THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILE OF ALGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Historical, political, ethnic, educational, and socio-cultural factors have all contributed in making Algeria a conglomerate with a mosaic linguistic composition in which three main languages coexist side by side, namely Arabic, Berber and French. Chronologically, Berber, or Tamazight as it is labeled in official documents, figures more in the history of the country. Arabic, which identifies in two forms (dialectal and literary), is a relatively latecomer which was introduced to North Africa since the 7th century. French is a colonial legacy which still survives in independent Algeria in a variety of important domains. As such, Algeria identifies as a multilingual speech community. Also, the 'functional specialization' of each language renders Algeria a representative case of both *in-diglossia* and *out-diglossia*.

KEYWORDS: Arabic, Covert Status, Diglossia, French & Multilingual; overt status; Tamazight

INTRODUCTION

The Status of the Different Languages in Algeria

As far as Arabic is concerned, it has always been crowned as the sole official language of the republic. This is explicitly declared in the different constitutions of the country (1963, 1976, 1989, 1996). In fact, the linguistic policy of arabization was a priority of Algeria's political leaders, since the early years of independence. Few days before the official declaration of independence (July 5th, 1962), the Tripoli Congress (June 1962) discussed the major principles of the young independent republic. As for the cultural side, the Tripoli Charter (1962) announced that the role of the national culture will be based, primarily, on restoring the dignity and efficiency to the Arabic language as a language of civilization. Since then, Arabic has gradually entered different domains which were once associated with French. It is now the dominant language in most walks of life. It should be noted that although the constitution, besides other political documents and jurisprudence, does not specify what variety of Arabic, it understandably is Literary Arabic (and not Dialectal Arabic) which is meant.

As for Tamazight[1], within the firm assimilation policy of arabization that, the government launched Tamazight had always been put aside with no political mention. Such explicit negligence of the Amazigh culture and language, as components of the Algerian identity gave a strong push for pan-Berberism to rise, especially in Kabylia. Increased social pressure during the 1980s and 1990s forced the authorities to change the position toward the Amazigh question. Under the presidency of Bouteflika (1999-), Tamazight made significant advancements when it was introduced as 'national' language in 2002. However, for the Amazigh activists, this was no other than half a recognition. They did not cease their

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[1] Tamazight/Berber is an umbrella term under which a number of linguistic varieties reside. Such idioms, which are more or less mutually intelligible, are spoken in parts of Morocco and Algeria, but they are also used in some other African countries, such as Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, etc. The four major varieties in Algeria in terms of the number of speakers are Kabyli, Shawi, Targui, Mzabi.

calls for officialisation, especially that, the other neighboring country (i.e. Morocco) has declared Tamazight a 'co-official' language alongside Arabic in 2011. After a long wait, the onset of the year 2016 brought good news for them, and Tamazight was assigned the status 'joint-official' language after a constitutional amendment that was approved through a parliamentary vote.

French is a colonial legacy. Falling under French colonialism from 1830 until 1962, Algeria was subject to a rigorous *assimilation*, or precisely *acculturation* policy, perhaps the most significant among all French colonies. French served as the official language during the long-lasting colonial era. After independence, Algerian nationalist leaders led a linguistic campaign through enacting strict legislations with the aim to reinforce Arabic and oust French from its colonial stand. In the long run, French lost a lot of domains in favor of Arabic. Now, French is politically referred to as 'foreign' language. However, on linguistic grounds, French is actually a second language alongside Arabic. This builds on the verity that despite the large-scale arabization process, and although more than five decades have elapsed since the departure of the colonists (1962), French is still alive and kicking and continues to fulfill important linguistic tasks in the social life of Algerians. It is firmly associated with a variety of services of the central government to the extent that it may be the one and the only functioning language. It is used by high officials of the state. It is used in international diplomacy. It is also omni-present in the media, be it spoken or written. It is the language of a variety of prestigious domains, like health, finance and administration. French is also the (exclusive) language of instruction, in technological and scientific institutions of higher education. To show the strong presence of French in Algeria, suffice it to consider the linguistic landscape (road signs, advertisement, shop names, etc)- This is what, Shohamy (2006) calls *covert* language planning. Simply put, the political (overt/explicit) status of French does not faithfully represent its linguistic (covert/ implicit) status. One would agree with Ennaji' s (2005) characterization (with reference to Morocco), who observes that, French is neither a foreign language like English nor is it a national/official language like Arabic.

As for English, it is also regarded a 'foreign' language. However, English remains far behind French in terms of function and number of speakers as it has a very limited use. It is a mandatory subject of instruction introduced to learners since their first year of middle school education. Although decision-makers keep insisting publically on the importance of English, it still does not receive the same political push like French. This parallels social wants, especially among the educated youth and professionals whose calls are voiced for promoting English especially in the educational sphere. English may actually gain ground in the near future to the extent that it may replace French, especially in higher education as many teachers, researchers and students recognize the necessity of good control of English. Now, many researchers draft their doctorate dissertations and research papers in English with the aim to publish in highly acclaimed journals. Some institutions went further as they introduced English as a medium of instruction (e.g. The Graduate School of Applied Sciences in Constantine).

In short, Arabic is a *statutory* and *symbolic* official language. Tamazight is no other than a *symbolic* official language as it remains absent in most domains to the extent that it is only an elective subject of instruction in the Algerian school. By contrast to Tamazight, French is a *working* language which echoes a covert official status. The heated linguistic competition in Algeria is obviously between Arabic and French. The school is the major domain where the competition is noticed. While pre-university education is entirely based on Arabic, higher education is still divided with some fields offered in Arabic and others provided in French.

MULTILINGUALISM AND ITS ASSOCIATED PHENOMENA

On the basis of Mackey's (1967) classification of societal bilingualism, Algeria is identified as a ***de jure* bi**lingual speech community in the sense that the constitution recognizes two official languages (Arabic and Tamazight). In fact, the Algerian example is perfectly similar to its neighbor Morocco. They reflect official bilingualism just like, for example, Canada, Kenya and Norway where the three language dyads English/French, Swahili/English and Bokmal/ Nyrosk are official languages, respectively. Apart from political considerations, Algeria is actually a ***de facto* multi**lingual community in the sense that besides Arabic and Tamazight, French is also strongly present in the sociolinguistic profile of the country as it has been discussed above.

As far as individual bilingualism is concerned, Algerians are at large described as bilinguals. However, bilingual competence varies from one individual to another depending on a number of internal and external factors, such as upbringing, education, place of residence, age, attitude, motivation, etc. This does not exclude the very possibility to find putative monolinguals. In fact, geography is worth considering as people of the northern part of the country, especially in urban concentrations, are more bilingual compared to dwellers of Sahara and southern areas. A classification of individual bilingualism would virtually assert that most Algerians are **late** bilinguals. This builds on the verity that children generally acquire their L1 (either Dialectal Arabic or a nonstandard variety of Tamazight), and only later that they learn other languages. It is mostly in the school (i.e., after the age of six) that learning of the second language (i.e., French then English) will take place.[2] This translates that individual bilingualism in Algeria is of a **sequential**/consecutive type. Therefore, Algerians correspond to what Adler (1977) calls **achieved** bilingualism which is contrasted to **ascribed** bilingualism which denotes the natural acquisition of the second language since babyhood.

The existence of the three languages (Arabic, Tamazight, and French) has resulted in various language contact phenomena. For example, Algerians very frequently switch, or even mix codes during a communication episode. Alternation mainly occurs between Arabic and French. Sometimes, this process of swapping between languages occurs with a kind of density to the extent that it may not be easy to decide what language they are speaking. Besides cross-linguistic code switching, speakers may also perform internal or diglossic switching, when they alternate between the H variety (Standard Arabic) and the L variety (Dialectal Arabic).

Linguistic borrowings, or simply loanwords, characterize the everyday speech of Algerians. Lexical material comes in the forefront of borrowings. Listening to a conversation between speakers may allow one to list easily many items that have become an integral part of the day-to-day language. Examples of what Myers-Scotton (1993b; 2006) calls *cultural borrowings* (items for objects and concepts new to the culture of the recipient language) may include words like pizza, paella, internet, radar, to name but a few. Instances of *core borrowings* (items that actually have equivalent indigenous items) include words like 'reportage', 'mechanism', 'mondial', etc, which are sometimes used even in the standard variety, especially the media language.

Loanwords in Algerian (Dialectal) Arabic may show morph syntactic integration into the recipient language. Words like *tabla*, *cousina*, *farchita*, *casrona*, *piessa*, show a kind of adaptation into Arabic grammar as they originate from French 'table', 'cuisine', 'fourchette', 'casserole' and 'pièce', respectively. On the basis of Poplack and her associates

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[2] Although the label 'second language' is used here as a reference to French, it may also be used to include Standard or Literary Arabic as it is through schooling that Algerian children, being Arabophones or Berberophones, generally learn this variety.

(1981, 1987) distinction between borrowing and code switching, these items are instances of borrowing. However, many other words display no morph syntactic adaptation into the recipient language. Words like 'stade', 'rendez-vous', 'bus', 'auto route', and the like, are used locally as they exist in French. However, they are still considered instances of borrowing and not code-switched utterances, if one builds on Myers-Scotton (1993) criterion of *frequency of use*. These words and plus much else besides, are very recurrent in the verbal behavior of Algerians, including **monolinguals**.

The introduction of Islam to the Maghreb region, since the seventh century has also had a linguistic dimension. The spread of Islam meant a spread of Arabic as the language of the religion. Besides its religious value, Arabic was undeniably attributed high prestige due to its tight association with the time's strong Islamic Empire. The indigenous population had embraced this language, and they had gradually become bilinguals. Arabic soon became the dominant language, and it, therefore, displaced local Tamazight vernaculars in most walks of life. Because bilingualism is an important door to language death (e.g., Crystal, 2002; Trudgill, 1992; Wolfgang, 1988), the embracement of Arabic had resulted, in the long run, in cases of language loss. This refers to situations where total disappearance of Tamazight occurred in only one of the communities speaking it. This is not to be confused with language death which describes a total extinction of a linguistic variety from the world as Tamazight is still spoken in different countries, including Algeria. Language loss occurred in places, where Berbero phones shifted allegiance to Arabic, until they ceased to use their native idiom. Tamazight varieties had/have survived mostly in mountainous (e.g. Kabylia) or remote areas (Sahara), especially where the Amazigh people had no or, say, limited contact with the Arabophones. "Berberophones have always figured out that, adding another linguistic string (Dialectal and/or Standard Arabic) to their bows is a necessity, to function in a largely arabized country" (Djennane, 2016:66).

THE FUNCTIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

Algeria is a part of the Arab World. Therefore, it is a diglossic speech community. To put it another way, Arabic is manifested in two forms: while Standard Arabic corresponds to the H variety, Colloquial Arabic (a number of mutually intelligible regional dialects) represents the L variety. The two varieties are used for different functions and in different contexts. Standard Arabic is allocated to official and formal contexts. It is used in literacy and for literary purposes, giving political speeches, delivering religious preaches, broadcasting news, etc. Colloquial Arabic is attached to informality, used in casual conversations in the home, the street and the market. It is also used in informal TV and radio program.

However, it is of significance to mention that the use of Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic frequently display overlaps, i.e., the two varieties are not always kept separate. This challenges or, say, nullifies Ferguson's (1959) claim about the complementary distribution of H and L. Although Standard Arabic is also used in the context of L, it is Colloquial Arabic which is generally overused. Ferguson (1959) observes that, for example, political speech is delivered in H, but this is not the case in Algeria since political discourse may appear in the two forms of Arabic. In many times, politicians, being competent or not in Standard Arabic, favor Colloquial Arabic to address the mass as they see it the language of the people which eases getting the message across. The use of one variety in the context of the other may be accounted for in terms of diglossic code switching, and sometimes style-shifting (levels of formality).

In terms of prestige, Standard Arabic enjoys high prestige and is regarded as a revered language, due to its association with the Quran (Muslims holy book). It is also highly valued, due to its association with a bulk of literature ranging from pre-Islamic poetry to the very contemporary writings (Djennane, 2014). Colloquial Arabic is often referred to

al-āmmiyya or *ad-dārija* to mean 'dialect'. It is, therefore, felt to be less worthy and broken. These attitudes remain societal judgments and perceptions, however. It follows that, on linguistic grounds, both varieties are equally good as communication systems.

In terms of literary heritage, most of the Arabic literature is available in Standard Arabic. Literature in Colloquial Arabic may at best relate to folk literature. Again, like other diglossic communities, Standard Arabic is the mother tongue of no one in the society. It is a 'learned' variety, generally accessible through schooling. Colloquial Arabic is the true mother tongue being naturally acquired, since babyhood. Standard Arabic is the only standard variety. There had (has) been many attempts, especially during the colonial era, to standardize national dialects of Arabic (namely in the Middle East and the Levant). Colonial masters, and later some native followers, pushed towards such enterprise on the basis that Colloquial Arabic is the real mother tongue, and as such it is the medium which ensures better academic attainment and learning efficiency. However, this project has always faced failure and no regional dialect could become a standard norm. In terms of stability, Standard Arabic is a stable linguistic system because of its association with writing and education. Colloquial Arabic displays variation and is, therefore, subject to change. In terms of lexicon, Standard Arabic has a rich dictionary. The lexicon of Colloquial Arabic is often less, and it in many times draws from H vocabulary to fill in lexical gaps. Besides internal borrowings, Colloquial Arabic includes a large number of loanwords which are largely taken from French (due to the colonial past of the region)

In fact, Algeria does not only represent classic diglossia (Ferguson's characterization), but it is also a defining case of what Fishman (1967) terms 'extended diglossia', i.e., situations where two (or more) genetically unrelated, or at least historically distant, language varieties are used for different functions. Figure 1, sketched below, provides a simple, yet interesting, characterization of diglossia in Algeria:
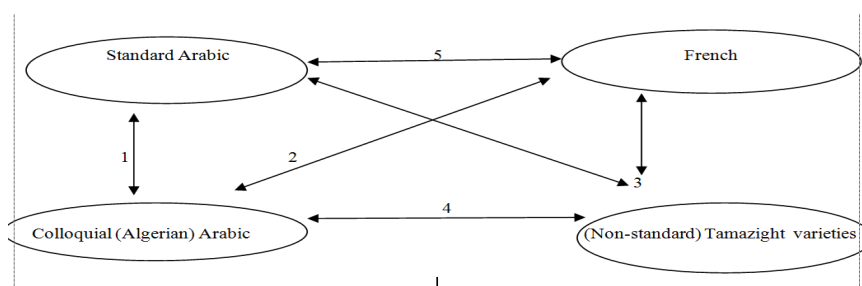

Figure 1: Characterization of Diglossia in Algeria (Djennane, 2016)

- Classic diglossia is commonly attested in Arabophone regions (major geographical area in the country) and concerns Standard Arabic vs. Colloquial (Algerian) Arabic. Standard Arabic is the official language of the country, and it, therefore, is associated with formal contexts and use.

- Extended diglossia basically concerns Arabophone areas, where French is the H variety and Colloquial Arabic is the L variety. One good area, where the functional distribution can be captured is, for example, higher education. French is indeed the medium of instruction in a number of faculties in the Algerian university. Lectures in technical and scientific majors, such as architecture, civil engineering, computer sciences, etc, are all exclusively conducted in French. In such contexts, French is allocated to formal usage, namely instruction/learning and thus has the H function. Algerian Arabic (AA) is L, the vehicle of communication amongst learners outside the classroom.

- Extended *triglossia* is a unique feature of Berberophone regions. In such localities, Standard Arabic and French, like in other parts of the country, are used in government official domains, administration and education and thus have the H functions, whereas local Tamazight varieties (such as Kabylian, Mzabi and Shawi)- which are unrelated to Arabic and French- play the role of the L variety, being the day-to-day idioms of communication. Here, it is of prime importance to mention that the attitudes towards Standard Arabic or French may differ among individuals; it would be unsound to assert that the L variety (Tamazight vernaculars) is downgraded.

- Dialectal Arabic is also used in Berberophone areas, either for in-group communication (i.e., between the Amazigh) or for out-group communication (i.e., communication with Arabophones). This is a form of bilingualism/ bidialectalism.

- The H-L relationship does not hold between Standard Arabic and French; this is rather a case of de facto bilingualism. Both varieties have H functions and are held in high esteem.

In sum, Algeria provides an illustrative case of what Fishman (1967) calls in his theoretical construction "diglossia with bilingualism" and "bilingualism with diglossia". In fact, rare are the cases of bilingualism, without diglossia. The distinction between bilingualism and diglossia has also been taken up by Francescato (1986:396), who sees it difficult to tell the two phenomena apart because, "the speaker perceives the linguistic diversity in terms of the diversity of roles and statuses of the participants in the situation". Building on Fishman's idea (1967), it is better to presuppose an amalgamation of bilingualism with diglossia, rather than without diglossia.

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