

Linguistic Diversity or Linguistic Rivalry in Morocco? Realities and Perspectives

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Abstract:

The contact of different ethno linguistic groups has contributed to Moroccan linguistic diversity to produce what is today a complex, multilingual profile. This linguistic diversity consists of Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, Amazigh, French, Spanish, and English. This linguistic diversity has amplified the tension between speakers' of these languages. In this paper, we aim, on the one hand, to investigate the linguistic situation in Morocco taking into account all languages, national and official languages, and foreign languages, their functions and status under different language policies, and on the other hand, to examine the rivalry between these languages that is exhibited in different spheres. We will try to demonstrate that the rivalry between these languages should not stress the question of which language can replace the other, but instead develop a multilingual policy that acknowledges the significance of all languages for Morocco's future.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic Situation of Morocco---- Language policies—Rivalry of languages

Introduction

Because of its strategic position at the crossroads of Greater Maghreb (Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia), Europe, and the rest of the African continent, Morocco has, throughout history, been the target of various conquests by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. All these nations have deeply influenced Moroccan's composition, and contributed to its linguistic diversity to produce what is today a complex, multilingual profile. Although little is known about the language demography prior to the coming of Islam in the seventh century, at least two languages were in use. Berber, the language native to the majority of the population, was used in the interior, and Latin was the language of administration, and later become restricted to ritual usage until it was replaced by Arabic during the Arab invasion (Hammoud, 1982:19).

I. Linguistic Situation in Morocco

1.1. Tamazight/Berber Language

The existing Moroccan linguistic situation is characterized by the presence of a variety of languages; each has a distinct social status and serves specific and different functions and purposes. First, Berber or Tamazight is the language of the indigenous population of Morocco and has lived in North Africa since ancient time. In Morocco, as well as in other countries of North Africa, the people who speak Berber prefer to call themselves *Imazighen*, in the singular *Amazigh*, which means 'a free man'. The feminine complement *Tamazight* denotes the language. Although the word Tamazight is usually used to designate a single language, in fact, it covers a number of widely different dialects which are not entirely mutually comprehensible. In Morocco Tamazight is used in reference to a particular variety of Berber, of which there are three dialects: Tarifit spoken in Rif mountains of Northern Morocco, Tashlehait spoken in the South West of Morocco especially in the Souss Valley, and Tamazight spoken in the Middle Atlas and the eastern half of the high Atlas mountains. "Official Moroccan figures say Berbers make up 40 percent of the nation's population, but analysts say the number ranges from 60 to 70 percent" (Moroccan Constitutional Reform, 2011).

In 2001 Tamazight was recognized by a Royal Dahir "decree" as a national language and a main component of the Moroccan culture, and declared as an official language of Morocco beside Arabic in 2011 as proclaimed in Article 5 of Morocco's constitution:

Tamazight [Berber/amazighe] constitutes an official language of the State, being common patrimony of all Moroccans without exception. An organic law defines the process of implementation of the official character of this language, as well as the modalities of its integration into teaching and into the priority domains of public life, so that it may be permitted in time to fulfill its function as an official language”. (Morocco’s Constitution, 2011)

As a result, Tamazight status and position has uplifted and changed from a spoken non recognized language to a written codified and standardized language.

1.2. Arabic Language

Second, Classical Arabic was introduced to Morocco in the seventh century during the Arab invasion, and was adopted by Berbers as the language of administration, legislation and education during that time. Today, three varieties of Arabic are in use in Morocco and stand in a triglossic relationship, that is three varieties, of the same language existing side by side, each enjoying a particular status and fulfilling different sociolinguistic functions: Classical Arabic is the written language used in religious settings such as prayers, sermons. The Modern version of Classical Arabic, known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), spoken by two-thirds of the population, is one of the official languages of the country. It is used in different domains such as education, administration, television broadcasts, newspapers and magazines. Moroccan Arabic or Darija, on the other hand, is acquired by most Moroccans as their mother tongue and is the language of everyday conversation in informal situations, and of popular and folkloric literature, which is transmitted orally. It is the lingua franca used by all Arab and Berber speakers (Zouhir, 2013, p.273). Based on geographic regions, many variants of Moroccan Arabic exist such as the Northern dialects spoken in the North, the Fassi variant spoken in Fez, the Rabati in Rabat, and the Marrakeshi spoken in Marrakech, etc. All these varieties share a degree of common comprehensibility.

Since MSA is the standardized and codified written form of Arabic, it is perceived as the high variety and enjoyed a prestigious status compared to Moroccan Arabic which has a little prestige and deemed as a low variety.

1.3. Foreign Languages

In addition to these native languages, three major foreign languages (French, Spanish, and English) are added to Moroccan repertoire. Among these foreign languages, French occupies a significant place because of its status as a second language in the education. During the French occupation for 44 years from 1912 to 1956, French was imposed and instituted as the main language of instruction at all levels of education, and Arabic as a foreign language. French colonizers practiced a linguistic policy “based on what they perceived to be their *mission civilisatrice*” (Ezzaki & Wagner, 1992, p.216) – spreading their language and values by educating Moroccans to believe in the universality and superiority of the French culture and language, which they then imposed in the cities and certain selected rural areas as “the only language of civilization and advancement” (Bourhis 1982, p.14). Moreover, this French educational policy intended to weaken the status of Classical Arabic (the perceived symbol of national and cultural identity) by promoting the Berber dialects and the Arabic vernaculars through formal teaching, and by closing Arabic Koranic schools in Berber-speaking regions. This was done through the *Dahir berbère* (Berber Decree) of 1930, which created a type of schools, where Arabic was excluded and only French and Berber were taught using Roman script.

The presence of Spanish in Morocco existed even earlier than Spanish protectorate in 1916 when Spain established militarily in the North and temporarily occupied Tetouan in 1860, and continued seizing cities in the southern and Saharan coast until the Spanish protectorate was declared for both north and south of Morocco in 1916. During the Spanish occupation, Spanish was adopted as a language of administration and education in most Northern Morocco. After the country’s independence, Spanish becomes “marginally used by the local population and it has been in constant decline because of its absence in the unified educational system (Benzakour, Gaadi, & Queflélec, 2000, p.71-72). Even though the Spanish hounded the same language policy as French in advancing their language and culture in Morocco at the disadvantage of Arab culture and Islamic schools, it did not influence the linguistic situation of Morocco as French did because “there was not any sort of Spanish-style “civilizing mission” directed toward the local population. [Spanish] penetration in Morocco was neither pervasive nor as organized as that of French.” (Zouhir, 2013, p.274)

English whose contact with Morocco goes back to the presence of Americans in Morocco in World War II when North Africa harbored American air bases was taught as a second optional language next to Arabic during the French protectorate.

The presence of all these languages in Moroccan sphere is viewed, on the one hand, as a source of its enrichment and growth, and on the other hand, as an impediment with tension of these languages and their speakers to gain power and prestige in the society.

II. Rivalry between languages in Moroccan Society

In this second part, we will examine the rivalry between these languages, and discuss the role and function of each language in the society and Moroccans' position towards each language. We will refer, in particular to the rivalry between Standard Arabic and French, between Standard Arabic and Tamazight language, between Standard Arabic and Moroccan Arabic, and between French and English.

Standard Arabic vs. French

Since Morocco obtained its independence from French colonization in 1956, it has been a national priority to decrease the use of French and promote Arabic as a sole medium of instruction and as the language of literacy and wider communication. The language policy adopted was Arabization, a cultural counterpart of political and economic independence, and a means of restoring 'authenticity', asserting the country's Arabo-Islamic identity, and removing French cultural influence. Since Arabic has been the language of government for centuries, and was, during the Protectorate, the symbol of national identity, it has assumed unquestionably this role. Right after independence, Moroccan government formed an Institute of Arabization whose main goal was to replace French, used in the administration and education, with Arabic and only Arabic. The process of implementing this policy has proven arduous to accomplish because of "the convenient long-term reliance on French as an advanced language of wider communication and a medium facilitating access to the modern world of science and technology." (Hammoud, p.228). Needless to say that through the years, Arabization engendered a politically fervent and sustained debate between the proponents of a modern and Westernized trend who favor bilingualism and multilingualism, on the one hand, and supporters of Arabization who advocate monolingualism on the other hand. Arabization has also intensified a division between two social classes in Morocco. The upper class represented by the elites educated mostly in French language (Boukous, 2001, p.24) considers French as the language of prestige and modernity, and the key for success and development. The middle class, however, considers French as an instrument of Western principles and ideologies (Ennaji, 2002, p.9), and judges Arabic as symbolic of Moroccan identity and cultural authenticity (Chadrani, 168). These divergent viewpoints are the source of conflict between Arabic and French, a conflict founded on what Gravel (1979) calls "symbolic" and "Utilitarian". (p.190)

Thus, the status of MSA as the medium for religious topics used in formal speeches and religious sermons, and its place as the language of cultural heritage, and national identity of Moroccans has granted it an emblematic prominence in Morocco. French, on the other hand, is deemed the language of modernity, progress and social achievement and holds a practical function (Surgo, 2014, p.1-3). The practical role of French is apparent in higher education, particularly in the domain of sciences, technology, finance, commerce, communication, and media where it continues to be an important medium of instruction. Also, in private sectors such as banks, and insurance companies, French is considered a working and very practical language. Moreover, it is viewed as an important vehicle and means for job market and professional success. Its mastery and use are required for both the socioeconomic environment and the job market in Morocco (Ennaji, 1988, p.8).

Considered as a second language or as a foreign language beside English and Spanish, French remains prevalent in Morocco. It continues to maintain its position as the language of contact with the modern world, and is considered by most policy makers and politicians a language which still plays a big part in the socioeconomic growth and life of the country (Ennaji, 1988, p.10). MSA, however, is seen as under-developed and inadequate instrument of communication with external world and instruction of sciences in higher education. (Lakhdar-Ghazal, 1976), and in order for MSA to be compatible to the modern world and used in higher education and in sciences, it should be renovated and developed.

Standard Arabic vs. Tamazight

In 2000 the "Charte Nationale d'Education et Formation" (National Education and Training Charter) symbolizes a key change in Moroccan language policy because Tamazight language and culture were emphasized to be "part of the country's cultural inheritance" (COSEF, 2000, p.43). With this new initiative, the government acknowledges an existence of two national languages (MSA and Tamazight) that represent Morocco's national identity and that should have equal standing in the society.

One of the changes to the status of the Tamazight due to this Charter is its integration into the school system. It was incorporated for the first time in some 300 elementary schools across the country in 2003 and gradually in the school system at all levels. (Errihani, 2006) Its teaching is delivered in all the three varieties of Tamazight depending in its home-based (Tomastik, 2010, p. 107). Tamazight is taught now in Moroccan schools along with Modern Standard Arabic. Also, in the media sphere, more time has been assigned for programs in Tamazight Radio channel. There is now one Tamazight channel and more programs in public channels are delivered in Tamazight.

In addition to these changes in the education and media sectors, Tamazight becomes the medium in which several Berber organizations and associations conduct their meetings and debates in Tamazight. Conferences now are held in Tamazight on different issues and aspects of Berber population and its rights in Morocco. Berbers now have their own calendar and new year, and celebrate national holidays and their customs. The struggle for acknowledging the Imazighen culture and identity continues to become the concern of Moroccan scholars and a major issue in the political arena.

Standard Arabic vs. Moroccan Arabic

In Morocco, the need to replace Standard Arabic with Moroccan Arabic goes back as early as the 1920s when French exhibited an interest for Moroccan Arabic promoting its teaching. Although Modern Standard Arabic has managed to survive the governance and supremacy of French during the protectorate, it is threatened again after the independence by Moroccan Arabic. (Zouhir, 2013, p.276). Standard Arabic is the language of early childhood education in public schools, and the language of administration in all public sectors and media. Nonetheless, it is not the mother tongue that Moroccans learn to speak since their birth, and the language of daily communication. (Ait El Caid, 2014, p.2-3)

Recently, Morocco has been involved in fervent wrangle after a local educational foundation Zakoura advocated for a policy to have colloquial variant of Arabic, Moroccan Arabic or Darija adopted as a language of instruction public schools, and for its standardization and normalization in order to obtain an official standing and equal footing with Standard Arabic and Tamazight. (Ait El Caid, 2014, p.2-3). The rationale of their claim is that since Moroccan Arabic is comprehended by the majority of Berbers and Arab Moroccan children, its implementation in the educational system could make their learning easier. This demand initiated forceful disagreement and strong denunciation from members of parliament and governmental officials. Moqri Abouzayd, elected member in Moroccan parliament condemned this policy as “an attempt to destroy the foundations of the nation and a conspiracy against Islam”. The Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane overruled it as a menace to “the very foundations of the Moroccan state” (The complex language debate, 2014, p. 2). It has also instigated heated debate among professors, linguists, scholars, and researchers who represent opposite views: Those who advocate for Darija and others who oppose firmly to its implementation. Certain, however, view that the two varieties can be compatible and function harmoniously in Moroccan society.

Among the proponents of implementing Darija in early instruction is Nouredine Ayouch, founder of the Zakoura Education Foundation who, during a special episode of the televised 2M program “Moubashara Maakom” asserts that this could help allay Morocco’s education dilemma. (The complex language debate, 2014, p.2). Ahmed Najim, Chief of Goud Ayouch, an online magazine also advocates for the use of the native language in early childhood education, stating that Moroccan students are often baffled by the switch from darija at home to fus’ha at school. (The complex language debate, 2014, p.2)

Those who oppose to this policy claim that this problem is not simply a linguistic, but a political one averring that this is another ploy to divide Moroccan society and deprive it from its Arab and Islamic bequest. (The complex language debate, 2014, p. 2) Abdellah El Aroui claims that “Standard Arabic is the language of the divine and is linguistically rich, and that Darija is not qualified to cover Sciences and Academia, because it lacks rules and standard practices in writing and syntax.” (cited by Ait El Caid, 2014, p.2-3) Fouad Abou Ali, president of the association, the National Coalition for the Defence of Arabic Language, asserts that Standard Arabic is “the language of Islam and attempts to alienate it target the cultural and religious value system it represents, and will strip away Morocco’s Arabic and Islamic identity.” (The complex language debate, 2014, p.3) Mohammed Baboul, a professor of linguistics at Mohammed V University in Rabat, adds that similar language debates have caught several other Arab countries’ attention, and will continue to provoke debates for years to come. However, he and other language specialists and linguists say the polemic is not grounded on an accurate scientific basis.

Among those who judge that the two varieties can be seen as a complementary, it is noteworthy mentioning Mohammed Balboul who trusts that both varieties of Arabic language should be a source of dignity and sense of worth for Moroccans, not an origin of disputes and divergences. He adds that the two varieties represent “who we are as Moroccans,” and “we should equally take care of both of them and not use one at the expense of the other.” (The complex language debate, 2014, p.4) Another advocate for the complementarity of both varieties of Arabic is Taoufik El Yazidy, a sociolinguistics professor at Mohammed V University’s Arabization Institute, who argues that from a linguistic point of view, both Modern Standard Arabic and Moroccan Arabic share many similitudes, and “offer a substantial Arabic vocabulary and have a comparative structure, and the two ought to be seen as corresponding. “Darija assumes an open part, while fus’ha is all the more unmistakably utilized as a part of training, organization, and the media,” (The complex language debate in Morocco – al Jazeera English, 2015, p.2). But he does not agree that “Darija ought to be ventured into the scholarly domain because it “is not sufficiently rich to be utilized as a part of the educated community, and is not able to offer the information base that [standard] Arabic is right now giving.” (The complex language debate in Morocco – al Jazeera English, 2015, p.2)

Regardless of these rival views, the reality is that since 2000, the use of Moroccan Arabic has increased significantly among Moroccans in social and academic life. It has moved from being a dialect into a potential and operational language in many domains. (Ait El Caid, 2014, p.2-3) “It is used now as a medium of communication between members of Moroccan organizations and in conferences and seminars among intellectuals, linguists and journalists.” (Zouhir, 2013, p. 276) It is widely used in publicity and marketing, talk shows, online media, cartoon strips and kid’s shows, and in many forms of music. Soap operas from foreign countries such as Mexico and Turkey are disseminated on Moroccan television in Darija. Radio stations and television channels have begun to present programs and debates between politicians from different and opposite parties about political topics and issues entirely in Darija to attract more viewers from the uneducated mass and to get their message understood. (The complex language debate, 2014, p.3)

French vs. English

Not only did Arabization language policy help in the spread of English and improve its role to the detriment of French, but also the recent language policy, with the charter National Education and Training Charter, that reinforce the use of foreign languages (COSEF, 2000, p.41). The charter acknowledges that science and technology should be taught in a variety of languages preferably those used in higher education. Although French is currently the language of science and technology in higher education, it is never mentioned by name in the charter. This non reference to French entails that other languages such as English could also be used. (Marley, 2004, p.31) As declared in Article 5 of the 2011 Moroccan constitution, the state:

sees to the coherence of linguistic policy and national culture and to the learning and mastery of the foreign languages of greatest use in the world, as tools of communication, of integration and of interaction [by which] society [may] know, and to be open to different cultures and to contemporary civilizations.

Also, opening the door towards foreign languages has lately been highlighted by the King Mohamed VI in his speech of the 60th Anniversary of Revolution of the King and People in 2013. He openly declared that “Moroccans should, therefore, be encouraged to learn and master foreign languages, in addition to the official languages.” By doing this, Moroccans “would thus expand their knowledge base, refine their skills and gain the competence needed to be able to work in Morocco’s new professions and areas of employment.” (King’s speech, 2013)

English is taught as a foreign language in high schools and universities and used for academic and scientific research. There are several private institutions for higher education now in Morocco where the teaching instruction is only in English. The advent of globalization has abetted English to become a global language in Morocco, and has helped it gain a significant place near French, particularly in the fields of tourism, media, and finance. It is spoken not only by educated Moroccans, but also by tourist guides, and handcrafts merchants in market places. (Zouhir, 2008) Even though English is neither a national nor an official language, Moroccans, Arabs or Berbers, agree that it is an agent and tool of scientific and academic research, technology, and international business and trade.

Lately, representatives of the government, heads of political groups, and Moroccan teachers of English have advocated for “replacing French with English as a first foreign language, or at least making English more important in Moroccan education. Yet, no official statement has been made by the government to give a boost to English.” (Ait El Caid, 2)

Conclusion

Even though Morocco has carried on for the past decade various reforms to establish a multilingual policy recognizing officially both national languages to preserve its identity and culture, and promoting foreign languages to be open to the Modern world and to strive in this era of globalization, there is no doubt that Morocco linguistic situation remains a complex one with conflict of these varied languages and their speakers. Both MSA and Tamazight are recognized in the constitutional reform as the two official languages of the country, but none of the two languages assumes this responsibility and portrays the reality. An official language is assumed to be used in most if not all public sectors of the country, and it is not the case in Morocco. MSA Arabic is not used in higher education in scientific subjects, and Tamazight is only used in elementary level. Moreover, Tamazight is not used in the parliament and in all public sectors by its speakers. Also, as both the Charter and the constitution have claimed that Morocco has to open to languages without naming any one in particular, both French and English should be used in similar sectors and treated equally.

So for future reform or any new linguistic and educational policy, the government should encourage the coexistence and complementarity of all languages, national and official, or foreign, and consider their importance for Morocco’s future and its advancement in the modern and universal world.

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