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Taoufik Jaafari

Hassan II University, Casablanca, Jaafari.taoufik@gmail.com

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Language Debates and the Changing Context of Educational Policy in Morocco

Taoufik Jaafari

Abstract

Language is a critical basis of local identity and a vital tool for global communication. In multilingual Morocco, the issue of language instruction has been highly politicized, a factor that has contributed to poor educational practice. This article aims at providing a brief description of Morocco's linguistic landscape together with the language policies first established in Morocco by the French colonizer. It goes on to further assess the evolution of language education policy and makes recommendations for strengthening Morocco's multilingualism.

Keywords: Language debate, Morocco, Amazigh, Arabic, French

Introduction

Morocco, a strategically located North African country, is situated beside the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean at the geographical intersection between Europe and the rest of Africa. This rather unique geographical location has given the country its genuine multilingual character and diverse population of European, African, Arab, and Imazighen (Singular *Amazigh*, plural *Imazighen*, a word which means "free people" and is preferred over the term Berber) who have cohabited with one another for many centuries. Morocco has always prided itself on the stability of its society, where multilingualism, multiculturalism, and multi-ethnicity have been instrumental to national and cultural identity. However, this linguistic situation which has been characterized by its richness, diversity, and complexity hides various ideological and sociopolitical conflicts. In fact, this linguistic pluralism has been a source of contention that has contributed to failing educational policies implemented ever since the political independence of the country.

There are six languages which shape the linguistic landscape in Morocco: Classical Arabic with its two varieties Modern Standard Arabic and the local Darija (Moroccan Arabic); and Imazighen languages with its variants – Tamazight, Tashelhit (Tashelhiyt, Tashelhait, Shilha) and Tarifit; and finally French, English, and Spanish.

Under French Colonization

During the French colonization of Morocco (1912-1956), France imposed French as the official language of education and administration and tried to

marginalize the two already existing languages, (Moroccan) Arabic and Amazigh varieties, which were peacefully existing side by side. In fact, among the policies that the French colonizer usually relied on to spread their hegemony and to disseminate the French language was through building modern schools. Gordon (1962) quotes a well-known French saying which claims that “when the Portuguese colonized, they built churches; when the British colonized, they built trading stations; when the French colonized, they built schools” (p. 7). That is why French was enforced in all walks of life (especially the economic and the political domains) and it even replaced the Arabic language whose status was relegated to that of a secondary language to be used only in the traditional educational system. Furthermore, the French colonizer adopted a discriminatory “divide and rule” policy through the 1930 Berber Decree to make a clear-cut segregation between the Arabs and the Berbers. This enabled them to set up a different type of school called the Franco-Berber Schools especially in the middle Atlas Mountains where they started teaching French as a first language and Tamazight as a second language to the exclusion of Arabic. Among the most famous schools they built in the middle Atlas is Tarik Ibnou Zayyad high school in the town of Azrou. El Aissati (2005) wrote:

During the protectorate period, an event of paramount importance in the modern history of Morocco, which was to be exploited by the nationalist movement of this country, is the elaboration of a decree in 1930. This decree, signed by the then king of Morocco, Mohamed V, stipulated that the areas with Berber as the dominant language -mostly rural areas- were entitled to carry on their tribal law system (*droit coutumier*), which had been the practice among the Berber tribes for centuries. What the French did was simply formalize these practices by law. This decree was seen by the pan-Arab nationalists as the ultimate attempt by France to separate Berbers from Arabs. (p. 61)

Surprisingly, this French policy backfired on the French colonizer because instead of the intended segregation and the desired destruction of national unity, the Arabs and the Imazighen woke up to this danger and consolidated their unification by emphasizing their common faith of “Sunni Islam” (Etheredge, 2010, p. 147) in addition to a “unified cultural identity” (Crawford, 2005, p. 172). The French aimed at “civilizing” the Imazighen through “civilizing missions” (Zouhir, 2013, p. 274) under which the Imazighen found themselves “in the cross-hairs of these recurrent European anxieties” (Silverstein, 2010, p. 14). *Aitsiselmi* and Marley (2008) summarize these missions on the ground that “the French belief in the mission civilisatrice ‘civilizing mission’ of their language led to a desire to create an elite who would think and act like them, whilst keeping the mass of the population illiterate” (p. 193).

In addition to these schools, the French established special schools that were devoted to the European community and to certain rich families which sided with the colonizer who promised to protect their wealth and their estates and who were made to believe that everything European in language, tradition, literature, or even people, is superior to the local one viewed as ancient, archaic, and backward. The

French did not open schools for the middle- and lower-class Moroccans, thus reinforcing and exaggerating class divides within society.

As a reaction to the newly-imposed colonial presence and introduction of French schools, the educated patriotic nationalists took the lead and founded the free schools. These schools were private and free from colonial government control rather than free of tuition. Their mission was to combat the spread of French and to retain Arabic's cultural, national, and sacred status and identity. These schools, many of which are affiliated to the government nowadays, were mainly sponsored by militant founding fathers whose main concern was to defend the Arabic language and Islam. These schools were also used by the nationalists to inculcate in the youth a national spirit and to disseminate the ideological, religious, and cultural values integral to "Moroccan identity." Also, through these schools, the nationalists tried to reveal the colonizer's hidden agendas and to awaken Moroccans to the fact that their identity and culture were being threatened. Moreover, the nationalists managed to raise Francophobia and succeeded in making people aware that the French presence and settlement in Morocco was not to achieve Marechal Lyautey's "mission civilisatrice" but rather to exploit the natural resources and to strengthen their hegemony over North Africa after colonizing Algeria in 1830 and Tunisia in 1881.

Arabic

Classical Arabic is the sacred language which derives its power and authority from God. In addition, Classical Arabic is highly esteemed although it is not spoken anywhere in all the 23 Arab countries. Classical Arabic together with Hebrew and Latin, are referred to by Anderson (1983) as classical truth languages. Classical Arabic, empowered by the existence of a great literary heritage, has a special status in Morocco and as a high variety in a diglossic situation, according to Ferguson (1959), cannot devolve into an everyday vernacular. Its usage is mainly restricted to high functions like religious sermons, literature, and academic writings. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as a simplified variety derived from Classical Arabic was designed to serve mostly in administrations and in the media in addition to its being the first language that pupils learn in their first year of primary education. Talking about this diglossic situation, Ferguson (1959) says,

DIGLOSSIA is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. (p. 325)

Traditionally, both Classical Arabic and MSA are considered to be the languages of prestige in Morocco. However, nowadays, it seems that French and English are considered high prestige languages in Morocco.

Mother Tongues and Language Attitudes

Unlike Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic or Darija is the native language and the mother tongue of the majority of the populace. It is the non-standardized spoken form of Arabic. According to the latest census in 2014 from the High Commission for planning, more than 89.42% of Moroccans communicate in Moroccan Arabic. Moroccan Arabic dialect or Darija is gaining ground and is being used nowadays in the media and in everyday business transactions. Previous research, however, (Boukous, 1995; Bullock, 2014; Ferguson, 1959) has shown that Moroccans hold negative attitudes towards their mother tongues (Darija and Tamazight) because of the low status that these languages have in the linguistic market. In recent research on a subset of the Moroccan population, Et-tahiri (2019) investigated the attitudes of Moroccan university students towards the various varieties which shape the linguistic market, and the 520 respondents who participated in this research also confirmed this claim. The study was carried out in Casablanca (Morocco) and the respondents included a sample of university students from two faculties (Ben Msik Faculty of Art and Ben Msik Faculty of Science); both faculties belong to the Hassan II university. On a five-point Likert scale (Not at all important (1)-Very important (5)), the following table shows the low share that Tamazight and Darija (6.4% and 19.9%) occupy compared to French (33.1%), Standard Arabic (46.1%), and English (74.5%).

Table 1

Attitudes of Moroccan university students towards languages in Morocco.

Language	Not at all important	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
Tamazight	20.9%	18.7%	39.3%	14.7%	6.4%
Arabic (Fusha)	0.6%	0.9%	10.7%	23.6%	64.1%
French	3.7%	6.4%	22.1%	34.7%	33.1%
Spanish	14.4%	20.9%	39%	18.1%	7.7%
Darija	6.7%	14.7%	30.4%	28.2%	19.9%
English	0.6%	0.3%	6.4%	18.1%	74.5%

Source: Et-tahiri (2019, p. 70).

Et-tahiri's (2019) findings support previous research on language stratification in Morocco. Chakrani (2010), for example, uses a Language Attitudes Questionnaire to research how language attitudes affect linguistic stratification and practices among Moroccan youth. The study examined H (High) codes (Standard Arabic and French) and an L (Low) code (Moroccan Arabic) using different focus group participants. This analysis of covert attitudes shows that these languages are

not uniformly distributed along the poles of status and identity but rather are competing for both (Chakrani, 2010, p. ii).

When describing a similar linguistic situation in Egypt, Haeri (2003) noticed during her stay in Egypt that the Egyptians speak a language they do not respect and respect a language they do not speak referring, of course, to Classical Arabic (pp. x-xi). Here, Haeri (2003)'s observation can be cautiously generalized to most if not to all the other Arab countries where the modern dialects are regarded as "deviant" varieties of Classical or Standard Arabic (Alajmi, 2014; Alghamdi & Petraki, 2018), or, as Bentahila and Stevens (1985) put it, "corrupt languages" (p. 34).

Tamazight

Imazighen are the indigenous population of Morocco. According to El Kirat (2008) they are "the oldest known inhabitants of Morocco and their language is the most ancient language in the Maghreb" (p. 126). Although there are many hypotheses about the origin of the Amazigh language, its origin has not been clearly traced because of the lack or the absence of a written literature. The Imazighen speak three main dialects: Tamazight is spoken in the Middle Atlas Mountains; Tarifit in the Rif Mountains; and Tashelhit in the Anti-Atlas Souss Mountains. These three dialects are generally mutually incomprehensible and differ noticeably especially in their lexicon and their phonetic inventory.

Scholars, government officials, and associations and NGOs do not agree on the exact number of Imazighen in Morocco; for example, Boukous (1995) and Zouhir (2008) estimate the number of native Tamazight speakers in Morocco to range from 40% to 45% of the population. In this respect, Brett and Fentress (1997) in their book *The Berbers* state that it is difficult to estimate the numbers of Imazighen in North Africa because they say that it all depends on who is counting and who is counted (p. 5). El Kirat (2008) explains that "it is hard to give any exact estimation of the number and percentage of the Imazighen in Morocco, especially in the urban centers, for no census has ever taken this variable into consideration" (p. 127).

Ever since the independence of Morocco and after officializing Arabic in the constitution, Imazighen felt marginalized and they started a campaign to gain recognition of their culture and of their language. In fact, the Amazigh activists crowned their nearly five-decade struggle by having their language proclaimed as an official language next to Arabic in the 2011 amended constitution. Prior to the constitutionalization of their language, they managed through the Royal Institute for the Amazigh Culture (generally abbreviated in French as IRCAM, Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe), established in 2001, to introduce the teaching of Tamazight in the primary school education. There was a problem as to which script to use in standardizing it but it was eventually agreed on using Tifinagh (an abjad script used to write the Tamazight languages). In September 2003, teaching started in 300 schools in view of gradually generalizing it to all primary schools in Morocco by 2010. Currently, Amazigh activists are asking the government and the parliament to enact further laws for the implementation of their language.

French

Although French has no legal status in Morocco and is considered one among many other foreign languages, it remains the most dominant language on the Moroccan linguistic landscape as it is used extensively in many vital sectors such as the administration, education, business, and the media, even in post-independent Morocco. Up to now, most of the administrative paperwork be it in the public or the private sector, is still written in French. No doubt, its presence in the public space reflects the economic and political power that it used to enjoy during the protectorate period. The only government domain where French is not used is the judicial system.

The maintenance of the French status in Morocco was prepared long ago during the protectorate when the French colonizer thought of creating Moroccan elites who would take over after them. These elites, some of whom were from the poor indigenous population, were made to believe that the French culture and language are the symbols of modernity and the vehicle of science as opposed to Arabic that was portrayed as only serving religious and traditional purposes. Many elites were bilingual in both French and Arabic and had high hopes of ushering in post independent Morocco. El Kirat (2008) claims that French “plays an important role in the socio-economic and educational fields because it is highly valued (generally associated with the upper class, i.e. the rich and educated people). Until now, it is the most prestigious language, for it represents the language of the opening on the modern world” (p. 124).

English

The first prolonged contact with the English language in Morocco was in the Second World War when American military bases settled in Tangiers and Kenitra. It was taught simply to facilitate the translation from French into English and from English into French. After the independence of Morocco, English was taught together with Spanish and German as optional foreign languages in high schools. Despite the great dominance of French, the English language has managed to impose itself especially with the socio-economic challenges brought by globalization in the last two decades.

According to El Kirat (2008), “unlike French and Spanish, which are a symbol of political and cultural dependence, English has no colonial connotations [in Morocco]. Negative attitude towards French increases the positive attitude towards and popularity of English” (p. 125). In the field of education, currently, English is taught starting from the last year of the middle school in public education system until graduation from high school. Although students are introduced to English in secondary schools, some educators have recommended English be introduced in primary schools. It is assumed that the early introduction of English in primary schools will help students learn English at an early age and consequently, they are likely to be even more competitive when they embark on the labor market.

Spanish

The Spanish language is spoken by less than 6% of Moroccans, mostly in the northern regions and certain regions in the south. The presence of the Spanish

language dates back to 16th century when the Moriscos were expelled from Spain. Many factors have helped in maintaining the presence of Spanish such as the geographic proximity and the Spanish colonization of the north of Morocco. After the political independence of Morocco, Spanish was taught as a second language in the northern part of the Morocco and as an "optional" foreign language in the rest of the country. The language lost its official status as the administrative and educational language in the North and has been replaced by French (El Kirat, 2008). However, recently, "more and more Moroccans choose to continue their studies in Spain because of its proximity to Morocco and also because of the cost of living" (p. 124).

The Language Debate and the Educational Language Policies

Morocco has experienced many language policies starting from the eve of independence. To establish a linguistic and cultural unification, and to distance itself from the colonial past, Morocco's first national educational project, decided to opt for Arabization and to adopt the Arabic language as an official language of instruction. Grandguillaume (1983) states that "... [Its] ultimate goal was to advance the Arabic language as the official and national language" (p. 153). There were many problems with this improvised policy because of the lack of a clear vision. For example, there was a significant shortage of teachers and administrative staff and the state had to recruit teachers from many Arab countries especially from the Middle East to make up for this deficiency. This shortage was mainly due to the fact that all the Moroccan administrators and teachers were educated in French only. In addition, Morocco as a newly politically independent country was still economically, socially and culturally dependent on France.

In addition, the policy of Arabization has kept gaining ground and by the year 1980, the Arabization of the primary and the secondary education was complete. However, the university level has never been Arabized for three main reasons which, according to Ennaji (2005) are as follows: (1) the language of references or textbooks in the university is either French or English; (2) the lack of teachers and professionals who master the Arabic language; and (3) the inevitable need of French in the socio-economic environment (p. 106). There has also been a long-standing bias against Arabic as a language of higher learning in the West where many Morocco professors were trained.

The varying levels of prestige, economic value, and language roles within the same nation lead to "tension" especially between Arabic speakers and Tamazight speakers. This tension reflects the prioritization of the Standard/Classical Arabic as a national language over Tamazight and Moroccan Arabic as "low" languages with no religious or economic sway. In this context, Ait Dada (2011) argues that Moroccan Arabic is seen as a "corrupt and incorrect form of Arabic, which is associated with poverty and downgrade and therefore considered to be inferior to Classical Arabic for it is neither codified nor standardized" (p. 19).

According to Ibn El-Farouk (2002), Morocco is experiencing a linguistic crisis which is not visible but persists and worsens despite the measures taken by the state. The language debates which have been going on for many years in the

hope of achieving a balanced linguistic market and a clear language policy have reduced the linguistic varieties in question to merely weapons of struggles among politicians. In fact, such “politicization and ideologization of languages made it next to impossible to craft a coherent policy” (Chahhou, 2014, p. 138). The damages of the shifting language policies which have been implemented for the last four decades did not yield any benefits for people in general and for the pupils and students in particular. Rather, they have resulted in a “chaotic” unhealthy educational system (Cheddadi, 2011, pp. 56-57) and may lead to a kind of sociolinguistic inter-ethnic conflicts (Ait Dada, 2011, p.19).

For example, after decreeing Tamazight as an official language in the constitution, the linguistic situation has been even more “complicated” as “unexpected” issues (pertinent to the educational landscape) have cropped up, including the lack of trained teachers and supervisors and the precariousness of the teaching conditions, among other things (El Kirat, 2008). The empowered Amazigh activists vehemently asked the two chambers of parliament to pass the laws which would help in implementing their language(s) in all walks of life. However, as noted previously, the main obstacle to this process concerned which of the three Amazigh varieties (Tashelhit, Tarifit, or Tmazight) to implement.

Scholars such as Fihri (2013) and Al-Wadghiri (2000) believe that the failure of the educational system is due to the policy choices that have been motivated by political considerations rather than the real needs of the majority of Moroccans. Nowadays, many voices of political leaders, academicians and intellectuals are defending Arabic against the campaigns of colloquialism, francophonization and Amazighation (Laroui, 2014). They claim that despite the negative stereotypes that have been established against the failure of Arabic, it is still the most qualified language in the country to respond to the urgent needs of education, identity, modernity and science. Fihri (2013) asserts that among the factors that should be considered while upgrading the level of Arabic and opting for the Arabization policy is the increasingly growing number of its speakers all across the world in addition to its dramatic digital presence on the internet. The number of internauts (users of the internet) using Arabic has moved from 2.5 million to more than 70 million between the years 2001 and 2011.

Darija and Education

Another controversial issue which is the subject of heated debate is Darija. Activists such as Nourddine Ayyouch, in a televised program in 2014, and scholars like Loutfi (2017) and Slaoui (2014) have persuasively advocated the use of the Moroccan Arabic or colloquial Arabic as a language of instruction. They argue that since more than 89% of Moroccans communicate using Moroccan Arabic and since it is the main mother tongue, why shouldn't it be promoted, implemented, and included in educational reform plans? They also defended their claim by referring to the UNESCO's (2008) recommendations, which suggest that children who begin their schooling with their mother tongue continue to perform better than children who have to acquire another language when they enter school (Ball, 2010). In addition, UNESCO considers the use of mother tongue in teaching to be a human right and claims that the teaching in the mother tongue helps in reducing the number

of school dropouts (Bender & Dutcher et al., 2005). In September 2018, there was a big social outcry when the ministry of education agreed to release some primary school Arabic textbooks which included, for the first time in the history of schooling, some Moroccan images with some colloquial words. In the following photo from one textbook (designed for primary school students of the second level), the three Darija words underneath the Moroccan pancakes and cookies exemplify this:



Figure 1. The inclusion of words from Moroccan Arabic (*My Guide to the Arabic Language* textbook, p. 9).

Many Moroccan parents criticized and condemned the inclusion of colloquial words in school textbooks designed for primary schools. They regard colloquial or Moroccan Arabic as a corrupted and incorrect variety of Arabic which is loaded with many loan words and borrowings from Spanish and French and a lot of grammatical and syntactic structures from Tamazight. This is why they could not hear of it being used neither as a subject nor as a language of instruction. Instantly, the government, through the head of the government and the minister of education, strongly reacted to this blunder. They claimed that this issue is closed for good and nobody can violate the clauses of the constitution, which decreed and officialized MSA not Colloquial Darija. Kasraoui (2018) states that “El Othmani [the Head of the government] thanked citizens for their strong stance against the use of Darija in education” adding that “their stance supported the position of the government” (parag. 4). Conversely, the Ministry of National Education defended the inclusion of Darija words as progress towards cultural relevance in the curriculum as cultural products specific to the region with no equivalents in MSA.

Decreeing Tamazight in the constitution and becoming a second official language equal to Arabic shifted the linguistic debate in Morocco because shortly after the Amazigh activists wanted to have their language incorporated in all domains of life such as the court, the administration, road signs, and public spaces in general. They asked to have their language leveled up to junior and high schools after launching it in primary education in 2003. The Amazigh activists (Assid, 2019; Errihani, 2006) even asked to have their language implemented as a language of instruction for all school subjects. For many Amazigh activists and intellectuals, the officialization of the Amazigh language was not enough as,

in many cases, the underlying goal of several language policies is simply symbolic: the goal of recognising a minority language or instituting it as a national language could be sometimes seen as nothing more than a symbolic act often seen as politically necessary. (Errihani, 2006, p. 145)

Whether politically motivated or not, the teaching of Tamazight in primary school education was hampered with different constraints including: the lack of qualified teachers, the difficulty of making the pupils get acquainted with the new script Tifinagh, the unavailability of textbooks, the teaching of a standard variety which was not comprehensible to speakers of the main varieties of Tamazight, and last but not least, the negative attitudes that most non Amazigh pupils and their families have towards the teaching of Tamazight.

An Amazigh is likely be motivated to learn a language which might be useful in his personal, social, and professional life; however, it is not surprising to see non-Amazigh speakers questioning why Tamazight should be imposed on them. In one of my seminars, I asked a student who is Amazigh but does not speak Tamazight about whether he is looking forward to learning Tamazight. Surprisingly, he said, “Why should I learn a language which would only help me one day if ever I traveled to see one of my remaining relatives in my parents’ village in the Souss region? I would rather learn a foreign useful language instead” (personal interview that took place in February, 2018).

In addition, research (Errihani, 2006; Soulaïmani, 2015) has shown that the pupils who were subjected to this new experience, learning Tamazight, did not in any way learn Tamazight but rather they spent all of the three-hour-a-week sessions getting acquainted with a third somehow hard script, Tifinagh, which was added to the Arabic and Latin scripts at an early stage in their schooling. Also, the Tamazight teachers themselves were not familiar with the Tifinagh script in which they had only a three-week period training during 2003.

French and Education

The main debate which has been around for so many years concerns the strong linguistic presence of French in all the educational policies. All the policies have reinforced French either as a subject or as a language of instruction in public schools depending on the politicians who championed the policy. Currently, Moroccan pupils get introduced to French in their second year of public schooling and continue learning it until they graduate from high school. This means that students learn French as a subject for 11 years before they join the university. The paradox here is that after all this period of teaching, a considerable number of students, according to the 2009 report released by the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation*, de la Formation et de la Recherche (2009), finish their high school with a very low level in French which does not even enable them to communicate let alone to pursue their higher studies in sciences, economics, and medicine at public institutions where all the teaching is carried out in French (p. 31).

There are many issues to highlight here concerning this big failure. First, there must be a serious problem with the teaching methodologies when after exposing

students to a language for 11 school years for a minimum of at least four hours a week, students are still unable to communicate even at a basic level. Second, Moroccan pupils, students, and people in general have changed their attitudes towards French from that strong language of power and prestige to an inferior language which is losing ground in most of the ex-colonies and even in France itself (See Table 1). Also, the French government, in the person of the French prime minister himself acknowledged for the first time ever that English is the language of the future. On the 23rd of February, 2018, Edouard Philippe said, “Bien maîtriser l’anglais, c’est mieux maîtriser son avenir : chaque étudiant, à la fin de son lycée et au plus tard en fin de licence, aura passé un test de type TOEIC, Cambridge, IELTS, financé par l’État” (Fjarraud, 2018, parag. 2). This means in English that “Mastering English well is better for securing and controlling your future. Every student at the end of their high school or at the latest at the end of their bachelor’s degree will have reached a high score in one of the English international tests like IELTS, TOEFL, or TOEIC, funded by the state.”

In another address to the students in a press conference in EDHEC Business school, Edouard Philippe said, “that English is the lingua Franca. That’s how it is. You have to speak English if you want to act and move in globalisation” (cited in Kasraoui, 2018). This clearly shows that French is losing ground in France itself and is no longer a language of academic research, modernity, and openness to the world. Likewise, French is no longer regarded as the language of the future in Morocco and even the Moroccan Francophile elites have woken up to this fact and started sending their children to English or American schools which are booming in Morocco.

English and Education

The above discussion leads us to another point which has been very controversial in language debate recently and which concerns the status of English in the Moroccan educational policies. English is considered to be the second foreign language in Morocco and as I mentioned earlier, it has been taught as a school subject for many years in high schools. The popularity of English at the high school level,

leads to a wider spread at the university level: largest number of registered students [reside] in the departments of English throughout the country. In the early 1970s, there were only two departments of English in Morocco (Rabat and Fez). There are more than 17 departments of English throughout Morocco. (El Kirat, 2008, p. 125)

In some English departments the enrollments of first-year students outnumber all the other departments despite the first shortlisting and subsequent placement interviews that are administered. It is worth mentioning here that the students we receive at the Ben Msik Faculty of Letters, Casablanca English department are exposed to English for a maximum period of four years, but what is striking is that during the interviews, we find that these students are more proficient in English

than in French, which they had studied for 11 years. Twenty or 30 years ago, this was not the case. We used to receive only literary or humanities students; however, for the last 15 years the number of science students has grown significantly higher.

Currently, in the department where I teach (Ben Msik Faculty of Letters, Casablanca), 68% of our students are science students. Of course, this has made us question this issue and ask about the reasons which push the students to choose to learn English instead of pursuing science. The main reasons why most of those students prefer not to join the sciences schools are first because of their weak level in French, which is the language of instruction and second because they claim to have been impressed by the teaching of English in high schools and thus prefer to study further at university. According to Buckner (2011),

English is becoming a new means for socio-economic competition in Morocco, by appealing to upper and lower class alike. Upper class view English as a way to maintain their privilege as Morocco opens itself to the global economy. In contrast, many lower-class Moroccans, who are weak in French, see English as a means to access public sector teaching positions, a traditional channel of mobility, or to sidestep the power of French entirely and engage directly with the global economy on their own terms as low-paid labour in Morocco's tourist industry and informal economy. (p. 21)

Although English has been developing in Morocco over the last two decades, Morocco remains to be an exception to other countries because of its heavy multilingualism heritage of its past. Arabic, Amazigh, French, and Spanish have been strongly implanted in the country's way of communicating, thus creating major challenges in language policy and instruction. As noted earlier, because English does not have a colonial legacy in the country, it is seen, especially among younger students, as the language of modernity and future market-led opportunities. While Moroccans feel very strongly about their national identity, they do not perceive of English as a threat to it at all. Moroccan students who are strongly motivated to learn English view it as a popular language, promising opportunities and social mobility for all classes. El Kirat (2008) sums up the current teaching status of English in Morocco by emphasizing that,

Moroccans, in general, have a positive attitude towards English. The Moroccan government policy is extremely influential in encouraging the spread of English. Moroccan policy makers realized that international communication between Morocco and the rest of the world could not be achieved via French alone. English is the key to communication. Its status is not connected to political considerations or to ties with Great Britain or the USA. It is not viewed as a sign of colonialism or attachment to another nation as it is the case with French. (p. 126)

The issues which I have covered throughout this article in relation to the language debate(s) confirm that the chronology of the educational policies which

have been successively implemented ever since political independence have been tremendously unsuccessful (El Kaidi, 2018). Their failure is clearly manifested in the low quality of the learning output which lags behind the desired outcomes. This failing language policy and instruction has somehow contributed to a real linguistic conflict between the two official languages that make up the national identity and the first foreign but dominant language French.

Further evidence of this can be seen in the improved National Charter for Education and Training (NCET) which came into being in the year 2000 and appeared very promising to many educationalists that saw it as an improvement on the past deficiencies of the previous reforms. However, nine years later, all the hopes were dashed when many signs of its failure came out, resulting in a subsequent emergency education reform plan for which a huge budget was devoted but to no avail. In 2015, the NCET was substituted with the 2015-2030 Strategic Vision (SV) of reform, a reform which was grounded on the recommendations of the Supreme Council for Education and Training.

For the sake of this paper, I will examine only the clauses that deal with the teaching of languages as subjects and the choice of the language(s) of instruction. It stipulates that children will be exposed to Arabic and French in the two years of preschooling (the third or fourth year) with a particular emphasis on oral communication. In the primary school, the two official languages Arabic and Tamazight are compulsory throughout the level. French is also taught as a subject in all the levels. At the fourth year of the primary school, English will be introduced and taught as the second foreign language. Concerning the middle school and the high school, the same languages will be maintained with a special focus on both French and English (being taught only as foreign languages and not as a language of instruction for other subjects). At the high school level, in addition to the aforementioned languages in the three previous levels, another third optional foreign language will be introduced and this language will be Spanish. In this strategic vision, it is clearly mentioned that Arabic is the only language of instruction throughout the three cycles of schooling. The SV aims at achieving three fundamentals. The first is to achieve equity and to insure equal chances in the learning of languages. The second is to standardize the presence of the two national and official languages with their constitutional and social status. The third fundamental is to establish a progressive and balanced multilingualism.

Now after nearly three years since this strategic vision has been implemented, there are still many constraints which obstruct the incorporation of all its clauses. Last month, the language of teaching scientific disciplines came to the surface again as some members of the parliament started questioning the fact that Arabic will not serve this function appropriately since it is not a scientific language according to them. What is surprising is that the traditional political parties belonging to the majority do not themselves agree on this. Some political parties suggest either to go back to French or to use English instead. What is certain is that the fervent defenders of the Francophonie will struggle again to impose French because they are finding it harder to take a backseat and watch English become the first foreign language in

Morocco and the lingua franca of the world, in addition to seeing Arabic gain more ground and strength in Morocco.

Recommendations

This last section is intended to highlight the implications that can be drawn from the various issues the paper has raised. The implications range over theoretical, methodological, and socio-political areas.

The diachronic aspect is crucial for the understanding of the current linguistic situation in Morocco. This means that any linguistic description remains incomplete in the absence of a deep, coherent, and reliable understanding of the historical issues that have given rise to the current linguistic situation in Morocco and its interplay with the future of education. This diachronic outlook is likely to help researchers gain understanding of the language policy during the French protectorate and its impact on the current situation that the French language enjoys in present-day Morocco.

Multidisciplinarity is another prerequisite for examining the current linguistic situation and the future of education in Morocco. Multidisciplinarity guarantees a reliable, fair, and non-discriminatory perspective on the investigated issue. In this very context, it seems that the incorporation of sociolinguistics, the sociology of education, and the socio-historical awareness seem to be inescapable to the study of multilingualism in Morocco.

For policy makers, crafting a coherent policy should be free from any politicization or ideologization of the issue. Ideological attitudes eclipse the right to linguistic diversity and legitimizes the suppression of certain languages deemed to be corrupted or inaccurate (e.g., Darija). Language policies should provide an even playing field for the different national languages in Morocco. Moroccan Arabic or Darija and Tamazight are the native languages and the mother tongues of the majority of the populace.

The attitude of policy makers and intellectuals should be directed towards the potential that these languages hold for the improvement of the quality of education especially at the elementary levels. Research findings clearly show that learners benefit from using their native language in education in early grade years. Concerning the officialization of Tamazight, as El Kirat (2008) correctly argues “the state would be compelled to promote its usage and to accept it as a legitimate language for all social activities, including the formal settings” (p. 125).

Research should be directed towards exploring the systematic properties of Moroccan Arabic. These properties can help place Darija on solid academic footings compared to well-studied languages such as Classical Arabic and French. In addition, mass media should work towards valuing the status and role of Moroccan Arabic, especially towards helping Moroccans reconsider the negative attitudes held towards their mother tongues.

Situated within its socio-political and socio-historical context, it seems that the officialization of the Amazigh language is far from achieving its desired result as a “real” socio-political outlet. Therefore, decreeing Tamazight in the constitution and becoming a second official language should be coupled with the political will to

provide the necessary support to this long-repressed national language on concrete footings (e.g., revising textbooks, training teachers, etc.).

Finally, the status and role of English in the Moroccan educational policies should also be revitalized in light of its current national and international socioeconomic role, compared to French. English should be introduced as a medium of instruction at least for the teaching of science.

Recent educational reforms in Morocco (NCET, the Emergency Plan, and SV) have embraced the principles of linguistic openness, calling for the establishment of a progressive and balanced multilingualism. However, more concrete and realistic steps should be taken by the government policy makers towards ensuring that national and international languages are enjoying the same socioeconomic privileges and support as French.

Conclusion

El Kirat (2008) argues that “strong sentimental attachments to a language are not always accompanied by language use, nor by a desire to actively promote it. But only people and communities can keep a language alive” (p. 128). I would like to conclude by questioning whether the multilingual situation in Morocco has ever been taken as the starting point for educational policy makers. There are many pragmatic recommendations and solutions which have been suggested in academic symposia, conferences, and research studies in this regard, but unfortunately, these proceedings and publications have been mostly ignored, stored, and shelved in libraries. Hopefully, this article will find more attentive and receptive audiences interested in supporting Morocco’s multilingualism.

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