INCONSISTENCIES AND ADJUSTMENTS IN LANGUAGE POLICY: EVIDENCE FROM THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

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Abstract: Taking effect immediately following Tunisia's independence, Arabization has achieved mixed results with Arabic institutionally empowered but still competing with French. In fact, when examining the linguistic landscape, this monolingual policy is flouted both in terms of the bilingual Arabic-French Street signage but also challenged by people's preferences. This paper examines inconsistencies between Arabic as the 'language of the state' (government-decreed), and the omnipresence of other 'languages in the state' (observed in representation and practice) in Tunisia. Street signage artefacts and attitudinal data also illustrate how language policies are responded to and experienced by Tunisians. Data consists of different types of private inscriptions and public signs, governmental decrees, as well as attitudinal surveys and interviews. The juxtaposition of urban signs with the official policy on multilingualism provides an illustrative account of the complexities of the linguistic situation in Tunisia, which blends top-down advocacies of Arabization, ambivalent attitudes to Arabic-French Bilingualism, as well as a growing interest in English as the emergent language of globalization.

Keywords: *language policy; multilingualism; linguistic landscape; language attitudes*

INTRODUCTION

The use of the linguistic landscape (LL) as a diagnostic of a country's language policy has been a much-debated issue within the LL literature, not only from the inception of this field of research but up until recently through a plethora of studies (Grey, 2021; Jódar-Sánchez, 2021; Savski, 2021). More specifically, the LL has become a testing ground to evaluate the extent to which decreed language policies are enacted on the ground via their visibility and appearance on display through street signs and urban multilingualism. As such, while studies have emphasized the inconsistencies between the promotion of some languages through state-sponsored policies and their lack of visibility in the LL, other findings seem to suggest that the 'absence' of such languages in fact implies their 'de facto' (Shohamy, 2006) acceptance and assimilation (Mendisu, Malinowski, & Woldemichael, 2016).

Triangulating findings using language policy enactments with other sources such as attitudes toward language has proven to be effective in gaining a deeper understanding of the language situation of a country (Ben-Said, 2011; Rose, McKinley, & Bafoe-Djan, 2019). As will be explained in the next section, the current study offers to broaden current research on LL through the examination of multiple sources of data in order to examine the multilingual context of Tunisia.

Rationale of the Study

The objective of this study is to describe, analyze, and develop a sound understanding of the multilingual communicative practices of Tunisia, by analyzing linguistic practices as expressed through official language policies, the language of street signs, and people's attitudes both to languages in the linguistic landscape and to the language ecology of Tunisia. Using these three data sources to examine multilingualism in Tunisia, this study develops a perspective on the country's linguistic landscape.

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The Linguistic Situation in Tunisia

Tunisia is situated at the intersection of three continents and has a long-standing heritage of cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition to the languages which have been brought to Tunisia through occupation, other languages were inherited via migration. Despite the country's plurilingual history, the government initiated, following its independence from France in 1956, a policy of Arabization. This policy placed Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as the language of the state and placed as its prerogatives a desire to affirm a unique national identity. The omnipresence of western languages such as French and English in Tunisia are tangible evidence of the internal inconsistencies of this policy. The governmental stance with respect to Arabization has never been clear. In fact, as Daoud (1991) argues: "The official authorities have been quite inconsistent in promoting Arabization (…) they have encouraged bilingualism (Arabic and French) and biculturalism (Arab-Islamic and Western European, mainly French) much more consistently" (p. 7).

French is a widely used language in Tunisia, although its status as a second language is not recognized by state legislature. The influence of the French language has started to slowly decrease not only due to Arabisation, but also as a result of the rising influence of English. English, which has spread more tacitly in the recent years, was not imposed by colonial forces but is nonetheless gaining much currency and presence due to its growing importance in the fields of education, science, business, and economy (Hawkins, 2008). In addition, in line with the increasing globalization of the economy, the case of Tunisia is symptomatic of former North African protectorates and colonies, which are now slowly distancing themselves from dependence on the French language and turning to English as a tool for development. In this light, the struggle between French and English in Tunisia can be conceived in terms of a 'linguistic rivalry' (Battenburg, 1997; Daoud, 2011).

The tug-of-war between French and English is becoming more visible in the domains of education, business, science, technology, and tourism where English appears to constitute more linguistic capital than French. While French is a language which represents a colonial historical past, English on the other hand is becoming an incentive for upward socioeconomic mobility and educational opportunities. Thus, the linguistic dynamics of Tunisia have contributed to a complex multilingual environment which is evident in both spoken forms and, of more relevance here, in semiotic, written, and visual forms.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS
Visual Data

The primary source of data which constituted the corpus of this study included a total of 643 images of street signs collected from Tunis, the capital city, and La Marsa, the closest suburban town to Tunis. The choice of two large urban areas was motivated on the grounds that large cosmopolitan urban centres are often culturally and linguistically diverse and composed of separate and identifiable neighbourhoods. Furthermore, because urban contexts are relatively larger, more impersonal, and heterogeneous, there is a greater need for signs to direct people to places and services. The images collected were confined to the definition of LL as provided by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and hence included "public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings" (p. 25).

Language Policy Data

Data from governmental sources which attested of the policies pertaining to languages in Tunisia were accessed from two different sources. (i) The Constitution of Tunisia (2014); (ii) The Official Journal of the Tunisian Republic (Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne, 2021) which contains electronic versions of articles initially drafted in Arabic, but which are also available in French. These articles are

available from the governmental website of the University Centre for Scientific and Technical Documentation, Centre Universitaire de Documentation Scientifique et Technique (CNUDST). The relevant policy documents kept for the purpose of this study were from the periods of 1956 to 2018; and (iii) The Tunisian Jurists (2021) website which contains Tunisian codes of law and legal texts in integral form. In addition to these documents which are grouped by theme, there are also forums and discussion boards organized by specific field of law.

Attitudinal Data
The third category of data was collected using a questionnaire which consisted in a list of open-ended attitudinal questions aimed at triggering respondents' impressions and attitudes towards multilingualism in Tunisia and about the linguistic landscape (LL) of the cities of Tunis and La Marsa. This questionnaire was administered after the informants were shown samples from the database of signs collected from the two cities investigated and they were asked to answer questions based on these pictures as well as on the languages which formed their linguistic repertoire. Following this survey questionnaire, the investigator conducted a follow-up interview to get a more refined idea about informants' answers but also to rule out unclear answers which might have been provided by the subjects. The population sample comprised 12 respondents (5 Male, 7 Female) selected using convenient sampling. All informants were Tunisian nationals, residing either in the capital city or in the suburban towns neighbouring Tunis; they were all fluent in at least three languages.

FROM LANGUAGE POLICY TO OBSERVED LINGUISTIC PRACTICES
Modern Standard Arabic: The Official Language of the State
The state-sponsored policy of Arabisation, which was introduced in Tunisia following the country's independence from France in 1956, provides a rationale for the advocacy of Arabic as the national language of the state. This adoption of the Arabic language for purposes of identification and affiliation with Islam but also with the Arab world is indicated in the preface of the constitution of the Republic of Tunisia. In this authoritative document one sentence exemplifies the state's implementation of Arabisation (emphasis added): 'Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state. Its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic, and its type of government is the Republic' (Article I, Chapter 1, p. 4)

While it is explicitly stated that Arabic is the official language of the country in the first chapter of the Tunisian constitution (2014), it is not clear which variant of Arabic is referred to. It could be hypothesized that authorities strategically aimed at leaving ambiguous the reference to 'Arabic'. However, it is clear among Tunisians that Arabic refers to MSA not the local vernacular 'Tunisian Arabic' (TA) and MSA is ascribed a *de facto* official status. Even though official policy documents do not explicitly state which version is the legitimate one, identifying that 'official' Arabic refers exclusively to MSA is common knowledge in Tunisia. This direct assumption derives from the fact that MSA is the higher variety (H), whereas TA is the lower one (L), in which the categories H and L respectively refer to High and Low varieties in a diglossic situation (Ferguson 1959). MSA thus automatically qualifies as official 'language of the state' and performs additional functions since it is also the language of legislation, administration, education, and, more relevant to this paper, the language used in posting (Tunisian Constitution, 2014).

The preference for MSA is not only subsumed under the state-sponsored language legislation, but is also apparent in the LL, particularly on public signs where it is placed first in hierarchical order (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Public sign with Modern Standard Arabic followed by a French translation

When examining the LL, the higher status of MSA is confirmed in terms of levels of linguistic representation (Table 1). For clarity, minimal language frequencies were omitted from all tables. In the city of Tunis particularly, MSA is the most represented language in the LL with 49% of signs in old Tunis and 36.2% in the new city.

Table 1. *Languages Displayed in the City and the Suburb*

Languages	Surveyed Areas		
	Tunis (Old City)	Tunis (New City)	La Marsa (Suburb)
Arabic (MSA)	**49%**	**36.2%**	37.4%
French	36%	36%	40%
English	8.1%	16.7%	12.6%

Note: Findings represented on this table combine both public and private signs.

These observations are corroborated by data from Tunisian respondents as well. In this regard, data from a survey questionnaire revealed that most respondents stated that having MSA on public signs was appropriate, thereby confirming findings from policy documents and street signs. Moreover, when asked to define the role(s) and values tied to MSA (Figure 2), a majority referred to this language as either conveying official status or as being a badge of culture and identity. Only 8% of informants did not feel a sense of closeness to MSA, qualifying it as a language restricted to an educated population.
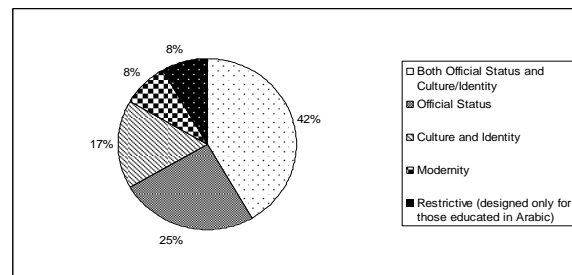

Figure 2. Roles and Values Associated with Modern Standard Arabic

With respect to the specific legislation pertaining to languages used in posting, MSA is again listed as the mandatory language (Table 2).

Table 2. *Languages Used on Signs in Tunisia*

Date	August 6th 1957			
Chapter	Chapter Pertaining to the Language Used in Posting (Decree of the Municipality of Tunis)			
Section	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3	Article 4
Text	All commercial, industrial, or other categories of signs, which are in the public space, must be written in the *Arabic* language. These signs can however still be *bilingual*.	The size of the *Arab* letters in these signs must be at least equal to that of the size of the letters of the *foreign language*.	The specimen written in *Arabic* must be approved by a calligrapher recognized by the municipal administration.	A municipal agreement must obligatorily precede the realization of all the signs in compliance with the regulation of the organization of the streets of the city in force.

This regulation which is in line with the foundational provisions stipulated in the constitution contains additional provisos which, in contrast to the constitutional clause, provide concessions for the posting of foreign languages on signs. In fact, as can be seen in Articles 1 and 2 of the decree of the municipality of Tunis, the state legislature allows foreign languages to be represented on governmental signs. Although these official documents do not mention a specific language, Tunisian authorities still concede a 'democratic' space for foreign languages in the LL. More specifically, Article 2 mentions that it is possible for Arabic and a foreign language to be written on the same sign if the Arabic content is kept at least equal in terms of font size.

The second indication of the state's flexibility vis-à-vis foreign languages is that no provision mentions that Arabic must be always first in the hierarchical arrangement of the sign (i.e. order and placement of languages). Public signs (Image 1) provide evidence that policies pertaining to posting are respected, and that MSA is maintaining a privileged status coming always first in the top-to-bottom hierarchy. Official documents, public signs, and people's attitudes validate, the privileged status conferred to MSA as the language of the state. However, a closer look at the data reveals some caveats to these preliminary observations. While MSA is the language most represented in both the old and new areas of the city of 'Tunis' (Table 1), with respect to the suburban town of 'La Marsa' however, MSA (37.4%) loses its dominion to French (40%) which ranks as one of the most frequently encountered languages in the LL.

Based on this observation, French seems to be gaining more representation in La Marsa than Tunis. One reason which may explain this inconsistency is the fact that Tunis plays an important role as the administrative, political, cultural, and historical centre of Tunisia, where the constitutional clause emphasizing the need to preserve an Arab/Islamic identity, is more expressed than in the more geographically peripheral areas. In addition, the saliency of French in the LL - - when compared to English

for example - may be due to the large population of French expatriates residing in La Marsa. In fact, large numbers of expatriates are employed by primary and secondary schools of this suburban town. La Marsa is also home to the French ambassador's residence. When looking at the legislation pertaining to street signs (Table 2), Article 1 states that MSA must be present on all signs and that a foreign language may be added as well. This legislation hence precludes the existence of signs where MSA would not be visible altogether and where only a foreign language would be present. This is nonetheless observed in Tunis and La Marsa as evidenced by Table 3.

Table 3. *Monolingual Signs in Tunis and La Marsa*

Language	Tunis (Old City)	Tunis (New City)	La Marsa
Modern Standard Arabic	73.4%	35.1%	37.5%
French	20.6%	**37%**	**43.2%**
English	3%	17.5%	12%

More specifically, monolingual signs in French and English are encountered in the LL. In addition, MSA which is argued to be the language of the state still does not achieve majority representation and is overshadowed by French in both the new area of Tunis as well as in La Marsa where French is the language most represented monolingually. These examples clearly demonstrate a violation of the policy provisions pertaining to the languages of representation. Additional illustrations of these inconsistencies are shown in the following images (Figures 3, 4, and 5).

Figure 3. Sign using French and English

Figure 4. Sign using Italian

Figure 5. Sign using Italian and French

Taken together these trends with respect to MSA show a preliminary picture of how policy about languages can be inconsistent with the linguistic situation on the ground. The discrepancy observed between policy and practice in this context confirms trends in the LL literature (Demaj & Vandenbroucke, 2016). The LL of Tunis and La Marsa are indicative of linguistic adjustments taking place (Ramamoorthy, 2002). These linguistic adjustments are the outcome of a policy of

conciliation which aims at affirming the national identity through the advocacy of MSA while making flexible provisions for foreign languages in official documents. However, these amendments seem to be directed at accommodating English and limiting the use of French. As will be shown subsequently from interview data, while French is relegated as a language indexing imperialism and cultural hegemony, English on the other hand is experienced with less hostility.

French: Between Imperial Relic and Commodity

Notwithstanding the fact that Tunisian policy documents do not officially endorse a second language, the expression 'foreign language' as presented in Table 2, Article 2 above, is mainly a cover term for 'French' as it is the most dominant second language in the country. French has a large presence in the LL of Tunis and La Marsa where it is second to MSA in Tunis, but is surprisingly in first position in La Marsa, as discussed above (Table 1). The visibility of French on the street signs of Tunis and La Marsa is due to historical circumstances as Tunisia was formerly a French protectorate from 1881 until its independence in 1956. This marked colonial presence has remaining traces in the Tunisian administrative system where French bureaucracy and terminology is used for common operations and service. Commenting on this issue, Nahla, a young female English teacher stated:

> "We are still related to France, culturally, but also politically and administratively, if for instance you go to some Tunisian administrations you will notice more words from residues of the French colonial administration than terms in Arabic, for example '*résiliation*'." (Note: *résiliation* is a French administrative term that have meaning as 'cancellation' or 'termination'.)

This prevalent presence of French is also due to the linguistic and cultural imperialism which 'francophonie'

(Manzano, 2011) and French cultural models exert on Tunisian local culture and ideology (Walters, 2011). When examining the LL, French is visible in public places particularly in translations and transliterations of locations and place names. These linguistic forms have been referred to as 'imperial relics' (Calvet, 1994) and were designed during the French occupation by the colonial administration. This is confirmed by the fact that Arabic-to-French transliterations follow a French morpho-phonology rather than an English one. For instance, the city of سيدي أبو سعيد is expressed with a French 'Sidi Bou Saïd' rather than 'Sidi Bu Sa'eed', a more anglicized rendition.

The governmental pliability concerning the visibility of foreign languages in Tunisia, as evidenced by Articles 1 and 2 of the decree of the municipality of Tunis (Table 2), shows that the regulatory role of formal institutions encourages the representation of foreign languages in general and particularly of Arabic-French bilingualism. This fact proves the tolerant stance that authorities have towards non-local languages despite what on the surface might appear to be a staunch monolingual policy favouring Arabic. The higher representation of French vis-à-vis MSA noted in Table 3, beyond flouting the constitutional provisions which advocates MSA as the language of the state, also casts doubt on the willingness of policy makers to provide a balanced representation of MSA and foreign languages in the LL. In fact, what emerges from visual data is that while Arabic-French bilingualism is desired, the outcome seems to favour French monolingualism to the detriment of MSA.

This point was also raised by Ilyes, a 25-year-old male interviewee, who argued that having French on street signage was an indicator that society was becoming more and more francophone. Ilyes also added that the use of French was contributing to the decline of the Arabic language:

> "The tendency of having French on street signs will change, because we (i.e., Tunisians) are more open minded, so there will be more languages and a degradation of Arabic. We

also have a negative perception of MSA in our society. If you speak to someone in MSA they will say to you 'what is wrong with you, you speak like my grandfather'. So, the public opinion is against MSA."

Judging from these claims, the use of French and MSA are associated with modernity and backwardness, respectively. This negative perception of MSA may span from the fact that despite the official status of Arabic, the actual implementation of Arabisation is not applied as a *conditio sine qua non* and not sanctioned by regulatory measures. In fact, when compared to Algeria and Morocco which have gained their independence from France around the same time, Tunisia can be cited as the least successful in implementing Arabisation (Sirles, 1999). Interestingly, Tunisia has a majority of ethnic Arabs compared to these countries where the Berber population is more important. While a group of respondents argued that French was taking more space in the LL and were lamenting the low 'display' of MSA, other participants explained these phenomena as being caused by socioeconomic factors. In this respect, when commenting on how one may find deplorable the prevalence of French signs in Tunisia when compared to the scarcity of Arabic signs in France, Ilyes stated:

> "Well, like Ibn Khaldun said 'the vanquished follows the vanquisher' you cannot go to stakeholders in an advanced country and ask them to write a sign in Arabic to please us because they are in a position of power compared to us. They are more advanced than us, culturally. I am not talking about economic superiority because it is not the context here, and we are just copying them. So for us, it is not even a question of power, we do it for a need. Because if we were powerful, we would not need to put French [on signs] but we do it because we have an economy which depends on tourism." (Note: Ibn Khaldun is a medieval Arab sociologist who was born in Tunisia, author of المقدمة (Prolegomena).

Another aspect which can explain the popularity of French in the LL of Tunis and La Marsa is its instrumental use as a language of commodity, particularly on private signs. Looking at the proportion of linguistic representation on private signs (Table 4), French is shown to be in second position, and coming only after MSA on private signs in the older areas of Tunis (39.4%). However, French is the primary language used on private signs in both the modern area of the capital (37.4%) as well as in the suburban town of La Marsa (41.4%).

Table 4. *Languages Contained on Public and Private Signs in Tunis and La Marsa*

Language Script	Public Signs			Private Signs		
	Tunis (Old City)	Tunis (New City)	La Marsa	Tunis (Old City)	Tunis (New City)	La Marsa
Arabic (MSA)	50%	58.8%	58.4%	48.5%	28.5%	36%
French	25%	38.2%	35%	39.4%	37.4%	41.4%
English	6.2%	-	3.4%	9.1%	19.1%	14.3%

Overall, the common advertised products and information displayed in both cities where French was used on private signs were connected either to the consumption of foods and alimentary products (restaurants and cafés, food items), clothing and fashion (beauty products, French brands), or were related to consumption in general (services, shopping centres and retail stores). The following images (Figure 6 to 9) taken from the three areas of data collection illustrate this point. It seems therefore that the use of French is instrumental in selling commodities to the local readership.

Figure 7. Advertisement in French for men's clothes "excellence for men"

Figure 8. Advertisement in French for fruit juice "New look, New fruits"

Figure 6. Advertisement in French for women's clothes "Ten *dixit* Days Up to -30%"

Figure 9. Advertisement in French for crackers "TUC's new-born"

The use of French in the LL as a commodifying language (Heller, 2003) was clearly confirmed by attitudes collected from local respondents. Several interviewees agreed that when French was used for commercial purposes, it was most often to 'valorise' the product. An informant argued that the use of French was intended to address the local population, not the foreign one, and that it was a marketing strategy. Rym, a young lady who teaches in a secondary school stated: "Maybe it is to show that French is an important language, and that this product is imported from France, but here this is actually a local product". While these respondents aimed at explaining the motivations of advertisers and their impact on the audience of sign readers, Rym, who adopted the voice of the Tunisian population stated: "People would think that this product is a good one and that it is manufactured in a nice way". Finally, Nahla explained how both sign writers and sign readers were engaged in a dynamic discursive relationship when she noted:

> "The use of French on advertising is not directed to the French population in Tunisia, but for the Tunisian population who speak French (…) they [i.e. sign designers] intend to address and attract the elite. This elite wants to feel better when buying a product, and when seeing this product advertised in French they feel they are purchasing a product that someone else does not understand. It has a psychological effect."

This interesting perspective on the use of French as a commodity in private signs

accurately captured the complex web of interdiscursive dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981) between sign readers and sign designers. In addition, it shows how marketing agencies use multilingualism and linguistic resources to appeal to consumers. The marketing strategy used to attract the attention of the consumers are by means of 'interpellating' (Althusser, 1970), calling the attention, and hailing consumers which in turn starts to identify with the roles assigned to them. In these interactional dynamics, French plays the role of the resource whereby consumers are hailed because this language connotes sophistication and higher social standards as evidenced by the above respondents' statements.

While the influence of French still permeates the Tunisian society, there are nevertheless two major factors which slowly contribute to its decrease, namely the policy of Arabisation and the growing interest in the English language. An interesting rationale for the spread of English to the detriment of French is expressed in Battenburg (1997) who quoting Fishman (1983) states: "English is less loved but more used; French is more loved and less used" (p. 287). This statement accurately epitomizes the situation of French and English in Tunisia. Yet, the word "love" may not be entirely accurate in representing the linguistic dynamics of the country; a more suited conceptualization would be to say that Tunisians are more "familiar" with these languages. In fact, this issue represents the plight of developing countries such as Tunisia, who do not have the luxury of using the language that they really want to use, but what is imposed on them by the actual socioeconomic and cultural/historical conditions which have a bearing on their immediate livelihood.

English: The 'Third-Space' Language
In the same way as French, English does not have official representation in the texts of law pertaining to posting. English is clustered in the same 'foreign language'

label used to refer to all non-local languages. However, this language, although not as historically established as French due to its relatively recent advent, is quickly gaining more terrain. The availability of monolingual English signs (Table 3) as well as its important representation on private signs (Table 4) both indicate that although English is less prevalent than French, it still has visibility in the LL. In addition, English on street signs was found to be more prevalent in the new city of Tunis and in La Marsa compared to the older area of the capital. Sociolinguistic studies which have explored the growing linguistic competition between French and English in Tunisia have talked about a relation of 'rivalry', or 'contest' (Battenburg, 1997) between French, the colonial language, and English, the language of technology, business, tourism, and globalization. This linguistic rivalry may be explained because former North African protectorates and colonies are slowly distancing themselves from the dependence on the French language and turning to English as a tool for development and a consequence of economic globalization.

The situation can be further explained due to the inability of French to make inroads into Anglophone territories. What this entails is that, as argued by Battenburg (1997) French in the Maghreb, and specifically in Tunisia, has not been successful in meeting the new challenges set forth by the English language. From a historical standpoint, with the advent of the 1980's, Tunisian politicians, government officials, and journalists started to advocate that the policy of Arabisation should be accompanied with an emphasis on the teaching and use of the English language in more domains than in the past, and with more commitment than the interest manifested for French. The desire to bolster English was sometimes the subject of polemical statements in the past, such as the one delivered by a former Minister of Finance, Mansour Moalla who argued in 1982 that: "The day will come when Tunisians have no interest in learning French. They will resort to English or another 'useful' language" (Bessis, 1982).

Corroborating this idea, an interviewed 33-year-old woman Yosr, stated that in comparison with the past, English was now taught at an earlier age in schools and was becoming more important for Tunisians: "Maybe, with many things that happen in the world, they (i.e. Tunisians) just want to get closer to English speaking countries". Other interviewees commonly shared the growing popularity of English in Tunisia and explained its importance for professional opportunities abroad. These attitudes and perceptions of English which are reflective of the future political trajectory of the country provide evidence that English in Tunisia is used as a language which brings about global opportunities and represents a linguistic capital. English is experienced by the local population as a modern language which connects them to the world. This idea was confirmed in Rym's statement, a university teacher:

> "I use English to make new friends through the internet, for example chatting -- yesterday, I had a new friend from Malaysia -- to speak with people from Arab countries, we use English, because on my keyboard I do not have Arabic letters."

The use of English is thus attributed to its flexibility and ability to be used as a modern resource for communication in Tunisia and worldwide. Keeping this idea in mind when examining the connotations of the use of French and English respectively, it appears that attitudes to French are more clear-cut being either the language of prestige and high class (59%), the language of colonialism (33%), or the second language of the country (8%). English, on the other hand, leaves a variety of impressions on the local population, and general attitudes to this language are less categorical or polarized. In this regard, Tunisians judged English as either having no connotation or as being neutral (33%), as conveying added credibility and quality to the object advertised (17%), as symbolizing modernity (17%), as specific to the context

where it is used (17%), as an eye-catcher (8%), or as a sign of dependency on other languages (8%). It is important to mention that this latest figure which indicates a negative stance towards English is minimal when compared to the hostile attitude towards French (33%). It therefore appears that Tunisian interviewees had more negative perceptions of French than English even though the former has an important representation in the LL (Tables 1, 3, and 4).

Bearing on these findings, it can be argued that even though there may be a linguistic rivalry between French and English in Tunisia, these two languages occupy different spaces in the LL and achieve different functions in the perceptions of Tunisians. Negative attitudes towards French and more neutral or positive ones towards English may be explained due to a combination of reasons. First, as Battenburg (1997) explains, the propensity to reinforce the teaching/learning of English may be explained by a desire from Tunisians to counter the French language hegemony which was imposed on them mainly for historical reasons during the colonial period. This use of English has local implications and serves to defy the dominance of French which is still invasive as witnessed by the Arabic-French bilingual public signage practices. Uses of English in the LL did not result in similar reactions as the ones triggered by French. In this respect, Riadh, a student in his late twenties commenting on the use of French on street signs argued:

> "For me this is not a good indication, because it is a loss of identity somehow. But for English, it is not the same thing because so far, we are not so Anglophone. Perceptions towards French and English are not the same thing at all. Each language has different connotations. In addition, since English is not connected to a political context like French, and that it is an international language, it does not bother me that much. Everywhere in the world this is happening, and it does not have a similar connotation of cultural dominance [that French has]. It is rather a sign of openness."

The use of English may be deemed as 'liminal' where this language crafts a 'third space', easing and mediating the historical tensions which the French language is associated with. The visibility of English can be also related to processes of linguistic adjustments taking place in Tunisia, both in its language dynamics but also in its policy and planning more generally. In fact, LL research offers parallel examples where English is used locally to subvert top-down advocacies or colonial status-quos (Ramamoorthy, 2002) but also to ease tensions (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2009).

As indicated on Table 4, private signs contain more English than public signs. It is important to place this observation in its socio-political context. The Tunisian government still has strong political, economic, and cultural ties with France. Therefore, although the government may be fostering more visibility of English in Tunisia, this initiative is slowed by the active role played by France in promoting its language in the national territory.

The influence of the French language, which is now slowly diminishing in Tunisia, has been predominantly maintained in world affairs by France's exerting influence over former colonies. French 'political' resistance to American-led initiatives in Africa and the Middle East is the outcome of the apprehensions of the loss of French influence in these areas of the world. This influence is not only linguistic but also political and economic since France continues to benefit economically from its former colonies and protectorates. These economic benefits are now being jeopardized by the rising importance of English which threatens to disrupt the situation.

Most uses of English featured on advertisements were characterized by short formulas rather than long texts or sentences. In Figure 9, 'Randa' a company which specializes in pasta and other manufactured foods, use of the expression 'very good' in combination with the image of a mother

feeding her child. This conciseness in the use of English shows that the intention of 'visibility' is more important than textual or semantic impact.

Figure 10. Advertisement for Pasta in English with the slogan 'Very Good'.

Such uses of languages in the LL, which are usually characterized by short formulas, and simple sentences and lexicon – or what Ross (1997) calls 'nuclear English' – have been described in the literature as aimed to achieve commodification (Ross, 1997; Hornsby, 2008), desired visibility of multilingualism (Backhaus, 2007) or instances of decorative use of English (Ross, 1997; MacGregor, 2003). This use of English on private signs was particularly salient in the new area of Tunis and in La Marsa and could be explained considering the indexicality of signs to their social environment and how they are reflective, among other things, of the human geography of the location which they index (Scollon & Scollon 2003). Specifically, the important number of advertisement signs in English in the new city of Tunis and in La Marsa may be explained as resulting from the larger population of tourists, foreigners, and expatriates residing in these two areas.

As a final observation, the uses of English, French and Arabic seem to be guided by generational dynamics in Tunisia. Illustrating this observation, Yosr pointed that there was a generation-divide whereby the older population was closer to Arab culture and values while the younger generation had more familiarity with French culture. While this woman in her thirties might have described her generation and the previous one, it seems however that there is currently another generational divide separating users of French from users of English in Tunisia. As indicated

by Battenburg (1997) in his study of the advent of English in Tunisia, the subtle shift from French to English is apparent along generational lines. He illustrates this trend by citing one of his interviewees who observed that while his parents were more proficient in French, his children were more proficient in English.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The dynamic interaction between language policy, linguistic representation, and attitudes to the LL in the context of Tunisia reveals a complex linguistic situation with apparent paradoxes and inconsistencies. These inconsistencies lie in the fact that while Arabic is advocated as the language of the state through official legislature, the LL as well as people's attitudes reveal that Tunisia's profile and identity is more multilingual than monolingual. However, following an analysis of the policy of the country, it has been shown that while the state advocates Arabic monolingualism on a surface level, there is an implicit will to accommodate more linguistic diversity which only transpires when starting to look at the LL and at perceptions from the local population. All in all, the discourses of linguistic diversity observed from the LL and elicited from respondents' voices have shown that political pronouncements pertaining to language are not always reflective of the situation on the ground. A more realistic policy for Tunisia will push for more implementations of local identity at the top-down level in order to preserve the individuality of the country but explicitly adopt a second language in order to justify the use of bilingualism on street signs (May, Moodod, & Squires, 2004). Although the implementation of such a policy will still constitute some challenges (Canagarajah, 2005), particularly since English is a relatively new language in Tunisia, this situation would be more in line with the reality of the situation on the ground. The allegiance to French in official bilingual signs seems to be anachronistic and obsolete

given the current context of globalization and its impact on linguistic choices (Blommaert, 2010; Coupland, 2010; Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael, 2015) but particularly due to the emergent growth of English as a foreign language in Tunisia. It is even more unrealistic because English is considered as a rather historically neutral or 'liminal' (i.e., in the sense of neither being a language of identification as Arabic nor an imperialistic language as French) language in Tunisia, and although it might espouse such roles in other contexts (Phillipson, 1992), it does not have similar colonial undertones as the French language does. Future research aiming at examining the language policy of Tunisia may potentially investigate how globalization (Barrett & Dovchin, 2019) is impacting the country's accommodating stance towards foreign languages both in policy as well as through the visible LL. At a larger level, the findings of the study will also inform the policy considerations in other multilingual and postcolonial communities which have undergone similar historical paths following their independence.

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