

Tamahaq: A Snapshot into Language Loyalty and Endangerment

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Hassiba Ben Bouali University, Chlef, Algeria**Received: 16/10/2021****Accepted: 20/10/2021****Published: 04/11/2021****Abstract:**

The current paper gauges the level of Tamahaq, an indigenous language spoken in Southern Algeria, endangerment with reference to only one basic criteria of UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment Framework. The study thus aims to investigate the Tuareg community attitude onwards their mother tongue and gather more primary reliable information on the situation of Tamahaq and circumstances of endangerment. The study draws on a case study approach wherein questionnaire, interviews and observation are utilized to gather data in relation with the posed research question. The study reveals that Tamahaq is undergoing a gradual kind of loss where speakers, particularly children, shift to Dialectal Arabic use in informal domains and Standard Arabic in formal contexts. Foreign languages mainly French and English are also gaining more grounds at the expense of Tamahaq.

Key words: Tamahaq, Tuareg, language endangerment, language loyalty.

1. Introduction

Compared with other continents, Africa has by far the highest concentration of languages in the world, followed by Asia, accounting for at least 30% of the world languages. Another distinct feature of the African linguistic landscape is that in most countries, the minority languages are in the majority by far (Austin, 2011). Like other regions, minority indigenous languages are being replaced by more prestigious dominant tongues. For instance, earlier to Arab conquest, the whole Maghreb was home to an indigenous population known as Berbers. The region had been a linguistic continuum wherein several of Berber languages were spoken. Today, particularly in Algeria, there has been a remarkable decline in the number of Berber languages speakers and their geographical distribution. Furthermore, Dialectal and Standard Arabic continue to gain increasing number of speakers at the expense of Berber languages. It is not surprising then that an increasing number of Algerians with Berber ancestry identify themselves as Arabs. The future of indigenous minority languages in Algeria particularly the chances of survival in the nearby future remain uncertain.

Since United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declaration in 2003 that 10 indigenous languages in Algeria are endangered, there has been a

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stark lack of research on language endangerment issue. Ignorance of the current linguistic situation of indigenous languages has been profound and continues to be so. It is only when information about the circumstances of endangerment and the potential causes is available, that decision about the type of support needed for language maintenance, revitalization and perpetuation can be adequately prescribed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Landscape View of Language Endangerment Worldwide

There are an estimated 6.800 languages spoken in the world today. Most of these languages are spoken by relatively few people. Over 95% of the world's spoken languages have fewer than 1 million native speakers; some 5.000 have less than 10.000 speakers and more than 3.000 languages have fewer than 1000 speakers. Besides, at least some 500 languages had in 1999 under a hundred speakers (Brenzinger, 2007). Not surprisingly then, of the world's population, 95% speak 100 languages, with 5% speaking the remaining thousands of languages (Muhlhunslar, 1996). There is a wide spread agreement that language loss is occurring at an exceptionally alarming rate. Most recent studies have concluded that at least 50% of the world's languages are losing speakers and may no longer continue to exist after a few more generations since they are not being learned by children as their first languages (Nettle and Romaine 2000). Simultaneously, by the end of this century a full 90% of the world's languages will disappear entirely replaced by more widely used languages. Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, English, Bengali, Arabic and Hindi among some others appear to be the replacing languages (Grenoble, 2006: 317). This situation is generally referred to as language endangerment.

In current sociolinguistic studies, many terms are exploited to refer to the phenomenon of languages disappearance worldwide. One encounters terms such as: language death, language decay, language decline, language demise, language displacement, language endangerment, language erosion, language extinction, language imperilment, language loss, language obsolescence, linguistic death, language suicide, language murder. Almost all the aforementioned terms are used metaphorically. Terms such as "language murder" and "language suicide" suggest that languages do not die natural deaths. They are instead murdered. English, as Glanville Price put it, is a "killer language." Thus Irish for instance was murdered by English. Others however put the blame on Irish by saying that the language committed suicide. From a sociolinguistic angle, it is wrongheaded to see language themselves as disappearing since languages have no lives that are independent of their speakers. Therefore, languages do not kill languages. Languages neither live nor die. They are instead used or ceased to be used (Tsunoda, 2006). Accordingly, it is their speakers who give them up.

In the light of the above, language endangerment typically involves language contact situations with two or more languages in use where one language (language A) replaces another language (language B). Prototypically, language A is being adopted by speakers of language B and so language A replaces language B in the sense that decreasing number of speakers of language B use it, until eventually there are no speakers of language B at all. This

is referred to as language shift (Brown. 2009). Language A is almost always the language of a majority usually in terms of population or a national lingua franca but, more importantly, is dominant in the sense of having social prestige, serves official and governmental functions and is associated with socio-economic development (Grenoble. 2006). Language shift generally culminates with language death when language B becomes extinct, that is, when language B is no longer used as a means of communication or socialization.

2.2. UNESCO Language Vitality Framework

There exist a number of different scales for measuring a language's vitality. One of the most comprehensive is UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment. The scale constitutes nine factors that need to be considered in conjunction to each other. They are:

Factor 1: Intergenerational language transmission

Factor 2: Absolute number of speakers

Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population

Factor 4: Trends in existing language domains

Factor 5: Response to new domains and media

Factor 6: Materials for language education and literacy

Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language policies, including official status and use

Factor 8: Community members' attitudes toward their own language

Factor 9: Amount and quality of documentation

The above criteria can be further re-grouped into more general categories. For example, factors 1, 2 and 3 represent the total number of the speakers and the language distribution across generation. Moreover, factors 4-7 indicate contexts of language use. Factor 8 has to do with speakers' loyalty towards their language. The last listed factor, 9, highlights the existence of any data produced about the language.

2.2.1. Factor 1: Intergenerational Language Transmission

The Intergenerational transmission of a language is by and large a determining factor whether a language will maintain its vitality into the future. One finds three types of situations. In the first, all generations, including children, have fluent use of the language. In the second, the language is used by parents and grandparents but not the children, though children know the language. In the third category, only the grandparents/elder generation would maintain knowledge of the language. It is only when children are acquiring a language; it does have much chance of long term use. For a language to be vital, it must be actively learned by children (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006).

2.2.2. Factor 2: Absolute Number of Speakers / Factor 3: Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population

A fundamental condition for vitality is the size and composition of the speaker population. It seems obvious that the larger number of native speakers of a language, the more likely it is to be maintained and be healthy. However, a large number of speakers do not always guarantee vitality because speaker population must be numerically considered in relation to other speech communities in the same region. Equally significant is the percentage of the total population which can speak the dominant language. Language shift is indicated if a large percentage of the ethnic population speaks a different language instead of the heritage

language. For example, nearly 200,000 people speak Tujia, a Tibeto-Burman language in Southern China. Thus the language would be placed within the safe range. However, Tujia speakers are outnumbered by speakers of another dialect of Chinese by a ratio of 10:1. Indeed, only 3% of ethnic Tujia are able to speak their heritage language and probably less than half that number uses it regularly. In a similar vein, Tujia is clearly endangered despite a considerable speaker population (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006).

2.2.3. Factor 4: Trends in Existing Language Domains / Factor 5: Response to New Domains and Media

The UNESCO Ad Hoc Group recognizes six levels of usage in existing language domains:

a- Universal use: it refers to the active use of the heritage language in all domains such as in stores or service encounters, for educational purposes and in forms of public address. Besides, speakers feel comfortable using the local language in any setting (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006).

b- Multilingual parity: Both the dominant and heritage language are used. While the dominant language is reserved for formal and public domain, the heritage language is predominantly used in informal contexts mainly for intra-ethnic communication. By implication, stable bilingualism emerges in such a situation (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006). The next three levels present continuous decreasing use of the heritage language. The category of dwindling domains involves the use of the heritage language increasingly less; simultaneously, there is a significant shift occurring when parents cease to speak the language at home. Accordingly, children no longer learn the language. The next level, the use of the language is in only limited domains such as religious ceremonies, rituals and festivals. The speaker population here is the elderly generation. These limited domains may include use in the home whenever the elderly are present. At this stage, although younger people may continue to understand the language, they cannot speak it. The next step beyond this is very limited domains, where the language is used only on very restricted occasions, and only by particular community members such as elderly tribal or religious leaders. Here, language use is ritualized. Finally, extinction occurs when the language is not used in any domains (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006).

2.2.4. Factor 6: Materials for Language Education and Literacy

In regions where education is nationally administered, the languages of instruction influence language use patterns in other domains. Simply put, when mandatory schooling occurs exclusively in a national language, the use of heritage languages inevitably declines. Conversely, when local languages are part of the formal educational process, they maintain a high degree of vitality. Ideally, for sustaining vitality in a local language, all subject matter needs to be taught in the heritage language; simultaneously important, pedagogical materials must be available to teachers and students (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006).

2.2.5. Factor 7: Governmental and Institutional Language Policies, including Official Status and Use

Multilingualism has been regarded by many nation-states as a serious impediment to nation-building. The latter explains why many countries still have, explicitly or implicitly,

hostile attitudes towards the continuous existence of indigenous languages over their territories. So far as institutional attitudes are concerned, UNESCO provides the following categorizations:

- a- Equal support: all languages of a country being treated as assets with explicit policies in place to encourage the maintenance of these languages.
- b- Differentiated support: non-dominant languages, here indigenous, are protected by governmental policies but are only used in private domains.
- c- Passive assimilation: there are no governmental policies to assimilate minority groups, but similarly there are no policies of support. The dominant language functions as the language of wider communication. The final three levels- active assimilation, forced assimilation and prohibition- differ in terms of governmental intervention to force people to give up their language in favor of the official (Grenoble and Whaley. 2006).

2.2.6. Factor 9: Amount and Quality of Documentation

This factor looks at the urgency for new language documentation. It also helps in assessing the feasibility and viability of a language for revitalization. Simply put, a seriously endangered language should be documented as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. Furthermore, the more extensive the documentation, the easier revitalization will be in the future since revitalization efforts rely on dictionaries, descriptive grammars, and recorded speech that documentation supply.

3. Method

3.1. Research Population

The present research investigates Tuareg who speak Tamahaq as a mother tongue. The Tuareg are a Berber-speaking people who live as dispersed tribes in five states-nations: Algeria, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Libya. The two main Tuareg groups in Algeria, whose member numbers is estimated 120.000 according to official population figures, are the Kel-Ahaggar from the Tassili of Ahaggar and the Kel-Ajjer from the area around Djanet. Both regions now fall within Algeria's two cities (*Wilayat*) of Tamanrasset and Ilizi. The latter, located in Southern Algeria, are still traditional homelands of Tuareg. The present research takes as a sample the Kel-Ahaggar. The sample population constitute 72 persons. Table (1) summarizes key characteristics of the research population.

The researcher uses deliberate sampling procedure. It is also commonly known as purposive or non-probability sampling. This sampling method involves deliberate selection of particular units of the universe for constituting a sample which represents the universe. The choice of the deliberate sampling procedure corresponds with the nature of Tuareg as a population. Access to Tuareg population and their localization necessitates assistance from a local resident, Mr. Mestafoui Abderhman, whose presence during all the in-field investigation facilitates the determination of representatives of the entire sample. It is worth noting that the researcher gives consideration to rural and urban distinction for what concerns sampling. The rural population constitutes parents and children from two villages: Tit and Azerzi.

Table 1: The Research Population Basic Characteristics

Category	Research Population			
	Number	Age: from ... to	Gender	
			Female	Male
Parents	21	21-86	2	19
Children	23	8-14	8	17
Youth	28	16-36	16	12

3.2. Data Collection Procedures

The present case study employs three major techniques in the data collection process: questionnaire, interview, and observation. The present research identifies one basic criteria to be used in determining the degree of endangerment of Tamahaq so as to appropriately develop measures for its maintenance or revitalization: community Members' Attitudes towards their own Language. It excludes governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies including official status and use. Questionnaire A is administered to 21 parents only while questionnaire B is intended for children (8 to 14 years) and youth (16 to 36 years).

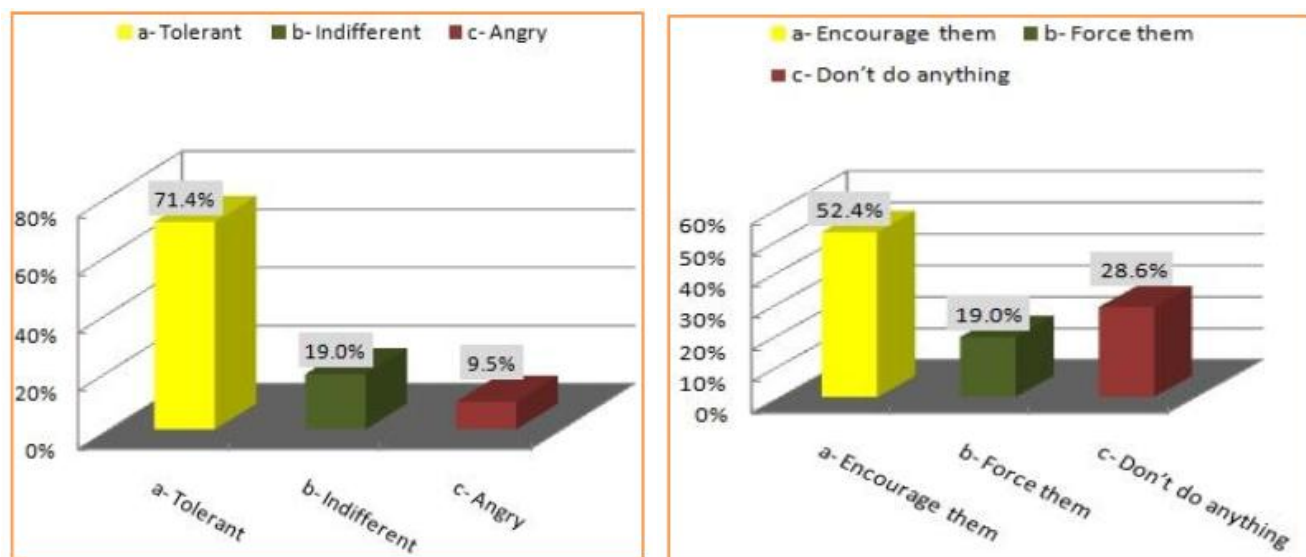
All questionnaires A, B are translated to Standard Arabic in accordance with the informants' linguistic competence. It is worth noting that not all the questionnaires were answered by the informants themselves. For instance, some elder parents were illiterate; thus, the questionnaire turned into a schedule filled by the researcher. Similar to questionnaires, the interview is conducted in both Dialectal and Standard Arabic.

The researcher also resorts to observation. This method implies the collection of information by way of investigator's own observation, with interviewing the respondents. The present research uses uncontrolled observation; that is to say, it takes place in the natural setting with no definite pre-arranged plans or a careful definition of the units to be observed. The observation seeks to include whatever information that describes circumstances of Tamahaq endangerment.

4. Results

Items 15 and 16 in questionnaire A assess the parents' attitudes towards their children shift to a different language. Furthermore, item 16 focuses on parents' reactions when their offspring abandon their mother tongue in favor of a more dominant language. The underlying objective is to assess parents' loyalty towards the heritage language. Concerning the younger generation informants, children and youth, item 6 in questionnaire B focuses on which language they regard most important for their future. Parents are also administered the same question.

Figure 1: Community Members' Attitudes towards Language Shift and Tamahaq Extinction.



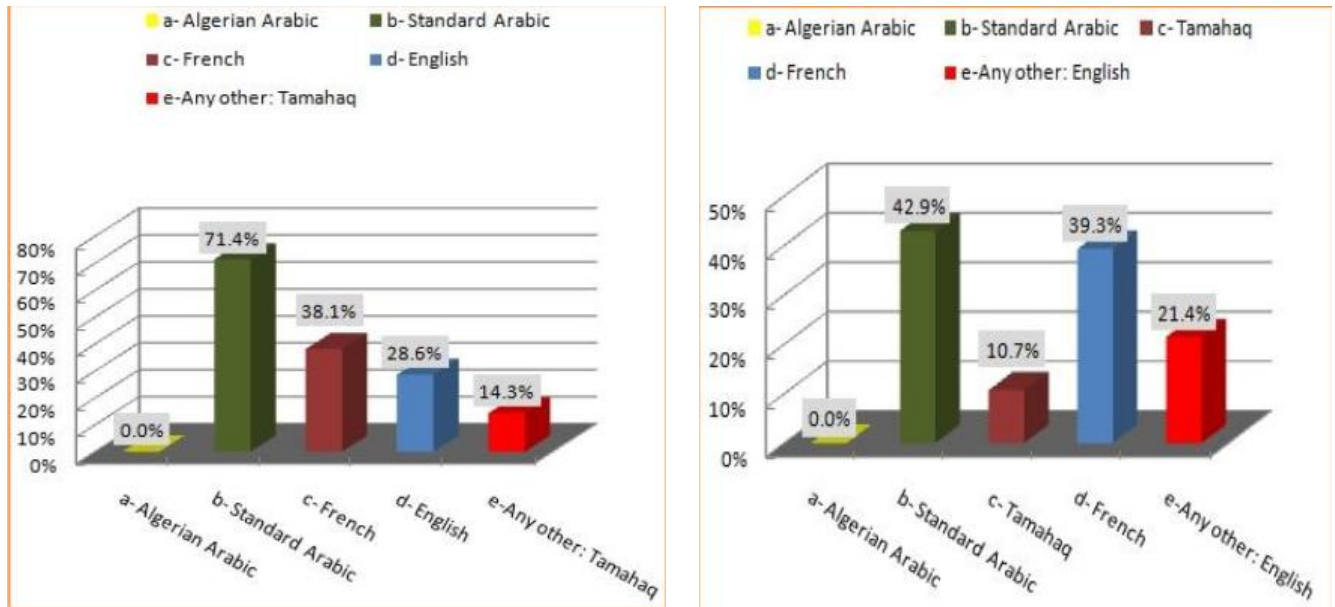
Throughout items 15 and 16, parents respondents show that they do not object against their children using a different language at home (71.4% tolerant). Only a small portion of respondents (9.5%) turn angry at their children once they hear them speaking a different language at home. Moreover, results of item 16 are a clear indication that parents' loyalties towards their mother tongue as well its retention is reduced. It is not surprising then for 28.6% of parent respondents to remain passive and indifferent once their kids abandon their mother tongue whereas only 19% force their offspring to acquire Tamahaq. Half of respondents (52.4%) foster their kids to use their mother tongue.

Some comments by parents explain better the reasons why they disregard their children's shift to use the dominant group language. The following comment demonstrates the side effect of language planning on parents' attitudes and the decisions they take in response when it comes to their children acquisition of language. *"We find that the family is the first responsible for the decline of Tamahaq because fathers and mothers do not teach their children Tamahaq at home. Because Standard Arabic becomes the sole official language at schools, parents see that their children should learn Dialectal Arabic so that when they start school, they are more fluent in Standard Arabic."*

There exists a stark divergence between rural and their urban counterparts in Tamanrasset. In the suburbs, language loyalty and retention of Tamahaq is higher. The following narrative illustrates language loyalty of elder generation:

"In the place where we were sitting near the mosque, there was a fight between an elderly and somebody two weeks ago. The youth spoke Dialectal Arabic. The elderly objected and recommended the youth to speak only Tamahaq since they are Tuareg. The situation worsened and turned into a fight so we intervened to separate them. The youth said that I should use Dialectal Arabic since when I deal with people, I often use it. The elderly objected, 'We are both Tuareg so why do you use Dialectal Arabic?'"

Figure 2: Community Members' Attitudes towards the most Significant Languages.



According to the displayed charts, two major languages, Standard Arabic and French, are regarded very important. Both parents and youth informants see the acquisition of Standard Arabic very fundamental. The charts also reveal the prestigious position of French. 39.3% of youth reported that they see French as indispensable for their future. Unexpectedly, English is also gaining more ground. 14.3% of parents want their children to learn English whereas 21.4% of youth regard English as indispensable.

5. Conclusion

Often the causes of language shift center around imbalance in prestige and power between the heritage language and culture on the one hand and the language of wider communication and dominant culture on the other (Brown, 2009: 325). Since linguistic behavior is profit-driven, speakers would shift to use a language that would bring them instrumental rewards. That is to say, Standard Arabic is seen as prestigious in an increasing number of domains. The national language is a means of wider communication, simultaneously; it gives access to education, higher status jobs, the media and social advancement. In concrete words, socio-economic improvement is thus perceived as tied to knowledge of Standard Arabic. In the case of foreign languages, French and English are receiving an extra push because they are not only the tool for international communication, but also strictly linked to tourism which Tuareg view as their industry. In fact, tourism means a great deal to Tuareg. From tourism, they expect to benefit materially by selling their handicrafts, providing entertainment, renting their vehicles, work as guides and so forth. In this sense, Tuareg increasingly attribute more value to foreign language mainly those involved in tourism-related jobs.

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