TU TE PRENDS POUR THE KING OF THE WORLD?
LANGUAGE CONTACT IN TEXT MESSAGING CONTEXT

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Introduction

Sociolinguists, psycholinguists and neuroscientists[1] frequently declare that the communicative impulse is innate to human beings. The desire to transmit culture, beliefs and technical know-how and the wish to share memories and emotions have existed from the beginning of civilisation and are present from the first moments in a human life. In this regard, the 21st century is no different from earlier times; but communication properties have changed and evolved in many respects. Communication today is faster (email is certainly much faster than ordinary 'snail' mail), and more practical (mobile phones compared to fixed phones); it blurs certain limits (we can easily keep in touch with friends who live on the other side of the world, thanks to networking websites such as Facebook) and permits multilingual mixing in discussions (for example, chat or role-playing games using automatic translators). However, certain linguists[2], and even the media, often point an accusatory finger at new technologies, claiming that communication is deteriorating as a result of these innovations. They suggest that there is always a loss of information or quality in translated speech, or even that computer mediated communication (CMC, which includes SMS communication) is destroying language. Other commentators are firmly convinced that it is better to consider language as a progressive and changing entity[3]. From this viewpoint, language is a social tool that has to be studied in-depth through the prism of objectivity, as a process in motion which is influenced by new social and technological stakes, rather than as a fading organism.

This is the perspective adopted in this study. Since 2004, the *sms4science* project has been studying what we generally term today 'SMS language'. *Sms4science* is an international project that promotes the study of spontaneous SMSs, through the use of a substantial corpus of text messages sent in genuine

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[1] For example Squire and al. (2003) or Mehler and al. (2000).
[2] For example Jalabert (2006).
[3] See Sapir (1949).

communication situations[4]. In 2004, *sms4science* collected a corpus of 30,000 SMSs in the French-speaking part of Belgium[5], and it is this data which constitutes the raw material for my study. Belgium is an exceptionally pertinent area for research on language contacts because it has three official languages (French, Dutch and German), which are also used in the surrounding countries (the Netherlands, Germany, France and Luxembourg), by which Belgium is culturally and linguistically influenced. A final reason is the large number of immigrants from Europe and North Africa who live or work in Belgium, attracted by the European institutions in Brussels and by other international companies whose working language is often English. All these factors provide the country with a day-to-day multilingual dynamism.

Using this collection of SMS material, I will examine in this paper how languages mix, borrow from, code-switch with, and influence each other in an SMS context. In the first part of my analysis, I will present the multilingual aspects of the corpus, the data and terminology that are relevant to the study. The second part will be more qualitative: I will try to establish what types of switching occur in an SMS context (metaphoric or situational), and whether they can explain, at least partially, the function of language contact in an SMS context.

1. Numbers and terminology

As already stated, the data for this study is a corpus of 30,000 SMSs that were gathered following a strict collection methodology[6]: SMS users were asked to send the project a copy of text messages that they had already sent to a real addressee in a genuine communication situation[7]. Our methodology also allowed us to gather sociolinguistic information about SMS users[8]: this enabled us to obtain essential information, such as the number of languages spoken by users, their SMS-specific practices[9], their age, their mother tongue, etc. At present we have 2,773 complete sociolinguistic SMS-user profiles.

It is legitimate to ask whether or not text messages are pertinent to studies in linguistics. In my opinion the answer to this question is a definite 'yes'. Pre-

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[4] The project is coordinated by the CENTAL (a Research Centre in Natural Language Processing) at the Université catholique de Louvain, in Belgium. More information about the project can be found at www.sms4science.org.

[5] A second collection was organized on the French island of Réunion in 2008 (www.lareunion4science.org) and two more were started in autumn 2009: a three-language corpus in Switzerland (http://www.sms4science.ch/) and a French one in the Canadian province of Quebec (http://www.texto4science.ca/).

[6] Details of this methodology can be found in Fairon et al. (2006a).

[7] This means that the methodology excluded SMS messages initially addressed to us.

[8] Notably through an SMS2Mail system that linked a phone number to an email address, that was used to ask for more information about each user.

[9] For example, how many SMSs do they send per week?

vious research (Fairon et al. 2006a; Cougnon 2009) has demonstrated that the SMS context is one of today's rare spontaneous examples of written texts that contains specific linguistic phenomena such as neologisms, regionalisms, slang, word and letter play, language and register switches. This can be explained by three main factors. Firstly, SMS practice seems to inhibit fear-related behaviour in writing — it erases traditional social, professional and academic demands. The addressee's physical absence, in addition to the delayed character of the media, encourages SMS users to play with language and to move away from standard language[10]. Secondly, the large degree of creativity conferred upon a written context where specialization[11], abbreviations, acronyms and the insertion of smiley's are the norm, encourages the use of other – foreign – languages, should their variants be graphically shorter than those of standard language. Finally, SMS practice emerges as a playful activity that tries to fill the affective gaps which written media (limited as it is by the number of characters) can cause. Thus, graphic elements (such as smiley's and ASCII art) and linguistic phenomena (such as language switches, the use of regionalisms, etc.) are employed to convey expressive clues. For example:

> Je te consacre mon dernier SMS pour te dire tout le bien que je pense de toi: en 4 mots... **You are so wonderful!** (smsBF)[12]

Although SMS users were only asked to send us their French messages[13], seventeen other languages are found in our Belgian corpus, mixed with French. Figure 1 shows the number and classification of foreign language segments in these text messages[14]. The foreign language segments occur in the corpus in various forms. In order to identify these forms and to describe them as precisely as possible, I will first define them briefly.

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[10] Standard language can be understood as a graphic and syntactic demand and/or as a register standard.

[11] That is homophonic by letter, syllable or number substitution. For example, "B" for [bi], "2" for [tu], etc.

[12] As will be demonstrated below, English is often used in our corpus as an intensifier, a highlighter of feelings. Each SMS example provided here has been converted from its rough form into standard written language, and is translated into English in the footnotes. "*I'm devoting my last message to you to tell you how great I feel about you: in 4 words... **You are so wonderful!***"

[13] Any messages which were entirely in a foreign language were deleted from the corpus when received.

[14] "Others" include Japanese, Lingala, Latin, Greek, Moroccan, Lebanese, Rif dialects and Macedonian.
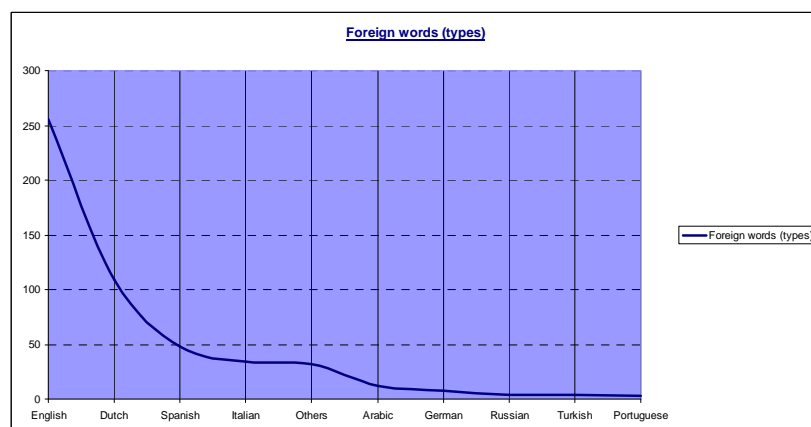
Figure 1. Number of distinct words for each foreign language in use in the French-speaking SMS corpus

The base language of text messages in which "foreign languages" (FL) appear is called the "matrix language"[15] (ML). In our corpus, ML is French and FL comprises the seventeen foreign languages which are embedded in the French in our corpus. *Code-switching* is defined as "variable length sequences of words of two languages, varieties or registers of languages, juxtaposed in the same verbal exchange, which demonstrate all indications of a monolingual exchange and which respect both languages' grammatical rules"(Cougnon, 2007). Code-switching can be distinguished from *transfer,* which is used to describe a verbal exchange where the switch to a FL occurs but is limited to a specific construction followed by a predictable return to the ML. Auer (1998) explains that transfer does not show any signs of the linguistic negotiation of the verbal exchange that exists with code-switching. We will also differentiate code-switching and transfer from *loan words,* which are considered as items borrowed from an FL lexicon which have become part of the ML lexicon, and are no longer considered as examples of the use of an FL[16]. Finally, we label as *code-mixing* the use of an FL in an ML context with no respect for the FL's grammatical rules[17].

[15] We borrow this concept from Myers-Scotton (1993).
[16] More precisely, we mean recent loan words that we consider to be words "imported by borrowing from another language" (Matthews, 2007) during the last fifty years.
[17] We are aware of the ambiguity of these definitions, due to the large variety of perspectives held by linguists in the language contact field. Code-mixing, for example, is often contrasted with code-switching by its reference to language contacts in a formal context, with code-switching considered as a colloquial phenomenon. The definitions given here are only binding on us.

2. Methodology and typology

In order to find all the FL lexemes in the 30,000 SMS corpus, we applied a French dictionary to the corpus after it had been converted to written standard (CWS)[18]. We then manually sorted the 3,209 FL candidates. In this way, we excluded a wide range of French slang words, neologisms, wordplays, technical vocabulary, brands, etc. The next step was to find out which language each candidate represented[19].

The FL lexicon used in text messages is grammatically diversified: there are nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, etc. Segments are used as subjects or complements (adverbial, direct/indirect object, possessive phrase, etc.). While nouns have the highest frequency (e.g. *amor*, *kusje*, *problem, assalam*), adverbs (e.g. *tanto*, *cómo*, *dag*, *now*, *maybe*) also feature significantly, often used alone in an ML context.

Our descriptive analysis demonstrates that all types of language switching[20], as enumerated above, appear in the corpus. We find:

- code-switching (linguistic negotiation halfway through the verbal exchange):

> C'est gentil de préciser mais je me doutais bien qu'il ne lui avait pas parlé. Attente insupportable mais restons **open! Be aware! But he makes me crazy! Yes he does!** (smsBF)[21]

- lexeme transfer (no linguistic negotiation):

> Désolée mais j'avais pas bien compris! Si c'est OK dis-moi quand tu peux venir à la **zee**! Réponds vite stp! Juju qui t'aime, bonne nuit (smsBF)[22]

- syntagm transfer (no linguistic negotiation):

> Salut **mi amor**. Moi ça va! J'ai eu 7/20 en sciences (la merde). {il}[23]{n'} y a plus que 3 jours sans se voir, ça va passer vite (smsBF)[24]

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[18] This CWS corpus was set up manually following the strict conversion conventions that are described in Fairon and al. (2006a).

[19] We ended up with a list of only 25 unclassified FL words.

[20] Henceforth we will use the phrase *language switching* for what should strictly be called *code-switching* (since we are talking about codes and not about languages). According to our definitions, code-switching is a specific expression of language switching.

[21] "*It is good to be certain, but I suspected he hadn't talked to her. Awful wait but let's stay* **open! Be aware! But he makes me crazy! Yes he does!**"

[22] "*I'm sorry but I didn't understand! If it's OK tell me when you can come to the* **see!** *Answer quickly! Juju who loves you, good night*"

- segment transfer (no linguistic negotiation):

> **Hola que tal? Espero bien**... Juste un message comme ca. Je te sou-haite un bon w-e. Bise (smsBF)[25]

- code-mixing (no respect for FL's grammatical rules):

> Tu prépareras 1 truc **for eat**? Gros gros bisou. Moi je vais me lever et ranger un peu. Je crève la dalle! Je t'aime (smsBF)[26]

- loan words:

> Coucou, dans le sac que papy va m'amener pourrais-tu rajouter ma **Pashmina** noire, des cotons-tiges, le Roquefort et les yaourts Alpro soja? Merci. (smsBF)[27]

- we even find loan words denoting a foreign reality (here, a typical German-style meal):

> Revenus chargés de pièces. Fini usine? Téléphone-moi si tu peux. On aurait mangé des **wurst mit kartoffelsalat** si nous avions été ensemble. {je} t'aime (smsBF)[28]

Quantitatively, the corpus contains less than a dozen cases of code-mixing, compared to more than seven hundred cases of transfer. Loan words make up only a small part of FL lexemes (24 in all, most of them relating to cooking or computers). Nor is code-switching, strictly speaking, a common phenomenon in the corpus: there is usually a predictable return to the ML.

From a statistical perspective, we also took a careful look at syntagm transfer in order to identify certain degrees of fixing (from free lexical associations to fixed expressions, including phenomena such as collocations[29])[30]: thus, we find

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[23] Missing words that have been added during the manual conversion to written standard are placed within curly brackets in the texts.

[24] "*Hi* **my love**. *I'm fine! I scored 7/20 on my science test (shit). Only 3 days left until we see each other, it will pass quickly*"

[25] "**Hello how are you? Hope fine**... *Just a quick message. Wishing you a nice w.e. Kisses*"

[26] "Are you making something **for eat**? Big big kiss. I am going to get up and tidy up a little. I'm starving! I love you"

[27] "*Hello, in the bag that Daddy's going to bring me, could you add my black* **Pashmina**, *Q-tips, the Roquefort and the Alpro soja yoghourts? Thanks.*"

[28] "*Got back with lots of pieces. Factory finished? Call me if you can. We could have eaten some* **sausage with potatoes salad** *if we had been together. {I} love you*"

[29] A collocation can be defined as "a relation within a syntactic unit between individual lexical elements [...] used especially where words specifically or habitually go together" (Matthews, 2007).

various kinds of fixing in an SMS context, such as the Tunisian Arabic *Saha chribetkom* (which is a special salutation for Ramadan), the English *only kidding* and *see you*, the Dutch *geen probleem* and the Spanish *hasta pronto* and *viejo amigo*.

Despite the interesting patterns identified by these statistical analyses, the research reported in this paper will focus on individual FL words or syntagms in the SMS context in an attempt to paint a more qualitative picture of the corpus and to learn something of the social meaning of language switching.

3. Situational and metaphoric switching in an SMS context

In this study, I wanted to explore the functions of FL use in a francophone SMS context. To do this, I employed Blom and Gumperz's (1972) terminology for situational and metaphoric switching. A situational switch is defined as a switch that ensues from social and linguistic contexts (addressee properties, topic of conversation, etc.); in other words, it is a switch motivated by a cause. Conversely, a metaphoric switch is a switch motivated by a goal (to have an impact or reach a particular goal). Inspired by Auer (1988) and Mackey (1962), I listed different types of situational switches in advance (Cougnon, 2007):

1. topic change;

2. sequential contrast (for example, between an on-going sequence and a subordinated repair sequence, or an aside);

3. change in the discourse style (between informative, evaluative, order, etc.);

4. addressee change;

5. change in participant constellation.

Due to the characteristics of text messages, only the first three types of situational switches are relevant to this study[31]. The list of possible metaphoric switches was inspired by Gumperz (1989), Giancarli (1999) and Zongo (1993). People may be switching:

6. to quote;

7. to denote a change in the narrative mode (speaker paraphrases someone else without using specific quotation marks);

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[30] These syntagms are, of course, not necessarily fixed in their source language, but they seem to be fixed in the French ML SMS context.

[31] As we only asked SMS users for copies of the text messages that they had sent (and not those they had received), we do not have information on conversations, and each SMS was studied independently. Therefore, factors such as addressee change or change in participation constellation cannot be taken into account in this analysis.

8. to denote a phatic element[32] or an interjection;

9. to reiterate (simple repetition or slightly modified repetition) for a better explanation or to clear the speaker's own mind;

10. to modalise an utterance (providing further details by means of relative clauses);

11. to introduce a semantic nuance that does not exist in the ML;

12. to express solidarity;

13. to demonstrate ethnic unity and complicity;

14. to play with words;

15. to denote a hedonistic strategy (to make use of each language's affective overtone);

16. to denote intimacy.

All of these functions could, in theory, appear in the SMS context, so they were all retained for this study. The analysis consists of describing the situational and metaphoric switching that actually appeared in the SMS context and, possibly, of finding new types that were typical of a CMC or even an SMS context.

The three situational switches listed above are illustrated in the corpus. The most frequent is a change of subject (1). Consider, for example, the subject change between two answers to questions that were probably asked in a previous message. The first one is about a break-up in a relationship, the second is probably about an invitation:

> Ben non, j'ai largué **face to face** la dame après 6 longs jours, 1 record :-)! **Vamos** pour demain mais j'ai cours jusque 6h15, grande folle! Fais-moi signe quand t'es là![33] (smsBF)

The two other types of situational switches also appear in our corpus and are qualitatively more pertinent. For example, we find sequential contrasts (2) between an outgoing message and an explicative sequence:

[32] A phatic element is an element that generally introduces a conversation or that maintains the contact between
the speaker and the addressee, such as *hola viejo amigo*, or set phrases such as *you're welcome* or *buena notte*.
[33] "*Well no, I dumped the woman* **face to face** *after 6 long days, a record :-)!* **Come on** *for tomorrow but I have a class till 6.15, you crazy girl! Let me know when you get there!*"

> Les chouchoux on est encore au concert du Rideau, {il} faudra vraiment que vous veniez une fois!! On {n'}ira pas vous rejoindre **because** demain je bosse… mais on s'appelle biz biz[34] (smsBF)

These examples are interesting because the subject or explicative switches are effected through a simple lexeme transfer. The recourse to a single FL word (a verb in the first example, a conjunction in the second) seems sufficient to denote the sequential contrast or change of subject. Adverbs are also often used alone in a complete ML context for this purpose. This can be observed when SMS users switch as a result of a change in the style of discourse (3), for example between an informative clause and an interrogative clause:

> Coucou, j'espère que tu vas bien. Moi, j'ai bien dormi, mais mon torticolis est presque pire qu'hier... Je n'ai jamais eu ça si fort si longtemps, **maybe** je devrais aller à Molière...[35] (smsBF)

This last type of situational switching is also found in the corpus in the form of segment transfers between an interrogative clause and an imperative clause:

> **Welk sacs? Wit? Blauw? Geel?** Fais 1 choix réfléchis parce que j'ai qu'un sac et 2 petites mains…[36] (smsBF)

or between an informative clause and an imperative one:

> Charlotte c'est bon chez toi? M'énerve je me suis trop bêtement bloqué ici j'arrive pas à trouver un **lift** mais clair je vais trouver. **Dammi un attimo!**[37] (smsBF)

Metaphoric switching is also evident in language use in the SMS context. Most of the types identified above are illustrated in the corpus (the exceptions are the direct quote, the change in narrative mode, the semantic nuance and modalisation). Some metaphoric tools, such as reiteration (9), are very frequent. However, reiteration here does not seem to serve the same purpose as it does in other communication situations, for example in the family context (Cougnon, 2007), where the aim is simply to offer a better explanation or to

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[34] "*Sweeties we are still at the Rideau concert, {you} really should come some time!! We {won't} be able to meet you* **because** *I'm working tomorrow … but we'll stay in touch xx*"

[35] "*Hi, I hope you're OK. I slept well, but my stiff neck is almost worse than yesterday... I've never had it this bad for this long,* **maybe** *I should go to Molière...*"

[36] "**Which bag? White? Blue? Yellow?** *Make your choice think about it because I just have one bag and two little hands…*"

[37] "*Charlotte is everything OK with you? I'm fed up I stupidly got stuck here can't find a lift but I'm sure I'll manage something.* **Give me a minute!**"

clarify an issue within the communicator's own mind. In the SMS context, reiteration almost always serves as a feeling intensifier. For example:

> Doux amour de ma vie, tu vas bien? Je suis à Bruxelles! Je t'aime tout plein. Fais attention à toi pm. Tu me manques! **I love you very very much**! **Te quiero mi amor**.[38] (smsBF)

Here we can see that the feeling already expressed in ML (*Je t'aime tout plein*) is reiterated twice (in English and Spanish), with certain modifications, but without additional information. The language switch clearly serves to intensify the expression of the feeling[39].

Another type of metaphoric switch is also well-represented in our corpus: the denotation of a phatic element or interjection (8) seems to constitute the major aim of many text message users when resorting to FL. A very large number of SMS messages commence with salutations such as *hola*, *dag*, *hi*, *salam* or *saluti*. In the same manner, we also find FL segments aimed at maintaining or initiating the contact between the speaker and the addressee: *how are you?*, *que tal?*, *que pasa?*, *Wat heb je allemaal gedaan?*, *labes?*, etc. It seems to be more than politeness alone, given that these contact segments consume an excessive number of characters for the SMS user. In examples such as

> Bonjour gente dame, **come stai** ? Dis, vous êtes toujours à l'ADAC ?[40] (smsBF)

it is not even clear whether switches are used as contact intensifiers or as a playful element. The need to introduce or maintain interpersonal contact often seems more important in SMSs than in, for example, an oral conversation. This suggests the idea of *SMS intimacy*. We described social and psychological characteristics of messaging practices above – inhibited fear-related behaviour coupled with the addressee's physical absence – and this surprisingly transforms SMS practices into a driving force for intimacy. And yet, as we have already indicated, since SMS is a *written* medium with severe space constraints (in contrast to email or ordinary mail, for example), SMS users have to be inventive and resort to a variety of linguistic phenomena to transmit intimacy (16) to the addressee.

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[38] "*Sweetheart, are you alright? I'm in Brussels! I love you very much. Be careful pm. I miss you*! **I love you very very much! I love you my love**."

[39] Note that feelings or emotions expressed in SMS messages are not always positive, as in the following example, with swear words: C'est la merde j'ai oublié mais je finis à 16h10!! Ça foire? Crotte de bique **shit** de merde! (smsBF) (*It's shitty, I forgot that I finish at 4.10!! What am I going to do? Holy* **shit**, *crap*!)

[40] "Hello there lady, **how are you doing**? Hey, are you still at the ADAC? "

Three or four types of metaphoric switching seem to reinforce this theory. First, it can demonstrate ethnic unity and complicity (13):

> **Salam alikoum** c'est Houcine comment {ça} va? Ah oui pour les CD de Chokri tu les as? Si oui dis-moi quand tu sauras me les donner et où **Beslama** réponds sur mon numéro.[41] (smsBF)

Where one FL segment (*Salam alikoum*) could be the simple use of an interjection to introduce the message, the second (*beslama*) is more akin to sharing a sense of identity. *Beslama* isn't a general Arabic salutation but rather a local Moroccan way of saying goodbye. In choosing this FL word, the SMS writer acknowledges or highlights the common local Moroccan identity or knowledge that he or she shares with the addressee[42].

Second, the reinforcement of intimacy is also engendered by expressing solidarity (12) (between men in this example):

> **Dag schatje**, ça fait longtemps qu'on cherchait l'occasion de vous revoir, et là, c'est tout trouvé ! Demain, se tient La Plus Grande Soirée Disco d'Europe au Sportpaleis d'Anvers (**volle vlaamse quiquine !!!**) ! Ça te dirait de venir avec Adri et moi nous apprendre tes dernières techniques de chasse ?[43] (smsBF)

Intimacy is used a great deal in order to denote hedonistic strategies (15)[44]. The use of language contact in the corpus suggests that certain languages possess specific overtones within themselves. Thus, Romance languages are frequently used for their affective connotations:

> Même le ciel étoilé dessine ton visage, avec dans tes yeux, les étoiles les plus brillantes de la voie lactée :o) **bellissima Chepita, mi amor**! Ma tendre...[45] (smsBF)

On the other hand, Germanic languages are more often employed for their fashionable element. Indeed, German, Dutch and English are often tools for speakers to push themselves forward, as in the following examples[46]:

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[41] "**Good morning** *Houcine here, how are you {doing}? Ah yes, do you have Chokri's CDs? If you do tell me when you'll be able to give them back and where* **Bye** *answer on my phone*."

[42] This theory is reinforced by the context: the names *Houcine* and *Chokri,* and the greeting *salam alikoum*.

[43] "**Hello darling**, *we haven't seen each others for ages, and now, it's possible! Tomorrow is the Biggest Disco Night Party ever in Antwerp Sportpaleis* (**a lot of flemish girls**!!!)! *Would you like to come with Adri and me to teach us your latest hunting techniques?*"

[44] i.e. to make use of each language's affective overtones.

[45] "*Even the starry sky draws your face, with the brightest stars of the Milky Way shining from your eyes* :o) **beautiful Chepita, my love**! *My dearest ...*"

Ça fait plaisir en tous cas d'avoir de tes nouvelles sauf que tu {ne} réponds pas aux SMS donc OK, pas très sympa! Tu te prends pour **the king of the world? Have a nice night**[47] (smsBF)

Ah ben super! Ils sont vraiment débiles, {il} faudrait leur faire 1 procès devant la CIJ! Sinon si tu veux faire un crochet par Leuven en rentrant de Bruxelles, **aarzel er niet over**.. À tantôt[48] (smsBF)

Re. Ça va toujours? Là je suis toujours au kot de ma **zus**. Vendredi je vais pieuter chez Meg. Samedi c'est réunion en partie avec les pionniers. Et ta petite épaule je l'aime bien :-)[49] (smsBF)

Hi V! **Wie geht es?** On est de passage ce week-end, oui. On peut se voir samedi soir (sauf si verglas...). Rendez-vous à 20h à l'endroit habituel?[50] (smsBF)

Finally, SMS users also switch languages for comic effect (14). In the following example, there is wordplay when discussing the *waterzooie* meal:

OK ça roule! **Met plezier fieu**. Prépare le **zooie** j'apporte la **water**. À plus[51] (smsBF)

The wordplay is important for two reasons: while it means that the writer wants to make the recipient laugh, it also presupposes that the recipient understands the FL, and so strengthens the intimacy links between correspondents.

My analysis also revealed a 12th type of metaphoric switching, one specific to CMC media: the desire to be brief, which can sometimes be achieved by choosing an FL lexeme, the written form of which is shorter than the ML variant. This type of switching illustrates a well-known linguistic phenomenon, the principle of economy of linguistic effort. In the case of SMS messages this reason is confounded with the need to keep the message short. English is often

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[46] For this particular analysis, we checked the users' sociolinguistic profiles to ensure that they were not simply using an L1 or L2 language with an addressee who shared the same profile. Should that have been the case, it would have been evidence of solidarity or ethnic belonging.

[47] "*Good to have some news from you, you {are}n't responding to SMSs so OK, not very nice of you! Do you think you are* **the king of the world? Have a nice night**"

[48] "*Oh yeah great! They are so daft, {we} should sue them before the CIJ! If you want to make a detour to Leuven on the way to Brussels*, **don't hesitate**.. *See you*"

[49] "*Re. Are you still alright? I'm still at my* **sister***'s room. Friday I'm going to crash at Meg's place. Saturday we have a meeting partly with the pioneers. And I love your little shoulder* :-)"

[50] "*Hi V!* **How are you?** *We are passing through this weekend, yes. We can meet up on Saturday night (unless there's black ice...). Let's meet at 8 at the usual place*?"

[51] "*OK it's gonna be fine!* **You're welcome guy**. *Make the* **zooie** *I'll bring the* **water**. *See you*"

lexically and syntactically shorter than French, employing words such as *hi*, *happy*, *ask*, *maybe*, *next*, *now*, *send*, *sorry*, *today*, etc.

> Bonjour **chief**. {Je} vais au Makro jeudi avec Gene. J'**ask** une carte {d'} accès au nom de l'usine ? J' {y} vais 1 fois par mois. Pas inutile je crois. Quid ? Bon week-end et tenez bon à l'usine ça ira. Fl[52] (smsBF)

> Je suis **happy** de t'avoir vu **today** ça m'a fait plaisir même si t'es vite parti avec Jo (je t'ai peut-être intimidé à cause de la conversation que j'ai eu avec Max) J'espère que tu vas bien travailler, bis bis[53] (smsBF)

This habit of shortening forms is so significant that even English lexemes are subjected to truncations. We find *thanks* for "thank you", *gonna* for "going to", *wanna* for "want to" as well as established English acronyms such as *aka* (also known as) and *asap* (as soon as possible).

Conclusions

SMS language — like other forms of CMC — seems to represent an important store of linguistic phenomena for communication studies. Where else can researchers find spontaneous written corpora where language switches, neologisms, slang and even dialects and minority languages are used? In this age of globalisation, where vehicular languages are everywhere, it is necessary to study with a great deal of precision their real penetration into everyday communication. It is also interesting to measure the survival of disappearing codes that are still evident in a portable and relatively affordable medium.

Language contact in a text message context is diversified: I found a wide variety of mixing and switching. Acronyms, words, syntagms and segments appear in different FL, nearly always following grammatical rules. Of course, English hegemony is present throughout the corpus (as illustrated by the number of SMS messages containing English segments), and English is often used as a functional tool to produce a short and effective communication. In a similar way, Romance languages are used to create an overtone, and minority languages to share identities. Unsurprisingly, Figure 1 shows that, apart from English, the foreign languages most often used in SMSs in French-speaking Belgium were those spoken in the region: Dutch (an official language in Belgium), Spanish, Italian and Arabic (the languages of three of the largest immigrant groups). In conclusion, we can say that language contact in text mes-

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[52] "*Hello* **chief**. *{I'm} going to Makro on Thursday with Gene. Shall I* **ask** *for {an} access card for the factory? I go {there} once a month. Quite useful I think. What do you think? Have a nice weekend and hang on with the factory, it'll be OK. Fl*"

[53] "*I was* **happy** *to see you* **today,** *it was good even though you left in a hurry with Jo (I may have put you off by the talk I had with Max) I hope you are going to work well, xx*"

sages is a true reflection of a globalised world, a world with minority language concerns and a strong desire in human beings to become more intimate, transcending the hurdles of absence, distance and time.

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SUMMARY

Using a collection of 30,000 text messages in French, the author examines how languages are mixed, borrowed from, code-switched with and influence each other in an SMS context. After presenting the multilingual aspects of the corpus, the paper focuses on the types of switching that occur in text messages (metaphoric or situational) and which display, at least partially, the functions of language contact in new communication media.