

THE FOREFRONT OF REVITALIZATION.
NINETEEN YEARS
OF THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF AMAZIGH CULTURE (IRCAM)

ABSTRACT: This article attempts to present the main research directions of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture in Morocco, focusing most prominently on its pursuits to revitalize the Amazigh language. The first part of the article aims to present the social circumstances of the Berber population of Morocco throughout history and the events that led to the establishment of IRCAM and later the adoption of the Amazigh language as an official language of the state. The second part analyses the Institute's scholarly activities through the content analysis of its scientific journal and presents some conclusions about the Institute's importance, both nationally and internationally. The last part reviews strategies employed by IRCAM's linguists in an attempt to standardize the Amazigh language and thus prepare it to serve its constitutional role.

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KEYWORDS: Berbers, Amazigh, Morocco, Algeria, Tamazight, IRCAM

After nineteen years of existence the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture, a major Moroccan institution in charge of Amazigh¹ affairs, ceased to exist in February 2020. This article summarises the main scholarly pursuits of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture within nineteen years of its existence. It strives to demonstrate that the activities of IRCAM mostly centred around standardization of the Amazigh language seen as means to facilitate the emergence of a tightly knit Moroccan Amazigh community, and pushing it more towards homogeneity. Efforts to standardize the Amazigh language gave birth to a linguistic amalgam of the main Amazigh languages/ dialects present in Morocco. This newly created language is to serve a unifying role for the whole community providing it with an access to a shared written heritage as well as to facilitate communication within the Amazigh population of the country.

The article relies both on written sources published by IRCAM as well as on interviews with the scholars of the Institute, who agreed to speak on the record. Such an approach stems from the assumptions that there might be some information about the inner workings of the Institute in the wider context of the Amazigh movement that is impossible to obtain from official publications. That is why an analysis of the scientific journal *Asīnāg* and other sources published by IRCAM is combined and confronted with first-hand information. The analysis of written material was twofold. The primary task was to classify themes that appeared in *Asīnāg* in order to establish which topic/ topics

¹ In this article the term 'Amazigh' was used since the term 'Berber' is perceived as pejorative by this group.

were the most extensively covered in the journal. This analysis also sheds light on the affiliations of authors publishing in *Asīnāg* and the general position of the journal in relation to the wider Amazigh-oriented scholarship. It was assumed that linguistic issues would turn out to be in the foreground of IRCAM's activities. The second task was to establish what views on the revitalization of the Amazigh language were espoused by the scholars of IRCAM. Four main strategies prescribed by *Asīnāg*'s authors were identified and examined taking into account information extracted from the interviews.

THE LEGACY OF IRCAM

Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (Institute Royal de la Culture Amazighe – IRCAM) was established in 2001 and became the only authorized centre to conduct research, create textbooks and deal with issues related to the Amazigh in Morocco (El Aissati 2005, p. 68). The Institute was founded in Rabat, under the auspices of the king, from whom its financing comes, thanks to which it enjoyed independence (Maddy-Weitzman 2011, p. 91). IRCAM's budget, according to information obtained from the Institute's scholars, reached 70 million euro annually, which, if true, exceeded a typical Moroccan faculty's budget about fifteen times. It could be perceived as an indication of high hopes placed in IRCAM, especially if one takes under consideration, that it was intended to become purely a research facility, not responsible for teaching students.

The institute's mission was to promote the presence of the Amazigh component in Moroccan culture through research, conferences and publications. In 2003, it adopted a more active attitude and pressed for the adoption of the Amazigh alphabet, which enabled the development of the core curriculum and school textbooks. The idea of establishing the institute was controversial even in the Amazigh community and raised concerns. Opinions were divided, not only among Amazigh activists but also among opposition politicians. Some claimed that this step testified to the opening of the regime, while others saw it as a tool for co-opting the Amazigh movement and gaining control over it. In 2006, a group of pro-Amazigh organizations presented a report to the United Nations in which they objected to "official denial of the Amazigh reality, constitutional discrimination and exclusion, oppressive Arabization, and prevention of activities by Amazigh associations and intimidations" (Gilson Miller, pp. 225–226; Cleo, pp. 335–336).

Events of the so-called Arab Spring became a means to fight for Amazigh rights in North Africa since a large number of the Amazigh could be found among the protesters. They joined the protests against the authorities not only because it was an opportunity to gain greater publicity for their cause, but also because of the shared general demands. Thus, the initial demands of cultural nature, in the form of recognition of the Amazigh language by the state, turned into demands for greater autonomy and better distribution of goods. In Morocco, protesters mobilized using the Internet and formed a 20 February Movement. Moroccans protested on city streets all over the country and the Amazigh actively participated in these protests. They demanded full linguistic and cultural recognition and a reform of the monarchy (Maddy-Weitzman 2015, p. 4). King Muhammad VI tried to quickly respond to the unrest in the country. Soon, a desire to introduce constitutional changes was announced, which were then ratified in a national referendum on July 1, 2011. Despite only cosmetic changes regarding the position of the king, amendments to the constitution implemented the long-awaited Amazigh demands for their linguistic and cultural revival. First of all, the amendments recognized Tamazight as the official

language of the country, and also highlighted the fact that the Amazigh population and its culture is an integral part of Moroccan culture (Maddy-Weitzman 2012, pp. 125–126).

Several factors indicate that IRCAM functioned as an institution of token representation of the Amazigh community within the Moroccan society. There was a wide ideological discrepancy between the amount of founding granted to IRCAM by the king and the general lack of resources experienced by schools that teach the Amazigh language and institutions that train the teachers of Amazigh. The lack of systematic approach to the introduction of Amazigh to the public sphere is further demonstrated by small number of schools in which the language is taught. In 2003 Amazigh was present in curricula of more than 300 schools and about 1,000 teachers underwent training to teach this language (El Aissati 2005, p. 68). In 2019 we were informed by scholars of the Institute that Amazigh was taught at that time in about 100 schools.

In February 2020 the Moroccan House of Representatives passed a regulatory bill No. 04.16, which terminated the existence of IRCAM. Asked for a comment, El Ouafi Nouhi, who is a scholar from the Institute, responded that there are no reasons to worry, as these measures were taken according to the constitution adopted in 2011. However, some Amazigh activists and politicians do express concerns about the Moroccan National Council for Languages and Culture, which is yet to be established, and the extent of its autonomy (<https://www.yabiladi.com...>).

IRCAM, throughout its existence, signed many partnership agreements with both Moroccan and foreign institutions. Their number reached 349 in 2016 (<https://www.youtube.com...>), among them were UNESCO, state's ministries as well as foreign universities, among them: the famous French-based INALCO, Tilburg University, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria². The Institute organized and co-hosted almost 3300 events, e.g. cultural meetings, courses of the Amazigh language, art festivals and so on. It specialized in organizing lectures and scientific debates. Probably the biggest of these was the Amazigh Culture Prize, given out annually in order to commemorate the anniversary of the Ajdir Speech, awarded in 8 categories, among them: scientific discoveries, literature and art, education or translation.

As a research facility IRCAM published numerous books on various subjects, such as history, culture, geography, including Amazigh language textbooks, dictionaries and translations. One of the Institute's key activities was issuing of the *Asīnāg* Journal presenting articles, reviews and, what in general constitutes international dialogue on the Amazigh cause.

THEMES OF *ASĪNĀG*

The content analysis of *Asīnāg*³ summarizes the scientific activities and fields of research explored by the Institute's scholars as well as presents interesting data on social conditions for the functioning of the Institute in the light of modern relations between Arabs and the Amazigh in Morocco and abroad. Finally, examining connections between IRCAM and foreign scholars might be the first step for estimating the Institute's international importance and its role in studying and popularising Amazigh culture and language.

² The reason for that might be the very existence of Amazigh community in Gran Canaria.

³ This Amazigh word means „institute” or „laboratory”, as was explained in the editorial of the first issue.

All 281 texts published in fourteen issues of the journal were analysed under the following criteria: genre, main subject and its historical period, number of pages, language and author's affiliation.

Table 1. Number of pages in all issues of *Asīnāg* (2007–2019)

No	1	2	3	4 & 5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Pages	184	242	304	337	279	342	346	275	90	311	250	346	268

Throughout the existence of *Asīnāg*, its chief editor was Aḥmad Būkūs, IRCAM's President, which might indicate the importance of the journal. Among its Scientific Board members there were scholars affiliated with Moroccan, Algerian (Tizī Uzū) and even American (Princeton) universities as well as independent scholars and employees of Moroccan Ministry of Culture, which was reflected in the variety of published content.

Some genres, such as summaries, reviews, short pieces of literature, are naturally shorter than others, especially scientific papers. Data also show that the texts concerning Amazigh language in general (education, grammar, history, application of Tifinagh alphabet and problems resulting from it) occupy the largest part of *Asīnāg*, which is to be expected considering the linguistic mission of IRCAM. Another share of journal's pages was taken by studies on the Amazigh heritage and culture, such as literature, material culture, including articles about castles, pottery and so on, and non-material culture, especially legends and rules organizing the life of Amazigh communities. The second issue, dedicated to problems of teaching Amazigh language in Morocco, contained reports written by several officials and teachers discussing the subject. Until the seventh issue, pieces of Amazigh literature were published on the last pages of *Asīnāg*, yet this was abandoned. What the Table 2 does not show, is a gradual decrease in number of various genres over time, which freed up the space for longer scientific papers.

The biggest number of articles written by IRCAM's scholars is strictly connected to their editorial duties, such as reviewing the state of research on the Amazigh language and heritage. However, the data on the total volume of articles prepared by authors of particular affiliation shows that the volume of texts prepared in Moroccan research units amounts for only slightly less than IRCAM's papers. It might indicate that publishing on *Asīnāg*'s pages was seen as prestigious and attractive for external authors, also for those from different countries inhabited by Amazigh communities, like Algeria or Mauritania, as well as those affiliated with institutions functioning in countries historically interested in the Amazigh cause, such as France. Algerian facilities specialized in studying Amazigh literature, especially the one originating from Algeria's Kabylie, and non-material culture as well as relations between language and politics. It might have been due to the fact that Algeria was the first country to recognize Amazigh as a national language. Scholars employed in Non-Arab universities often published texts describing linguistic politics in their countries, in an attempt to provide IRCAM with potentially useful data and case studies on this subject.

As for IRCAM itself, its authors published papers covering a wide variety of subjects, although mainly stayed focused on the Institute's mission – developing and promoting the Amazigh language.

Table 2. Number of articles of a particular genre, their share of the volume (in percentage of pages) in all issues (the number of all pages combined) and the main subjects of texts⁴

	Scientific paper	Summary of PhD or Master's thesis	Editorial	Review	Literature	Interview	Report	All
Amazigh language and politics	18 / 7.87%	–	–	–	–	2 / 0.44%	–	20 / 8.31%
Amazigh language teaching	11 / 4.84%	–	–	–	–	2 / 0.20%	2 / 0.17%	15 / 5.21%
Arabic language teaching	1 / 0.44%	–	–	–	–	–	–	1 / 0.44%
Economy	4 / 2.05%	–	–	–	–	1 / 0.10%	–	5 / 2.15%
History	5 / 2.89%	–	–	–	–	–	–	5 / 2.89%
Language politics in different countries	4 / 2.66%	–	–	–	–	–	–	4 / 2.66%
Linguistics	36 / 23.14%	–	–	–	–	–	–	36 / 23.14%
Linguistics and history	7 / 2.93%	–	–	–	–	2 / 0.67%	–	9 / 3.60%
Literature	21 / 10.22%	–	–	–	–	–	–	21 / 10.22%
Material culture	16 / 7.37%	–	–	–	–	1 / 0.17%	–	17 / 7.53%
Non-material culture	12 / 7.70%	–	–	–	–	–	–	12 / 7.70%

⁴ Explanation of some of the terms used in the Table: literature (genre) – short stories, poems and novellas in Amazigh language; undetermined (subject) – a criterion connected directly to the literary texts, the subject of which is irrelevant to this study; state of research (subject) – e.g. reviews and summaries.

Table 2 – cd.

	Scientific paper	Summary of PhD or Master's thesis	Editorial	Review	Literature	Interview	Report	All
Sociology	10 /4.67%	–	–	–	–	2 /0.50%	–	12 /5.18%
Standardization of Amazigh language	6 /2.76%	–	–	–	–	1 /0.47%	–	7 /3.23%
State of research	1 /0.40%	1 /1.33%	27 /4.74%	23 /3.03%	–	–	–	82 /9.50%
Technology and language	12 /6.39%	–	–	–	–	1 /0.30%	–	13 /6.69%
Undetermined	–	–	–	–	22 /1.55%	–	–	22 /1.55%
All	164 /86.33%	31 /1.33%	27 /4.74%	23 /3.03%	22 /1.55%	12 /2.86%	2 /0.17%	281 /100%

Table 3. Number of texts concerning particular subjects, their authors' affiliation and their share of the volume (in percentage of pages) in all issues (the number of all pages combined) and the main subjects of texts⁵

	IRCAM	Moroccan	Others	French	Algerian	Moroccan institutions	Non-Arab university	Many	All
State of research	72 / 7.7%	7 / 1.11%	–	1 / 0.13%	–	1 / 0.34%	1 / 0.13%	–	82 / 9.50%
Linguistics	4 / 2.89%	20 / 13.72%	–	6 / 2.69%	4 / 1.98%	–	2 / 1.85%	–	36 / 23.14%
Undetermined	–	–	22 / 1.55%	–	–	–	–	–	22 / 1.55%

⁵ Explanation of some of the terms used in the Table: Moroccan – any Moroccan-based research unit excluding IRCAM; Algerian – any Algerian-based research unit; Non-Arab university – with the exception of one Mauritanian text included here out of convenience and excluding French articles due to their number and significance for the journal; Moroccan institutions – any non-scientific institutions, such as ministries, offices and schools; Others – in this case: Amazigh writers and IT experts from Italy and Canada.

Table 3 – cd.

	IRCAM	Moroccan	Others	French	Algerian	Moroccan institutions	Non-Arab university	Many	All
Literature	6 / 2.32%	4 / 1.68%	–	3 / 2.49%	7 / 3.23%	1 / 0.50%	–	–	21 / 10.22%
Amazigh language and politics	11 / 5.21%	–	–	2 / 0.74%	3 / 1.31%	4 / 1.04%	–	–	20 / 8.31%
Material culture	7 / 3.53%	6 / 2.52%	–	1 / 0.54%	–	2 / 0.50%	1 / 0.44%	–	17 / 7.53%
Amazigh language teaching	11 / 4.34%	1 / 0.34%	–	1 / 0.37%	–	2 / 0.17%	–	–	15 / 5.21%
Technology and language	4 / 1.65%	3 / 1.48%	2 / 1.48%	2 / 1.14%	–	–	–	2 / 0.94%	13 / 6.69%
Sociology	7 / 2.72%	4 / 1.98%	–	–	1 / 0.47%	–	–	–	12 / 5.18%
Non-material culture	2 / 1.45%	7 / 4.71%	–	–	3 / 1.55%	–	–	–	12 / 7.70%
Linguistics and history	4 / 1.75%	3 / 1.41%	–	1 / 0.30%	–	–	1 / 0.13%	–	9 / 3.60%
Standardisation of Amazigh language	3 / 1.51%	2 / 0.64%	–	1 / 0.67%	1 / 0.40%	–	–	–	7 / 3.23%
Economy	2 / 0.54%	2 / 0.84%	–	–	–	–	–	1 / 0.77%	5 / 2.15%
History	3 / 1.24%	1 / 0.87%	–	–	–	–	1 / 0.77%	–	5 / 2.89%
Language politics in different countries	1 / 0.81%	–	–	1 / 0.67%	–	–	2 / 1.18%	–	4 / 2.66%
Arabic language teaching	–	1 / 0.44%	–	–	–	–	–	–	1 / 0.44%
All	137 / 37.75%	61 / 31.75%	24 / 3.03%	19 / 9.75%	19 / 8.95%	10 / 2.56%	8 / 4.51%	3 / 1.72%	281 / 100%

Table 4. Number of texts concerning a particular historical period, their author's affiliation and their share of the volume (in percentage of pages) in all issues (the number of all pages combined) ⁶

	IRCAM	Moroccan	Others	French	Algerian	Moroccan institutions	Non-Arab university	Many	All
20th century and modern times	41 / 18.37%	35 / 20.21%	2 / 1.48%	13 / 6.63%	11 / 4.64%	8 / 2.05%	3 / 2.46%	3 / 1.72%	116 / 57.91%
Irrelevant	71 / 7.38%	7 / 1.11%	22 / 1.55%	1 / 0.13%	–	–	1 / 0.13%	–	102 / 10.31%
Many	18 / 9.25%	9 / 5.08%	–	3 / 2.15%	8 / 4.30%	–	2 / 1.01%	–	40 / 21.79%
Antiquity	1 / 0.47%	6 / 2.69%	–	1 / 0.30%	–	2 / 0.50%	1 / 0.13%	–	11 / 4.10%
Middle Ages	2 / 0.27%	3 / 2.05%	–	1 / 0.54%	–	–	1 / 0.77%	–	7 / 3.63%
French protectorate	2 / 0.91%	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2 / 0.91%
19th century	1 / 0.44%	1 / 0.61%	–	–	–	–	–	–	2 / 1.04%
16th century	1 / 0.30%	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1 / 0.30%
All	137 / 37.75%	61 / 31.75%	24 / 3.03%	19 / 9.75%	19 / 8.95%	10 / 2.56%	8 / 4.51%	3 / 1.72%	281 / 100%

⁶ Irrelevant (subject) – mainly literature, reviews and editorials, that is non-scientific texts.

Table 4 shows the journal's devotion to contemporary subjects, which proves the Institute's focus on obtaining practical and applicable knowledge and surely corresponds with the socio-political conditions in which it functioned. Secondly, a big number of papers covered a particular phenomenon over the centuries, which – in the case of Amazigh studies – could be a unique source of information for foreign scholars. It is worth mentioning that the period of the French Protectorate is almost absent as a subject of study.

Table 5. Number of publications in various languages and their share (in percentage of pages) in particular issues of *Asīnāg*

	French	Arabic	Amazigh	English	All
1	10 / 50.48%	7 / 43.81%	4 / 5.71%	–	21 / 100%
2	12 / 53.62%	11 / 23.67%	4 / 2.42%	2 / 20.29%	29 / 100%
3	16 / 78.84%	6 / 16.54%	4 / 4.62%	–	26 / 100%
4 & 5	16 / 61.77%	9 / 31.06%	4 / 2.73%	1 / 4.44%	30 / 100%
6	16 / 65.57%	7 / 25.94%	3 / 2.83%	1 / 5.66%	27 / 100%
7	17 / 73.38%	5 / 24.46%	3 / 2.16%	–	25 / 100%
8	13 / 54.36%	11 / 44.60%	1 / 1.04%	–	25 / 100%
9	14 / 68.12%	3 / 15.72%	–	2 / 16.16%	19 / 100%
10	5 / 48.57%	–	–	2 / 51.43%	7 / 100%
11	8 / 34.92%	10 / 55.56%	–	1 / 9.52%	19 / 100%
12	10 / 63.90%	6 / 31.22%	–	1 / 4.88%	17 / 100%
13	9 / 45.39%	5 / 19.86%	–	4 / 34.75%	18 / 100%
14	11 / 51.87%	6 / 35.27%	–	1 / 12.86%	18 / 100%
All	157 / 58.43%	86 / 29.73%	23 / 1.65%	15 / 10.19%	281 / 100%

At the beginning of its existence, *Asīnāg* contained papers written in three predominant languages: French, Arabic and Amazigh, with rare occurrences of English. However, the Amazigh language was never used for conducting research, instead being a language of Amazigh literature published on the journal's pages. This phenomenon might lead to a conclusion (one which was actually confirmed in the next chapter) that Amazigh language is still in a rather early phase of standardization, thus it is not widely used even by the Amazigh elite. As Tifīnagh texts disappeared from *Asīnāg*, their place was taken by English, which was, in contrast, used in long scientific papers, written mostly by Moroccan-based scholars. It might have been an attempt to obtain worldwide recognition which otherwise would remain beyond the authors' reach.

French turned out to be a dominant language on *Asīnāg*'s pages, both among Arab scholars and foreign authors. One might consider it a result of the decrease in the use of Modern Standard Arabic among Arabs and as a proof of enduring popularity of French as an international and prestigious language in Northern Africa. This fact may point not only to a conscious strategy adopted by IRCAM's authors in order to widen the international reach of their studies as well as to attract Francophones and convince them to share the results of their research with *Asīnāg*, but also to an interesting phenomenon of French language's omnipresence among the higher classes of Moroccan society and in science.

STRATEGIES ADVOCATED IN *ASĪNĀG*

RE-CLAIMING THE PAST

The first article in the first edition of *Asīnāg* strives to reclaim the history of Morocco as a history of cultural diversity and to present Amazighness as ‘an essential tributary of the national identity’ (*rāfid asāsī min rawāfid al-huwiya āl-waṭaniyya*) (Asmahri, Al-Maḥfūz 2009, p. 15), even though Amazigh has been marginalized in the public life of Morocco for centuries, as a non-literary language of a non-privileged people. Ever since antiquity the native Amazigh population experienced periods of successive Phoenician, Carthaginian, Roman, Vandal, and Byzantine domination, as well as contact with the cultures of the Northern Mediterranean. This early contact between cultures gave rise to Moroccan cultural diversity. The author emphasises that it is important not to see the culture of the Amazigh population as marginal and the culture of the colonizers as the dominant one, as the use of Punic, Latin, and Greek remained restricted to commercial, religious and official communication in urban zones (Asmahri, Al-Maḥfūz, p. 18). Amazigh people resisted the phenomenon of “colonial cultural invasion”, which is why the Amazigh aspect of Moroccan culture in antiquity was predominant, as was the role of the Amazigh language in oral communication.

The advent of Islam in the early Middle Ages was a turning point in the linguistic situation of Morocco. It opened the region to new cultural influences namely: Arabic, Jewish and later Ottoman, as the Moroccan culture absorbed new elements creating a ‘melting pot’. The culture of the Arab invaders, inherently connected with Islam, had the most significant impact on the Amazigh population. Arabic, as the language of the Quran, became dominant in religious life, subsequently, its importance as the language of administration started to grow. In consequence, from the 7th century CE onwards, Amazigh was relegated to the sphere of quotidian oral communication. Arabic remained a dominant literary language until the beginning of the 20th century. Since the Arab conquest until the 11th century the presence of Arabs and the Arabization of Morocco was mostly restricted to urban areas, but the 12th century Morocco experienced a wave of migration of Arab tribes. The coexistence of Arabic and Amazigh speakers gave rise to the Moroccan dialect. The author emphasises that there were two processes at work: Arabization of Moroccan Amazigh and Amazighization – the adoption of the Amazigh customs by Moroccan Arabs (Asmahri, Al-Maḥfūz 2009, pp. 20–24).

The period of French and Spanish protectorate brought significant changes to the linguistic situation in Morocco. A large portion of the population was convinced of the importance of learning the colonizers’ language in order to achieve a higher social status. France created ‘Amazigh schools’ first elementary, then secondary, which were supposed to counterbalance the influence of Qur’anic schools, however, the Amazigh was not the language of instruction. French and Spanish language press appeared in Morocco, while the influence of Amazigh in formal communication dwindled. At the end of the protectorate period the linguistic situation in Morocco was significantly different than at the beginning of the 20 century.

When Morocco gained independence in 1956, Arabic became the official language of the state. In reality French, Spanish and English dominated the spheres of economy and higher education, as Amazigh became marginalized even further under the pretext of preserving the country’s national unity, which was the general consensus of the Arab nationalist discourse. Amazighness was a taboo subject and the policy of Arabization in education led to the adoption of Arabic by many native speakers of Amazigh (Asmahri,

Al-Mahfūz, pp. 25–26). Changes in the political climate of Morocco allowed for the issues which used to be penalized to become widely discussed, among them the Amazigh language, culture and education. In this new political context an opportunity arose for activists and scholars alike, to try to change social perceptions about the Amazigh language and present it as “a responsibility of all Moroccans” (Assid, p. 15) and one of the components of the diverse Moroccan culture.

EMPHASISING UNITY

Scholars associated with the Institute tend to consider Amazigh as one highly dialectized language, rather than a family of closely-related languages belonging to the Afro-Asiatic phylum (A. Boukous, p. 131). They do admit, both in their writings and in person, that these dialects of Amazigh are mutually unintelligible. Nonetheless, they refer to Tarifit, Tamazight and Tashlhiyt as the “three main branches” (Assid, p. 15.) of one language, in educational materials calling them also the northern, central and southern varieties of Amazigh. Although such classification is not without precedent, since it is also present in some French scholarship, it is not ideologically neutral. One language implies the existence of one linguistic community and unity of the Moroccan Amazigh culture. Therefore Tarifit, Tamazight and Tashlhiyt are never a subject of analysis in any of them. They are only mentioned in *Asīnāg* in the context of standardization.

Standardization of the Amazigh language was the main postulate of the Amazigh social movement of the 1980s in order to transfer it from the domain of orality into the domain of literacy. The essential question which appeared among the supporters of standardization was whether all branches of Amazigh should be fused into one literary variety, or each regional Amazigh vernacular should be standardized separately (Halfi, p. 13). However, within the movement there were some who voiced their concern that standardization would strip the language off of its diversity and richness. The approach adopted by the scholars of the Institute sees standardization as an effort to fuse all branches of Amazigh in order to create a fully functional linguistic standard that meets the requirements of an official language. What prompted the scholars to embark on the task of standardizing the language in this unifying manner is the necessity to develop educational materials, which would be a process significantly more difficult if it had to be done for all dialects separately (Halfi, p. 29). What is more, the advantage of one standard variety is that it could facilitate inter-dialectal communication, as well as to bring all dialects closer to each other, as the standardized language will gradually influence dialects, promoting the use of certain widely-understood words and structures.

On a practical level standardizing the language has many stages, some of them have already been completed. First was developing the Tifinagh script from its earlier form. The next stage involved setting the rules of grammar. In order to do so a survey across all branches had to be conducted to discover shared structures. A grammar of standard Amazigh was published in 2008 (Boukhris), it aims to demonstrate the ‘deep unity of the language’. Analogically, to standardize vocabulary scholars searched across all three varieties of Moroccan Amazigh, so that the most suitable and widely understood word could be added to the dictionary. Words that denote the same thing but differ across regions were accepted as synonyms and added to the common standardized dictionary in order to enrich it (Halfi, p. 29). The process of creating new words is on-going, but several dictionaries of general vocabulary (Ameur 2017) as well as of newly-created media terminology (Ameur 2009) have already seen the light of day.

ADVOCATING A FLEXIBLE STANDARD

Standard Amazigh is called by Abd as-Salam Halfi a *lingua franca*, but in fact its idea is more akin to a koine language – a linguistic amalgam that adopts those grammatical and lexical elements from the dialects which are easily recognized by most area speakers and dispenses with those that are not. The creation of the linguistic standard is to be achieved by focusing on what is shared and treating dialect-specific vocabulary as synonyms. This inclusive approach creates several implications for teaching Amazigh at schools.

Educational curricula are developed in accordance with the ‘principle of progression’, which means teaching dialects on the lower levels of education and gradually introducing the linguistic standard (Halfi, p. 26). During the first stage children are educated in their regional dialects as it facilitates the process of learning on a psychological level, while relying on the standard variety only in teaching grammar. The gradual inclusion of structures and words found in other varieties of Amazigh happens at the second stage (grade 3–4). Grade 5 and 6 constitute the third stage, when a transition is made towards the use of standard Amazigh with all of its linguistic richness. On all levels of education local dialects are to be used within the classroom for communication. Future teachers of Amazigh, that is students of Amazigh on a university level, should receive their education according to the ‘the principle of linguistic family’ which means studying the three main varieties of the Amazigh present in Morocco. This will give them a better insight into the language, making them more tolerant while assessing the correctness of utterances, as the most important goal of teaching standard Amazigh is to help all Moroccan Amazigh people understand each other, as well as to present the Amazigh heritage, which is in and of itself diverse. In this lenient approach variations in pronunciation and vocabulary do not constitute linguistic errors and should be accepted as long as they do not hinder intelligibility (Halfi, pp. 29–31).

TREATING AMAZIGH AS AN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE

The Institute strives to revive the Amazigh language as a repository of Amazigh culture and identity employing strategies commonly prescribed to preserve endangered languages. Although the sheer number of Amazigh speakers, that is 1/3 of the total population of Morocco, seems not to indicate any danger of language death, studies show that currently the Amazigh language is undergoing processes that might lead to its demise in as short as a lifetime of four generations (Boukous, pp. 113–116).

It was only after centuries of exclusion, symbolic violence and decades of social movements which strived for Amazigh rights, that the Amazigh language was declared the official language of Morocco. Despite a legal change of status, the position of Amazigh remained precarious due to its predominantly oral nature and the absence of a literary standard, poverty of lexicon, which lacks technical and scientific terms, as well as its high dialectalization which renders trans-dialectal communication difficult, if not impossible (Boukous, pp. 111–113). The most ominous sign of the erosion of Amazigh is the impeded intergenerational transmission of the language, especially in predominantly Arabic-speaking urban areas, where children tend to perform worse in Amazigh language tests than their rural counterparts (Boukous, pp. 81–102). In Morocco the Amazigh language symbolically competes with languages that carry more prestige and are in a position of dominance, in writing these are Standard Arabic, French and increasingly English. In speech Amazigh is being gradually substituted with the Moroccan

Darija, especially among those Amazighophones who aim towards upwards social mobility (Boukous, p. 107).

Even though the Introduction of the Amazigh language into the educational system began in the school year 2003–2004, most Amazigh children do not have an opportunity to study their native language at school, mostly due to the lack of resources, both human and financial (Halfi, p. 34). Moreover, the number of educational reports in *Asīnāg* has been dwindling over the years, which indicates possible failure of the Amazigh educational program. The ability to read and write in Amazigh remains marginal in Moroccan society. New literary works in Amazigh appear scarcely, as do translations from other languages. Scholars of the Institute do not advocate education fully in Amazigh, on any level, as they admit that the language lacks sufficient lexicon to fully serve its role as the language of education and science. In this context it is highly unlikely that before long Amazigh will become an official language of all Moroccans and be taught in all schools three hours per week at all levels of education, as was the demand of the Amazigh rights social movement (Assid, pp. 15–17). As of now the change in the status of Amazigh remains mostly symbolic, not yet practical. Nonetheless, significant steps have already been made to prevent its disappearance.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing, this study obviously does not exhaust the topic; however, it can highlight some fields worthy of further attention and study. Main conclusions of this research are as follows:

- The predominant subject of *Asīnāg* was the Amazigh language – its grammar, history, education and functioning in modern Moroccan society. The Institute appeared to have been truly devoted to its task, commissioned by the king, however difficult it turned out to be.
- Besides being a scientific journal published by IRCAM, *Asīnāg* served as a popular platform for Moroccan as well as foreign researchers and institutions interested in Amazighness. The journal as a publication issued by a significant institution, one well connected to the king, might have been perceived, even by Amazigh activists, as an important source of information both about their own heritage and about the politics of the state.
- The main strategies employed by IRCAM were:
 - a) reclaiming the Moroccan history through a non-stigmatizing description of its Amazigh dimension,
 - b) emphasizing the Unity of Moroccan Amazigh by focusing on what is shared instead of dwelling on regional variations,
 - c) introducing a flexible linguistic standard which would serve as a lingua franca for the whole community,
 - d) formulating linguistic policy for Amazigh as an endangered language.

Linguistic policies advocated by scholars of IRCAM aimed at unifying the whole Moroccan Amazigh community through the creation of a national linguistic standard, which was to function alongside the spoken vernaculars of Amazigh. This could possibly lead to diglossia, thus mimicking the situation within the linguistically hegemonic Arab community. A step towards linguistic homogeneity was advocated as a means of mitigating conflict on the Moroccan market of symbolic goods and a way to gain political and cultural leverage.

IRCAM's shutdown emerged as a move that stirs strong emotions among some of the Amazigh. This might lead to serious political implications and as such surely needs further investigation.

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