# A Descriptive Overview on the Algerian Linguistic Situation

Mr Nabil Aziz HAMADI

Supervisor: Prof. Samira ABID

hamadinabilaziz@gmail.com

Amar Telidji University of Laghouat

ملخص الدراسة

الحالي بإعطاء فكرة حول الوضع اللّغوي في الجزائر وكذا نبذة تاريخيّة حول النظام التعليمي الذي يسعى بحثنا يقوم الباحثون إلى تقصيّه . كما يتطرق هذا البحث إلى دراسة النظام التعليمي المتواجد قبل الاستيطان الفرنسي ومفهوم التعريب الذي تتعدّد حوله وجهات النظر بين سلب وإيجاب. بالإضافة الى التطرق الى التخطيط اللّغوي مع تقديم وصف مفصل لمكانة اللغة العربية الفصحى والفرنسية في الجزائر، مسبوقا بوصف آخر لتعليم اللغة الفرنسية في المنهاج الدراسي الجزائري.

.مرّت الجزائر عبر مراحل وفترات مختلفة حيث شهدت تغييرا لغويا غلبت فيه لغة معينة على حساب أخرى بدأ من 1830،حين استعمرت فرنسا الجزائر وفرضت هذه على الأخيرة هيمنة على المستوى الاقتصادي والاجتماعي وكذا اللّغوي. ومنه أصبحت اللغة الفرنسية اللغة الرسميّة أما بالنسبة للغة العربية الفصحى فقد أصبحت اللغة الأكاديمية للتقاليد والمدارس الدينية. هدفت السياسة الفرنسية الى تحويل الجزائر الى امتداد للعاصمة الفرنسية الواقعة على جنوب البحر الأبيض المتوسط. هدف كهذا يمكن تحقيق فقط عبر إبراز الفروق المتواجدة بين العرب والبربر واستئصال قيم الحضارة العربية المسلمة من الجزائر.

## *ABSTRACT*

The present paper gives an idea about the linguistic situation in Algeria and the historical background on the Algerian educational system that the researchers are trying to investigate. It examines the educational system before the French settlement, the ambivalent aspects of Arabisation with its positive and negative aspects. Furthermore, it deals also with Language Planning. A description of the status of the Classical Arabic and French in Algeria and French teaching in the Algerian curriculum is first presented.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LANGUAGES IN ALGERIA: *The French Language in the Post Independence Era and the Colonial Policy*

Algeria went through different periods which witnessed linguistic changes in cases when one language overwhelms another.

Starting from 1830, France colonized Algeria and imposed its socioeconomic and linguistic control upon the speech community. Hence, French became the official language and Classical Arabic was the language of Academies both in traditional and religious schools. The French policy was designed to make Algeria an extension of Metropolitan France on the Southern side of the Mediterranean Sea. Such a goal could be achieved only by showing division between Arabs and Berbers and eradicating Arabo-Muslim values and civilization from Algeria.

It should be noted that the French policy attempted to severely control the Koranic schools and limit the teaching of Classical Arabic. Indeed, Classical Arabic and Islam were considered as crucial factors that would lead to national consciousness and the colonial authorities were determined to fight them energetically.

During the 1930's however, the French administration enacted a law which deemed Arabic as a foreign language. This measure generated anger under the leadership of Ben Badis who deserved credit for being the first to define the Algerian identity as Arabo-Islamic.

France sought to impose its both political as well as its sociolinguistic control upon the Algerian speech community, using all possible means for the purpose.The colonial administration, for instance, found in education the adequate environment where the French language and its socio-linguistic norms could be widely and efficiently implemented.

During the period (1830-1962) education was oriented towards French, the study of Classical Arabic declined drastically. French was considered as the language of instruction, a modem language with a great future unlike CA which reflection illiteracy and ignorance. When being taught in the French schools, CA was offered as an optional foreign language.

Since Classical Arabic was out of contemporary intellectual and technological development during the colonial era it consequently failed to develop the flexibility needed for modern bureaucratic, financial and intellectual affairs. Furthermore, as a part of a divide-and-rule policy, the Berbers of Algeria namely the Kabyles were favoured in education and employment in the colonial system and were represented in disproportionately large numbers in the French elite.

Paradoxally, the leaders of the War of Independence (1954-1962) and successive governments committed themselves to reviving Classical Arabic and to establishing it as the national language. The aim was to recover the pre-colonial past and to use it, together with Arabic, to restore if not create a national identify and personality for the new state and population.

Algeria had its independence on July 5th, 1962. The Algerian leaders especially the Nationalists soon adopted the following motto:

**"Islam is our religion, Algeria is our mother
country, Arabic is our language"**

After independence, Algeria witnessed an urgent need to regain its Arab and Muslim identity. Since Classical Arabic is the language of the Koran and Muslims throughout the world and since the language is an instrument of power as Hadjarab stated in 2000.Great campaigns of Arabisation were launched in order to replace French the language of the colonizer with Classical Arabic as the language of Arabo-Islamic identity. For the Algerian elite, especially the nationalists, Classical Arabic was the best vehicle of communication and instruction without which Algeria would have probably lost its identity and values.

Within this framework, President Boumédiene in 1968 declared:

**"Without recovering that essential and
important element which is the national language,
our efforts will be vain, our personality incomplete
and our entity a body without a soul."**

(Bouhania, 1998: 26)

This was probably an expected choice. Indeed, the Algeria, society whose true identity had been denied for a hundred and thirty years could not begin to reconstruct itself without restoring the bedrock of that identity. The Arabic language which remains a vivid symbol of its Arabic identity and Islamic values.

Colonialism in Algeria was not intended to reach process of ideological, cultural and linguistic exchange or, at least, a partnership but imposed a relationship of domination and subordination hence, creating a feed-back of resistance behaviour translated in terms of conflict and struggle. France through its language was, therefore, perceived as a threat to Arabic and the culture it conveyed .The school being the crucible where the national "soul" was forged. France attempted to modify the existing educational and linguistic systems the whole mentality of the community. The intended purpose was a twofold progressive substitution first, creating a French education; second, in order to avoid using Classical Arabic which competed with French, legislate some texts that would decrease the Muslim-Arabic activities of the "Taleb" who is the Muslim teacher.

## THE CAMPAIGNS OF ARABISATION IN ALGERIA AND THEIR DIFFERENT SOCIO-POLITICAL REASONS

Arabisation was probably an expected choice. The Algerian society, whose true identity had been denied for 132 years, could not begin to reconstruct itself without restoring the bedrock of that identity, namely the Arabic language, which remains a vivid symbol of Arabic identity and Islamic values. The group actively promoting Arabisation right after independence consisted of Algerian nationalists and political leaders who were extremely eager to find their place in an overwhelmingly French-speaking country. Then their political leader's first preoccupation was to build an Algerian identity based on two major points: Islam and Arabity. Such goals could not be achieved without an effective language planning. The latter refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of language.

There are many reasons for the Arabisation policy, among them:

French was the colonial language and had been imposed, so it seemed natural to replace it with the Arabic language. It was therefore decided that Arabic should replace French in all domains of use, in schools, the administration and everyday life. This was the purpose of the Arabization decision.

Islam had been a safe refuge during the colonial period, when Algeria was unable to preserve its own identity. There was a determination among leaders and the population to restore both Arabic and Islam.

Having been colonized for many years, Algeria wanted to underline that it belonged

to the Arab world, which had supported it during the liberation war.

In 1962, the Arabization issue deeply divided Algeria's political society and continues to do so today. Decisions on Arabization were often political ones taken against an adversary, with no concern for establishing the necessary prerequisites: to develop an education system, to train teachers to teach Arabic language including subject matters taught in Arabic, to produce school textbooks of Arabization on higher education and the labour market. There are two trends: one towards Arabization and another one trend towards bilingualism (because it is not an option to oppose Arabization, unless one wishes to risk being accused of "siding with France" - Hizb Fransa. The trend towards Arabization and hence monolingualism, which looks to Islam or Arab nationalism, aims to place an Arab and Muslim stamp on Algeria and to instill a non-Western identity. While some Arabists are sectarianist, others are convinced that it is necessary to restore the balance.

The trend towards bilingualism does not reject French, but remains attached to the idea of maintaining the French language, since not only is the country administered in French at present, but French gives Algeria access to modernization. Advocates of bilingualism are wary of the underdevelopment in Arab countries and fear the theocratic influence which they feel to be inherent in the Arabization policy. Their position seems to maintain the linguistic status with cautious Arabization.

> **"This was the mainstream motto in 1962 which gradually lost political backing up until 1992, when Mr. Bouteflika became president in 1999, Arabization regained importance."**

Conversely Berber-speaking people, whose language is threatened, have become staunch opponents of Arabization.

# ARABISATION AND LANGUAGE PLANNING IN EDUCATION

The educational profile of our society changed dramatically due to independence. When most French and other Europeans left. As the majority of technicians and administrators were Europeans, Algeria was left with a shortage of highly-skilled and educated people. In the educational system the first reform adopted right after independence, was to teach Modern Standard Arabic starting from the primary stage. French became a second language since 1964, and then a foreign language with the application of the Foundation School System in 1976. In reaction to this change and within the Foundation School System a political attempt was made to reconcile the restoration of the national language Modern Standard Arabic with the retention of French, an essential medium for the acquisition of technology and modern science. Ahmed Benbella, President from 1963 to 1965, declared in 1965 that Arabisation campaigns did not mean the elimination of the French language as stated by Grandguillaume in 1983. It should be noted however, that Arabisation was not evident and its implementation strategies were not easy to realize in various domains such as education.

From 1962 to 1976 the organization of the education system was inherited from the French system, namely:

**PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Lasting five years, divided into one year of Preparatory School, two years of Elementary School and two years of Middle School, culminating in the School Leaving Certificate and/or the examination for entry into 6th grade of intermediate education.

To reach certain objectives of the primary, intermediate and secondary educational system, huge efforts have been made in the infrastructure phase. In 1964 there was 4,063 Primary Schools and that of the Intermediate was 418.These numbers improved to reach 10,588 primary schools and 1,388 intermediate ones in 1985.Secondary Schools increased substantially only in 1977 and reached 392 in 1985 according what was mentioned in the table below:

| Levels | Year | 1962 | 1967 | 1972 | 1977 | 1982 | 1987 | 1992 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Primary** | - | 4581 | 6990 | 8380 | 9864 | 11843 | 13461 |
| | **Intermediate** | - | 454 | 540 | 987 | 1362 | 2118 | 2498 |
| | **Secondary** | 34 | 56 | 78 | 156 | 248 | 574 | 700 |

**Table 1: School Infrastructure 1962-1992 over 5 years-laps**

**INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION**

Lasting four years,(i.e.) the $6^{th}$,$5^{th}$, $4^{th}$ and $3^{rd}$ grades, leading to the Certificate of Intermediate Education .

**SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Lasting three years, (i.e.) the 2nd, $1^{st}$ and final grades, leading to the baccalaureate.

In spite of the selection made at the intermediate level, the school population joining the secondary level shows an important rate of failure. The school years 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 are characterized respectively by a rate of drop out of 17,8 % and 20,92 % while the number of pupils without qualification amount to 89,618 and 123,829 over a total figure of 503,308 and 591,783 respectively. These results lead to the question on the efficiency of selection at the intermediate level and revealed that delayed selection is extended to the secondary level. What is vital also is that the end of the secondary academic cycle is viewed by a low rate of success in the Baccalaureate examination for the academic years 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 is respectively 26,95% and 20,96% (see table 2 below).

| School year | 1980 /81 | 1981 /82 | 1982 /83 | 1983 /84 | 1984 /85 | 1985 /86 | 1986 /87 | 1987 /88 | 1988 /89 | 1989 /90 | 1990 /91 | 1991 /92 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rate (%) | 25,4 | 39,34 | 21,68 | 20,15 | 25,62 | 32,46 | 26,95 | 20,96 | 20,96 | 21,91 | 19,97 | 22,80 |

**Table2: The rate of Baccalaureate success.**

**From 1976 to 2004**

The 1976 reform created two types of education: Compulsory Basic Education for all children between the ages 06 and 16. This level of education lasts for nine years and is comprised of three years cycles. Pupils attend for the certificate  .The successive grades of basic education are referred to as 1$^{st}$ to 09$^{th}$ AF. *Se*condary Education, which lasts for three years and absorbs around 50% of the pupils leaving basic education. The successive grades of secondary education are referred to as 1 $^{st}$  to 3$^{rd}$ *AS*.

Secondary Education is organized into three core curricula in the 1$^{st}$ grade and splits into three branches of education as from the 2$^{nd}$ grade: general, specialized and technical/ vocational education. Each branch includes several streams. General secondary education and specialized education lead to the baccalaureate of secondary education. Technical/vocational secondary education leads to the technical baccalaureate.

The reform planned for 2004 signals a return to the previous system: primary education (lasting six, or possibly five, years), intermediate education (four years) and secondary education (three years).Basic and secondary education come under the remit of the Ministry of Education, whilst higher education comes under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

**ARABISATION IN UNIVERSITY**

In the universities, Arabisation started in the year 1970 when Mohamed Seddik Benyahia was minister of higher education. Commissions were set up on October 12, 1971, to develop an Arabisation plan (Grandguillaume 1983). The Arabisation process was gaining ground at the university level, and courses in Arabic were opened to teach terminology to students in various fields and disciplines. However, if Arabisation was totally achieved in both primary and secondary levels, such was not the case in universities, where Arabisation was:

**Integral** in literature, history and pedagogy;

**Partial** in geography, law, journalism, sociology and psychology;

**Non-existent** in scientific and technical specialities such as medicine, the hard sciences and engineering, where French had acquired a position of paramount importance since it became

an essential and omnipresent tool of teaching. Despite linguists' efforts to modernise Classical Arabic, it remains relatively unable to replace French in such departments, which have strongly resisted Arabisation campaigns.

## THE ALGERIAN TEACHING STAFF

Algeria had few teachers able to teach Arabic as provided for in the decisions. To remedy this, it recruited Algerian and foreign teachers mainly Egyptians. There were three levels - tutors, instructors and teachers. Tutors were recruited at the level of the primary school leaving certificate for French-speakers, and the equivalent for Arabic speakers. Instructors were recruited at the level of the certificate of intermediate education. Teachers were trained at the Bouzareah Teacher Training College (TTC). "The integration of the tutors and the instructors, the failures from the former system, was seen as undermining the education system". In the 1968/1969 school year, out of a total of 36,255 primary school teachers, 14,573 were tutors, 14,790 were instructors and 6,892 were teachers. The following table shows the growth in the number of Algerian teachers between 1962 and 2002 in each education cycle.

| Year | Secondary Teachers | | Intermediate Teachers | | Primary Teachers | |
|------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
|      | Algerian | Foreign | Algerian | Foreign | Algerian | Foreign |
| 1962 | 532 | 684 | 1,237 | 1,231 | 12,696 | 7,212 |
| 1967 | 1,003 | 1,827 | 2,089 | 2,575 | 27,307 | 5,806 |
| 1972 | 1,201 | 2,939 | 5,300 | 3,843 | 47,459 | 4,002 |
| 1977 | 3,286 | 3,756 | 16,053 | 3,610 | 76,025 | 984 |
| 1982 | 10,168 | 4,124 | 36,849 | 2,120 | 99,648 | 640 |
| 1987 | 28,066 | 2,991 | 73,292 | 739 | 139,531 | 344 |

| 1992 | 43,705 | 917 | 86,048 | 362 | 154,326 | 359 |
|------|--------|-----|--------|-----|---------|-----|

## Table 3: The evolution of the teaching staff

In September 1964, the Ministry of Religious Affairs opened the Islamic institutes, whose main task was to teach Arabic. They were dissolved and integrated into the national education system on 16 April 1976. In parallel, ITEs were Teachers Training Schools set up to train teachers of the various educational levels.

This table sheds light on the evolution of the Algerian staff and indicates that the balance has been upset in favour of Algerianisation since 1982.The Algerianisation rate amounted respectively to 99,6% ,97,8% at primary ,intermediate and secondary levels in the school year 1984-1985.

School attendance in its turn saw a respectful and a considerable development from 1962 to 1990.The whole number of pupils ameliorated from 777,636 to 4,027,6 ,from 30,790 to 1,408,522 and from 5,823 to 753,247 respectively at elementary ,intermediate and secondary levels,the school attendance rate was 45,4% in 1965 and increased to 86,99 in 1992).

The table concerns the number of pupils registered in the primary and intermediate academic levels whose age ranges from 6 to 13 –children of less than six years and more than thirteen are not comprised.

| Year | 1965 | 1970 | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| **Rate** | 45,4% | 57,3% | 75,5% | 78,0% | 82,2% | 85,98% |

## Table 4: School attendance over 5 year-laps.

## THE FOREIGN TEACHING STAFF

Some came from Europe, mainly France, and some came from the Middle East, chiefly Egypt, Syria and Iraq, this provided large contingents of teachers for Arabic instruction. Firstly in primary school and later the secondary school and higher education. "In 1966, out of

a total of 13,000 Arabized primary school teachers, 3,500 (27%) were non-benefited from French Teaching Algerians, of whom 2,000 were instructors or tutors and only 1,500 were teachers. The report complained of these teachers' lack of qualifications, their lack of faith in their task, the handicap their accent represented and their political involvement in the country's domestic policy.

## TEXTBOOKS

Most of the necessary textbooks were produced in Algeria. At first they were translations of French textbooks, but gradually textbooks were developed with a different content. The production of textbooks for instruction in Arabic generally resulted in less openness to modernism. Analysing the content of two philosophy textbooks, one published in 1968 and the other in 1988, Omar Lardjane[14] notes the disappearance of the notion of subject and the critical approach required for thinking, concluding. If the philosophy textbook … fails to help Algerian teenagers think of themselves as autonomous, free and critical subjects, then what is the use of teaching philosophy at all. Hassan Remaoun draws the same conclusion with regard to history textbooks, showing how the Arabo-Islamic reference model is constantly given precedence in history textbooks, at the expense of the Algerian identity and of historical objectivity.

## *ARABIC INTSRUCTION IN BASIC EDUCATION*

The aim of Arabic instruction was to replace the spoken languages with classical Arabic. It was the schools task to correct a child's faulty, deviant and deficient language and to expurgate and correct the expressions which children have learned prior to attending school says the teacher's handbook "Our job will be two -fold. We must use the child to correct the language of its family". This will be possible only when we have closed the gap between the written grammatical language and the anarchic spoken language. We shall express ourselves in writing as we speak orally, and we shall speak orally as we write"[8].Based on pedagogy of error, its aim was to eliminate the spoken languages and replace them with an artifact language that is not a language in everyday use in any Arab country. Although this type of Arabic instruction ensured the survival of the Arabic dialects, albeit by "standardizing" them, it was designed to eradicate the Berber dialects, which predated the Arabs and had survived for centuries. This approach, coupled with other anti-Kabyle measures, triggered the Kabyle

peoples' hostility to the Arabization policy and caused riots in Kabylia in 1980. The "Berber Spring" was to result in Tamazight being recognized as a national language in 2001.

A number of Algerian intellectuals analysed and denounced this teaching approach designed to make children feel guilty about their mother tongue. Malika Boudalia-Greffou[9] revealed that it was modeled on a scheme for teaching slightly retarded and mentally deficient people whose education needed to be simplistic and repetitive, with few nuances. Khaoula Taleb-Ibrahimi had the following criticisms to make:

> **"The clearest manifestation of this sociolinguistic schism is the stubborn and obstinate negation of a child's language experiences and achievements during its pre-school years, a negation very much apparent in the Algerian education system's stated goals with regard to language, the dangers of which Mr. Boudalia-Grefou revealed. The most astounding and worrying impact is to impoverish the linguistic skills of pupils not only as learners – during the course of their school career – but also as social speakers/actors[11]". She describes the result of this as "bilingual illiteracy".**

Following on from this criticism, based on a survey of schools, Chérifa Ghettas showed that children have no poverty of language, as claimed by the method's designers, but that "on the contrary, syndromes of fluctuation, regression and fossilization in older children are more the result of poor language input from schools". Instead of helping children to develop their full potential in their language, the method impeded and impoverished their expression.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper the researchers have tried to present the main linguistic situations in Algeria with the historical background. The compains, the reasons, the socio-political context Arabization policy in Algeria as well as Arabization and language planning in education have been revealed. The mastery of the Arabic language by its users is a vital force to feed the factors of solidarity, membership, identity, and thought emancipation of a society. The Arabic

language is also that space in which and through which the same numbers express themselves and realize their development. Being aware of that, French authorities in no time showed concern about that element i.e., CA to attack its means of survival and development. The interest given to statistics to inquire about the population from a literacy point of view and the exiting school infrastructure ended with the French determination to fight the Koranic school and the control of restriction of indigenous education. Such a determination was reinforced with a "policy of assimilation", conceived to deprive the majority of the population from the very element particular to a society which looks for a linguistic homogeneity.

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**About the Authors:**

**Prof. Samira ABID** is a Professor of Linguistics and English Language Teaching and is a researcher presently in charge of the Language Teaching Centre of Djilali Liabes University (Algeria). She investigates language and education in multicultural and plurilingual settings

and gives special attention to educational policy for minority language communities.

**Mr. Nabil Aziz HAMADI** is a doctoral candidate and a university lecturer at the Department of English at Amar Telidji University, Laghouat ( Algeria). He holds an MA in English. His research interests focus on English language teaching methodology, curriculum design, and use of ICT in language teaching and learning. He has contributed to some international and national conferences.