in the post-colonial era.

### Imitation, Resistance and Authenticity

El Hadji is *Xala*'s representative of this post-colonial ruling class though he is certainly not alone. He has an exact clone in every one of the cabinet members who wears a western suit and carries a briefcase full of white money. That these empty suits (the President included) preside at the highest level of government is cause for alarm for Sembène. These are highly-educated, French-speaking, ambitious men who are skilled in the Western capitalist system and who seem to be Senegalese only after the fact. It is among these men that the Self/Other relationship is heavily dichotomized, and from their example others imitate it, spreading the marketplace linguistic ideology beyond language to nearly every corner of the film's world (Chréacháin-Adelugba, 1979 : 92).

This ruling elite speaks French for more reasons than a simple imitative psychology. In post-colonial Senegal, the language is empowering (Robinson, 1980 : 154). In a contradiction typical of many post-colonial societies, though the tongue of the colonizer may have a certain

associated stigma as such, it is often the lingua franca of a multilingual and multiethnic nation, and moreover the code of preference for international commerce. French in Senegal, notably *Xala*'s Senegal, is a code of education, prestige and commercial success. « *The world which provides the structures and vocabularies for relationships in* Xala *is that of commerce, where the Other is held at arm's length and seen as a customer or seller of goods* » (Chréacháin-Adelugba, 1979 : 93). Relationships for the ruling class are crafted within this ideology, one that is initially transmitted through and associated with French, but it does not remain there.

French is more than the preferred language of the ruling elite – it is its only language. Every government official, indeed each and every character associated with the government, speaks uniquely French. Furthermore, when El Hadji wishes to address the President's cabinet in Wolof, he is denied. French is the official language of the government and its only legitimate avenue of expression. « *Même les insultes* » are to be made in French. The elite utterly rejects the native codes of Wolof and Diola, and the authenticity that Semebène implies they accord.

In contrast to this self-alienated ruling class stands the more « authentic » Senegalese, for whom Sembène obviously wants to create simpatico and allegiance in the audience. These are the beggars and griots, students and newspaper sellers that comprise the nameless (but not faceless) masses on the streets, people to whom El Hadji refers as « *ce déchet humain* ». Aware of an alienation of the masses from the privileged classes in post-colonial African societies, the director addresses this by « *substituting in turn the Diola and Wolof languages of the masses for the French of the assimilated elite* » (Robinson, 1980 : 150)[6]. Code-use is a central locus for resistance against the symbolic domination of the upper-class marketplace mentality. This resistance takes place primarily in Wolof, an indigenous language of Senegal and a mark of true Afrocentrism (as compared to the businessmen who declare « *Vive l'africanité !* » and « *La négritude, ça voyage !* » all in French, of course.)

Rama is the primary voice of this resistance, a character through whom « *Sembène posits a selective approach to both the African and western heritage* » (Gugler & Diop, 1998 : 151). Rama is equally proficient in French and Wolof, just like her father. However, her code-use is not dominated by the marketplace ideology of the ruling elite. Rama, « *is able to both benefit from the bilingualism of her education and still remain true to her cultural identity* » (Taylor, 1995 : 71). She does this by thinking critically, voicing her mind, and, most importantly, speaking primarily Wolof. Rama is one of the few characters (perhaps the only one) who demonstrate sufficient awareness of the power of language to create a social identity not only for oneself, but for the Other as well.

**Formality**

Though it is not associated with a specific language, formality is tied to titles (deputies, honorable colleagues, Madame, etc.) that the characters insist upon and use repeatedly. In this manner, while there is a certain increase of code-structuring, what occurs repeatedly is Irvine's third kind of formality, in which social positions in a public event are underlined and social distance is created and perpetuated. That this kind of formality occurs not only in formal events where one might expect it (such as the cabinet meeting), but nearly everywhere (El Hadji's secretary insists on being called « Madame » not « Mademoiselle »), implies that social distance is the rule rather than the exception.

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[6] This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Sembène novel *Xala*, the basis of for the movie, was written in French. In the filmic adaptation of this own work, Sembène therefore performs something of a self-correction.

Instead of a specific code, formality is associated with places. Government meetings are a site of formality, as is a place of business. The home and a wedding celebration are markedly informal affairs. These are not necessarily surprising of themselves, but Sembène plays with the expected level of formality in these established areas. One can observe that the greater the expected formality of an event, the more likely people are to speak French. However, this correlation is bent or even broken at times. The home, a very informal setting, and a locus of primarily Wolof, is invaded by El Hadji's French. The effect is grating, especially to Rama, and it is exclusionary to El Hadji's first wife, who speaks uniquely Wolof.

If formality and the power-structures that it represents can invade the home, informal speech in turn can invade more formal venues. The beggars, El Hadji's disenfranchised relative at their head, have their own meeting. It resembles just enough the government assemblies to highlight the possible parallels, but in form and content (formality as well) the meetings are nothing alike. The businessmen of the President's cabinet speak French with enormous code-structuring and say very little. The beggars speak Wolof with very little code-structuring but discuss a great deal of great importance in less than half the time.

## The Self-Other Dichotomy

The Self/Other dichotomy that dominates *Xala* is thus represented primarily by code-use. At one end of the spectrum, the supposed « Self » is El Hadji « *the impotent buffoon in a suit, the assimilated puppet castrated by his own pathetic opportunism* » (Taylor, 1995 : 68). He wields an impotent code. It is important to point out that this impotent code is not necessarily French. Towards the end of the film, El Hadji has a discussion with another businessman, Ahmed Fall. It is a business deal, and it fails, but it is conducted in Wolof. Thus, El Hadji's impotence cannot be tied directly to a specific tongue, but rather to the second-order code of commerce. No matter the language, the marketplace ideology that refuses to recognize the Other always fails. At the other end of the spectrum stand Rama, the griot, and the beggars. They are Wolof speakers, but more importantly they are aware of the Word as Truth as Power (or Tool) (*cf.* Chréacháin-Adelugba, 1979 : 100-101). They do not adhere to the marketplace ideology, but rather know that language empowers the speaker, but only does so when used in a equally unifying and self-critical manner.

This dichotomy is best represented in a scene in which Rama comes to see her father at his business. She asks him to visit her mother, El Hadji's first wife. El Hadji offers his daughter some Evian, but Rama does not drink European water. El Hadji offers her money, but Rama does not need it ; she wants only her mother's happiness. This disconnection is not only embodied by content, but by code. Rama speaks Wolof and refuses to speak French with her father ; at the same time, El Hadji persists in speaking French and refuses to speak Wolof. At the end of the conversation, he explodes and demands to know why Rama will not speak French. El Hadji's « xala » is subtly present here, symbolizing « *the paralysis of his alienation from his own language* » (Taylor, 1995 : 68). An impotent ideology (opportunistic capitalism) has shaped El Hadji's code-use (primarily French, but always business-like) and also its content. His heterogeneity to his own people, even his own family, is nowhere more apparent.

Sembène uses language as a critical part of his cautionary tale, highlighting its alienating properties, particularly in the home (Taylor, 1995 : 71). However, just as Renoir insists in *La Grande Illusion*, code-use also has a unifying potential. In *Xala*, Sembène's mixed message – embodied by El Hadji and Rama – is that Senegalese unity against foreigners is desirable, and he posits Rama as a heroine of this progressive solidarity. The difficulty is that nationality is not the only factor : like El Hadji, there are those who have alienated themselves, often by exclusionary code-use, from their fellow Senegalese. « *In the last scene* [Sembène] *reminds*

*us that not money but the willingness to recognize the existence of the Othe*r […] *is what can ultimately make El Hadji Abdou become a man again'* » (Chréacháin-Adelugba, 1979 : 95). Code-use must therefore serve not only to unify but to critique and correct as well.


## Conclusion

In this analysis I have demonstrated that code-use is a key element in *La Grande Illusion* and *Xala*, two seemingly disparate films. While their similarities permit a common analysis, their differences allow us to see that code-use and the theoretical concerns that surround it can be broadly applied. Keeping in mind current sociolinguistic theory about codeswitching, its role in the creation of identity and the reflection of political ideologies, I have analyzed both films and revealed that while code-use is undoubtedly salient in real social situations, it is doubly so in fictional representations, particularly those that are socially engaged. Code-use is highly iconic and its labeling properties are used by both Renoir and Sembène to highlight and critique social divisions that they perceive as disabling or even dangerous.

In both *La Grande Illusion* and *Xala*, code-use exists in a complex but realistic matrix, providing for the plausible and iconic use of codeswitching. Code-choice is in this way tied closely to not only the identity of characters, but also to the greater types that they represent. One can observe the dual potential in code-use to either increase or decrease the social distance, between both individuals and groups. Most striking, both Renoir and Sembène unequivocally criticize the refusal of solidarity, especially as it is represented by code-choice.


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