

The Linguistic Diversity Approval: The Inevitable Compromise Policy

Ghedeir Brahim Mohammed [1]¹⁰

Abstract

Linguistic plurality can be a source of anxiety to some nations especially because of those groups seeking for linguistic dominance at the expense of the rest of dialects to gain political and economic benefits. However, things can be exploited differently. Linguistic diversity can help in enriching the cultural heritage and highlighting the nation's identity. To investigate this possibility, we track the Algerian policy towards the issue of linguistic diversity. This study aims at investigating language diversity and its impact on the social security and stability in Algeria. It also attempts to shed light on the Algerian political decisions to maintain social harmony via implementing effective language planning. Results reveal that the policy adopted by Algeria to manage linguistic differentiation through the recognition of all sorts of linguistic varieties and mainly the re-consideration of the Tamazight language as a national language besides Arabic is a wise decision made by policy makers to prevent external and internal attempts to stir up linguistic –based troubles. This compromise policy maintains the nation's stability and its success is shown through the co-existence of Arabic with its different dialectical varieties, Berber languages, spoken by non-Arab groups besides French with its predominant position imposed by the linguistic imperialism inherited from the colonial period and English with its rising competitive status to French.

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Keywords

Linguistic diversity, linguistic imperialism, identity, nation's stability.

First submission: July 2022; Revised: September 2022, Accepted: November 2022

¹⁰ [1] Department of Arts and English Language, University of El-Oued, Algeria, email: ghedeir-mohammed@univ-eloued.dz

Introduction

The population of Algeria is ethnically and culturally diverse comprising Kabylis, Shawias, Mozabites, and Arabs. Though all Islamized, these ethnic and cultural groups differ in some aspects related to traditions, the way of life, social structure, and language. Algeria was a place of invasion and a crossroad of civilizations that made the linguistic plurality reign among its speakers since the antiquity.

The issue of language diversity and social stability is crucial in multilingual societies, as the case of Algeria. The sociolinguistic situation in Algeria is a complex domain of research because of the coexistence of many languages: the standard Arabic in addition to Tamazight are the official languages of the country. Besides, Algerian colloquial Arabic is the language of everyday life and is the mother tongue of a great proportion of the Algerian community. Berber and its different varieties Mzabi, Chaouia, Touareg, and Kabyle are spoken in the Berber community in addition to French, the heritage of French colonization to Algeria. Bilingualism, switching, mixing, and style shifting are part of common linguistic behavior among Algerians. The significance of this study stems from its attempt to approach the issue of linguistic diversity in Algeria and its impact on social stability from different perspectives: language in use, language in abstraction, and language in the eye of the beholder. The study adopts a qualitative research method.

In this study an attempt is made to shed light on the status of the different languages spoken by Algerians focusing on the following angles: the diachronic study of the linguistic situation in Algeria from the Antiquity to the modern French colonization and its aftermath watching the language with all its features' change, the social structures and domestic organization, and the component of language and the question of identity. The present research work focused on the status of languages used in Algeria. But at the heart of the study, the language contact situation is mainly an interest in order to reveal the linguistic contact of Tamazight with Arabic and French in the Algerian context.

The study has found that there is a high level of language change in the different languages and dialects due to the linguistic contact although each linguistic community attempts to preserve its linguistic identity. The findings of the study also revealed that linguistic compromise accompanied with constructive linguistic policies are inevitable to guarantee social and political security in Algeria.

1. Background of the Linguistic Situation in Algeria

During the colonial era (1830-1962), French was the language of power and prestige; it was limited to the elite. French has never been as widely spoken in Algeria as it has been since independence thanks to the democratization policy of education in addition to advancements in mass communication that make Algerians increasingly exposed to French language and culture through a variety of means previously unavailable.

Historically speaking, Algeria was an important part of the French Empire during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although Algeria gained independence some fifty (50) years ago (1962 for Algeria), it continues to be closely linked in a variety of ways, and remains important member of the international French-speaking community. The linguistic situation in Algeria is multilingual. Algerians use three (03) major languages: standard or classical Arabic for the

official use, Algerian Arabic which is the native language of the majority, French for the daily use and teaching of science and technology in universities, and Tamazight or Berber, the native language of a considerable minority.

2. Linguistic Landscape of Algeria

Hall (2001), in his definition to the concepts multilingualism and plurilingualism and their uses, asserts that both terms are currently used to refer to people who live in two languages or need to use two or more languages at home and/or at school. Hence, the linguistic landscape of Algeria is multilingual as there are three (03) spoken languages: Tamazight, classical Arabic and Algerian Arabic, and French.

2.1. Tamazight

Algeria was a place of invasion and a crossroad of civilizations that made the linguistic plurality reign among its speakers since the antiquity. The first inhabitants of Algeria were Imazighen or Berber that the Greeks and Romans indicated by the term 'Numidia'. They spoke the Libyc. In this context, Elimam (2004: 32) states: "During the Neolithic Era, the principle elements of the Berber culture were already in place: a Libyc language, means of communication".

Unfortunately, the history of Tamazight is still unclear because of the absence of written elements as Mercier says:

Unfortunately, almost all the past of this Berber language, or, if one wants, Libyc entirely escapes to us. A few hundreds of inscriptions known as libyc; which date from the time of Numidia's kings and precisely the Roman domination. They are written in an alphabet that presents a narrow resemblance with that of the Tuareg. (1988: 310).

Tamazight belongs to the African branch of the Afro-Asian language family, also referred to as Hamito-Semitic in the literature, along with ancient Egyptian and other African languages such as the ones called Cuchitic and Chadic languages, as opposed to the oriental or Semitic branch constituted of Semitic languages (Achab, 2001: 01). The areas where Tamazight is spoken are not continuous. Rather, they constitute more or less large islands distant from one another, interrupted by large Arabized zones. As a result, Tamazight has survived mostly in somehow naturally 'protected' areas. The zones where it is spoken today are either desertic or mountainous while most of the plain zones were Arabized. The Tamazight-speaking zones in Algeria are less homogenous when compared with the case in Morocco. Starting from the north, Kabylia represents one of the most important areas where the language is still in use. This is also the area where linguistic and cultural awareness has highly developed among the population. The Kabylia region contains four full administrative departments, Tizi-Ouzou, Bejaia, Bouira and Boumerdes, although there are some parts in the two latter departments affected by the Arabization process.

The next important area where the Tamazight language is spoken and which we come across as we are heading southwest from Kabylia is another mountainous region, bordering Tunisia, called Aures (Batna and Khenchla). The variety spoken there is locally referred to as 'Tachawit'.

Other different Tamazight varieties are spoken in many other linguistic islands scattered in different areas such as Ghardaia (Mozabites) and Tauareg in the Algerian Sahara (Tamarasset and Illizi) (Achab, 2001: 01-02).

2.2. The Diaglostic Situation in Arabic: Classical Arabic and Algerian Arabic

The sociolinguistic situation of the Arabic language is featured by the existence of side by side two varieties of the same language (Zughoul, 1985, Elbiad, 1985). This linguistic duality goes back to earlier periods of the Arabic language history.

Throughout the Arabic speaking world, including Algeria, two varieties of Arabic are used. The selection of each variety depends on the context. In formal situations the use of the "high" variety is required (Classical Arabic); the "low" variety (Algerian Arabic), on the other hand, is expected to be used in informal situations as a medium of interaction within a closely personal environment. As Classical Arabic is not spoken in any Arabic speaking country, competence in it is restricted to people who have reached a certain level of education. This implies that Classical Arabic is learned solely through formal education. Hence, illiteracy can mean total ignorance of Classical Arabic.

On the contrary, everyone in Algerian community uses Algerian Arabic as a mean of communication in his/her everyday and ordinary conversation. As a solution for this linguistic situation, almost scholars concerned with Arabic sociolinguistics proposed that the gap between Classical Arabic and Algerian Arabic dialects should be narrowed in favor of Classical Arabic and that people should be encouraged to use the superposed variety (Mustapha, 2013: 202).

2.3. French

French became the official language of the colonial Algeria. Arabic became as a foreign language since 1938, whereas, the rate of illiteracy reached 90% with the independence in 1962. Additionally, certain Algerian acquired a competence in French as was declared by Ben Bella, "we think as Arabs, but we speak French" (Taleb, 2000: 351). During the colonial era, Algerians spoke French in schools, with the colonizer, but still used their dialectal Arabic at home and with friends. Despite all the methods of deculturation, Arabic preserved its prestige as a language of the Holy Koran. But, for the first time since the antiquity, the Tamazight language was influenced by the new foreign language. The French language penetrated the mountains and did what the Roman Legionary failed in (Chami, 2009: 394).

3. The Algerian Policy Towards the Issue of Linguistic Diversity

Aiming at reaching a linguistic compromise policy and strengthening the linguistic and social harmony, Algerian governments initiated three (03) linguistic policies. This part of the research paper presents the language policy pursued in Algeria since independence. The first sub-heading focuses on the language policy of arabization and the different attitudinal reactions towards this

policy. The second traces the locations of languages in different educational plannings and reforms. The third policy is the recognition of Tamazight as official language besides Arabic.

3.1. Arabization Policy

The term Arabization means the extensive use of Arabic in all domains of life: political, social and cultural. It refers to the promotion of Arabic as a medium of interaction in private and public sectors (Dekhir, 2013: 25). According to Al-Abed Al-Hak (1994: 05), Arabization is a more adequate term that has been coined to refer to the second sense, because it is morphologically derived from the language which is Arabic, therefore refers to the idea of Arabic language planning. However, Arabization refers more adequately to Arabs, that is, the people and their behavior. Nearly all Arabic speaking countries, including Algeria, have become aware of the importance as well as the role of Arabization movement, however, the process has been quite problematic.

After independence in 1962, Algeria has adopted an eradication policy of the French rule and culture. In order to achieve this aim, Algerian government imported hundreds of Arabic teachers from the Middle East for securing Arabization. But, the number of such Arabic teachers could never compare with the thousands of French and Algerian-French teachers who had been sent to secondary schools during the 1960s and 1970s (Coffman, 1992: 59-79). Shortly after the independence, new national universities and some selective high schools were created in independent Algeria. Thus, new administrators in science, industry, university, research related fields worked according to the French standards and usually spoke and wrote in the French language (Naouel, 2013: 911).

It seems quite clear that the reason behind such poor results of the Arabization policy is no doubt the lack of real commitment to this movement. Most of the time Arabization is seen by many people as a plea for retraction and isolation from the rest of the world. In the same way, they regard it as being far away from bringing about a bright future for the country. As far as the deficiencies of Arabic language are concerned, the proponents emphasize this point to the extent that one could single out the Arabic language among all the languages of the world as the sole language to know these setbacks (Mustapha, 2013: 205).

3.2. Educational Reform Policy

In most countries, educational reform is rooted to instill change and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of schooling. Educational reforms are usually reform efforts focus on particular problems or issues, such as developing the low level of teachers through training and improving their socio-economic development, revision of curriculum content, and the status of foreign languages.

Historically speaking, Algerian educational system was changed by a program of Arabization shortly after independence. The government introduced new teaching methods and began training Algerian teachers and bringing in foreign Arabic-speaking teachers. Since 1973, however, the curriculum has been Arabized and the teaching of French has been restricted. In March 2000, the National Commission for the Reform of Education System (CNRSE) was created. This scientific panel comprises of 153 teachers and scholars. In this era, though the use

of Arabic has been enforced in public life, Tamazight was allowed in schools from the year 2003. The shift to the use of English as a medium in the Algerian context seems but a matter of heralding the French power. However, French language still occupies a wide space at the expense of Arabic and Tamazight within the framework of Algerian educational system (Naouel, 2013: 910-911).

3.3. The Berber Language and the Question of Identity: The Recognition of Tamazight Language and Culture

Significant scholars views accompanied the reemergence of the Amazigh movement with the rise of identity politics. The most significant work being Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud's compendium of scholarly essays entitled *Arabs and Berbers* (1973). While not directly addressing the issue of state interactions with their Amazigh populations, the work is important because it addresses the very existence and identity of the Amazigh people. An inflammatory notion today, *Arabs and Berbers* refuted the idea of the Imazighen as an ethnicity, instead asserting that they were more likely to identify themselves as members of a tribe or region, or as part of the greater Islamic *ummah* or religious community (Yahia and Haizam, 2008).

Reviewing the issue of linguistic and cultural identity of the Berbers from a historical and political perspective, prior to French imperial colonization in the 19th century, Berber culture could best be described as a hybrid variant of the dominant Arab culture. Although they were recognized as a distinct ethnic group, Berbers shared many cultural identifiers with their Arab neighbors. Most important was the fact that the Berbers were Muslims. The high number of inter-ethnic marriages and the full Arabization of some Berber populations certainly suggest that contemporary Berbers and Arabs perceived only a small culture gap between their societies. This is not to say that there were no distinctions between minority Berber and majority Arab populations; certainly, there were key cultural differences between the two groups. This was especially true of rural and mountain-dwelling Berbers, who tended to retain their traditional language, *Tamazight*, and maintain customary social and legal structures. With the advent of French colonialism in 1830, Berber identity was recast to maximize differences with the Arab culture. The organic whole of the Algerian Muslim community was fractured by imperial policies intentionally designed to emphasize Berber distinctions. The French adopted a “divide and conquer” strategy to weaken native resistance to foreign domination. The first independent Algerian government (1962-1965) imposed a centralized, Arabic-only language policy. This authoritarian initiative ignored the country's diverse cultural make-up and polyglot linguistic composition. The emphasis on Arabic language was explicitly designed to assimilate all minority identities into the majority Arab culture.

For the recognition of Tamazight language in recent history Algeria, although the president Bouteflika was always emphasizing the idea that a national referendum about the Tamazight language is the only legitimate option to institutionalize it, he chose the easiest way to make it a national language in 2002, i.e. relying on a parliamentary vote to pass the bill. A nationwide referendum about Tamazight might be disappointing for the Berbers as the important population is Arabophone. For the Berbers, the status "national language" was no other than half recognition.

After a long wait, the onset of the year 2016 brought the good news for the Berbers. During a press conference on January 5th 2016, Ahmed Ouyahia - director of the Presidential Office-

talked about the basic lines of the new constitution. At the linguistic level, article 3 recognizes Tamazight as "joint official" language alongside Arabic (Djennane, 2016: 102-103).

Conclusion

The relation between language and ethnic identity and the role of language in shaping identity have been the focus of hundreds of sociolinguistic studies. Generally speaking, the predominant theoretical trend tends to emphasize the major role of language in shaping identity and in maintaining distinctive collective entities. In this conceptual framework, language is not only a means of communication, but more importantly it is the essence of the culture of the people, the symbol of their cultural survival and continuity (Catherine, 2003: 07).

Since Algeria's independence, standard Arabic has been introduced as the official and national language, sometimes along with the former colonial language, French. Colloquial Arabic and non-Arab vernaculars are denied access to formal institutions and formal recognition.

As language is a foundational and defining socio-cultural characteristic of collective identity, the Tamazight language is a vital and valid ingredient of cultural identity and expression, as well as the locus of Amazigh existence. In the Algerian socio-political context, Tamazight has been recognized as an official national language in addition to Arabic. The Tamazight language has been introduced to some institutional framework of Algeria including mainly the educational system where Tamazight became a subject taught at Algerian schools and specialty at tertiary level.

The present study results reveal that the policy adopted by Algeria to manage linguistic differentiation through the recognition of all sorts of linguistic varieties and mainly the re-consideration of the Amazigh language as a national language besides Arabic is a wise decision made by policy makers to prevent external and internal attempts to stir up linguistic –based troubles.

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