

## Bottom-up Actors' Attitudes towards Languages at the Algerian Primary Educational Level: A Case Study

Dr. Ikram YUCEF

<sup>1</sup> Mohamed Ben Ahmed University –Oran2- Algeria , youcef.ikram@univ-oran2.dz

*Received: 16/07/2022*

*Accepted: 18/09/2022*

*Published: 08/10/2022*

### Abstract:

It is widely acknowledged that Arabization is considered as one of the major reforms tackled since independence. Despite the promotion of Arabic, the country exhibits a rich linguistic diversity through the existence of the mother tongues such as: Tamazight. This paper investigates primary school educationalists' attitudes towards the language in education policies undertaken and whether there is readiness to future reforms. To reach that, we opted for a semi-structured interview with 3 headmasters and 6 teachers from 3 different primary schools in Maghnia. The main findings reveal that participants hold positive attitudes towards Arabic meanwhile they hope for a solid and effective Arabization policy. In addition, any initiative to incorporate Tamazight is perceived to be far-fetched due to several cultural and linguistic reasons.

**Keywords:** Arabic; Tamazight; Education; mother tongues; Arabization.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Algeria has been regarded as a rich sociolinguistic scene that merits closer analysis. Two official languages, standard Arabic and Tamazight illustrate the nation's status planning image along with the dialectal varieties that shape every day's interactions. Due to the richness of the whole language scenery in Algeria, in this paper, a look at the impact of these languages and varieties of languages by relying on a study that examines informants' attitudes towards Arabization which one of the hugest

reforms since independence at the primary level and whether Tamazight would gain ground in a non-Berberphone area. The findings will provide interesting trends that echo some suggestions and recommendations for an effective language planning design.

Hence, this paper aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What are primary school teachers and headmasters' attitudes towards the Arabization policy?
- 2- What might be teachers and headmasters' attitudes towards the implementation of Tamazight as a school subject?

## **2. The Linguistic Profile of Algeria**

The language contact in Algeria bears mentioning different linguistic outcomes, not just the languages and variety of languages being under use, a set of sociocultural factors as well as a variety of linguistic repertoires tend to occur. Among these sociocultural factors, attitudes are relatively omnipresent in either bottom up hierarchy of language planning or a range of possibilities to employ languages according to domains of use. The Arabic language was accounted to be the vehicle of Arabization. After independence, policy makers foresaw Arabic as the sole medium to restore the country's sense of nationalism. Suleiman (2003,p.219) mentions that: "The existence of one language in the nation helps communication between members of the nation concerned, and this in turn can enhance the cohesiveness with which the nation acts and imagines itself". The existence of one language helps communication between the members of the nation concerned and this in turn can enhance cohesiveness. Interestingly, as far as Arabic is concerned, at one extreme, standard Arabic, that is (high) variety is typically employed to fulfil all formal aspects such as: education and formal, official uses, however, the (low) variety characterizes informal contexts at the other.

Since Algeria is undoubtedly a part of the Arab world, the Arabic language despite layers of multilingualism, was seen as beneficial to confirm such reality.in this attempt, Mostari (2004, p.41) clarifies that "the process of Arabization seems to be caught between national identity and unity." The Arabization policy was meant to replace French in the educational level. Therefore, at the practical level, we can point out that

the increase in the time devoted to the Arabic instruction aimed at reinforcing the Arabic language among learners and reaching out a unified language of education away from bilingualism.

By the 1980's, a total Arabization policy had been followed. Obviously, it was never an easy task, as far as possible, scientific subjects at the university level remain in French. When it comes to planning, the Algerian higher council of Arabic enacted decrees in order to implement Arabic in administration and other walks of life. In addition to be awarded an elevated position since it has been for decades, par excellence, the language that proves religious beliefs especially through being the language of the holy book of Quran.

It is of a prime importance to possess a clear understanding about the mechanism of Arabization and what advantages it can bring about in the field of education. It would be useful to add that language practices are built through speech communities and they are mainly an essential criterion which contributes towards the success or failure of language policies. Spolsky (2004,p.40) affirms that:

Language policy operates within a speech community, of whatever size. The domain of language policy may be any defined or definable social or political or religious group or community, ranging from a family through a sports team or neighborhood or village or workplace or organization or city or nation state or regional alliance.

The Arab world should share common aspirations for a better future. Theoretically speaking, in Algeria, for instance, the vernaculars despite being the widespread means of interaction, none of these have a written mode. By opposition, Tamazight requires huge process of standardization which will eventually strengthen its position as a co-official language. Consequently, language policies stretch between recent and past texts which may result confusion (Johnson, 2013, p.117). Algerian Arabic, by virtue, the mother tongue of a large number of the Algerian population despite of the fact that the vernacular serve 'informal communicative exchanges" Albirini (2016, p.3), it still faces challenges that require indeed corpus planning efforts to be promoted to a standard language.

The French colonialism in Algeria imposed French to gain supremacy over existing languages and varieties of language being in contact. As a result of a long period of settlement, French unlike Arabic remains the medium of science and technology. Its value persists over prestigious domains. “French in Algeria still fulfills a large functional range. Despite this lingering presence and the Francophonie's attempts to resist English and survive as a powerful lingua franca in the 21st century. (Belmihoub, 2018, p.19). French-Arabic bilingualism is the outcome of a massive linguistic imperialism. Arabization could not oust yet foreign language role particularly French from being the language of science. Nevertheless, there is a need to a systematic fashion which clearly goes in par with the value of local languages and the pressure made by forcing languages nowadays at a global level. There are several contradictions that foreground the linguistic situation in Algeria; multilinguals at a practical level signal the increase of a bilingual education demand. Recently, attitudes towards French are no more regraded as they used to be in the past due to subsequent factors to name but a few, the English language that is considered as a global language.

Tamazight is considered according the Algerian constitution as a co-official language in Algeria. Hence, “The recognition of Tamazight as a national language reflects a desire to reconcile the arabophones and the Francophones in Algeria” (Chemami, 2011, p.232). Tamazight, in spite of its officialisation, its corpus planning is found mainly as a challenge. Thus, there is a close connection between corpus and acquisition planning in which the latter prevails its spread among a larger population.

In order to boost Tamazight value as a part of the country's cultural and linguistic richness, it was introduced in the educational system by the year of 2005. As for the preservation of Tamazight, by the year of 1990, the department of Tamazight language and culture was established in the city of Tizi Ouzou along with the creation of the world Tamazight congress in 1995.

## **2.2 Methodology**

The current study relies on a case study. It aims to uncover teachers and headmasters' attitudes towards Arabization and the implementation of Tamazight their primary educational institutions in the city of Maghnia. This research explores the respondents' own experiences by gathering a plethora of attitudes so as to attain the research objectives. To reach the needed data and necessary information; we opted for a semi structured interview with 6 teachers along with 3 headmasters. The interview serves as a facilitating research tool to find out accounts of evaluation and recommendations concerning the language policy at the primary level. As for participants, they were invited to take part in a semi structured interview since it paves the way to them 'to respond to their own terms' (Garrett et al, 2003, p.34)

### **The Research Site**

As far as the research site is concerned, 3 primary schools at the Algerian educational system have been selected at the city of Maghnia (Tlemcen). The selection is based on the fact that this city is a Berberphone region and therefore Tamazight has not been introduced yet as a school subject.

### **The Research Objectives**

- To gather participants' perceptions and attitudes towards the Arabization policy and the possibility to implement Tamazight as a school subject.
- To analyze respondents' findings from the basis of a purely bottom up level of language policy.

## **3- Results of the Main Findings**

Since attitudes are "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour" (Eaglerly & Chaiken, 1991, p.1), the present research investigation accounts for understanding respondents' linguistic choices and beliefs.

### **Question 1: Perceptions towards the Arabization Policy**

The results yielded that most participants regard Arabic as crucial in the educational system. Hence, it is seen as the language of Arabic culture and literature. For them, standard Arabic is mainly an official form and has ultimately an impact on children's learning process.

**Arabic is the language of our identity, we believe that since we are Muslims, Arabic brings about unification.  
(Pseudonym: Leila)**

Indeed, another headmaster acknowledges that:

**The Arabic language is our official language not only culturally but educationally. We believe that it could be a language of science and knowledge once again if it is given more attention.” (Pseudonym: Muhammed)**

Arabization is undoubtedly one of the prominent language reforms that have been taken place since 1962. One teacher argues in regards to the effectiveness of Arabization :

**Personally, I think that Arabization has been a huge step to implement Arabic as the language of instruction contrary to the past use of both French and Arabic simultaneously. Arabic is the language that is spoken by millions of people around the world. I expect that it will spread more in the future. (Pseudonym: Toufik).**

Another informant added that:

**A look back at the history of Algeria, there was the existence of many languages due to colonization and other circumstances however with the departure of the French colonization, Arabization was the proposed alternative. At the primary level, I can tell you that it is an obstacle.  
(Pseudonym: Ali)**

Furthermore, only one participant argues that Arabization needs great efforts to build homogeneous educational system. He says:

**Arabization still faces major hindrances if this policy aims to strengthen the status of Arabic; it should open doors to new dynamics as our world witnesses competition between world languages. (Pseudonym: Muhammed)**

### **Question 2: Attitudes towards Tamazight**

The second question aims to uncover aims to uncover both teachers and headmasters' attitudes towards Tamazight. Their responses are of utmost importance as they reflect the core of these research findings. An interviewed teacher in this regards mentions that:

**Well, Tamazight has become an official language and we are all aware of that, for me I have no negative views towards this language but I do not think our children need it at school. (Pseudonym: Farida)**

Within the same vein, another participant commented that:

**Tamazight is one aspect of our multilingual country, so I am Arabized since my childhood, I can neither speak nor write through it. (Pseudonym: Ali)**

### **Question 3: Attitudes towards the implementation of Tamazight as a school subject**

The research site selected for our study has never witnessed the implementation of Tamazight as a school subject. In keeping with this goal, an evaluative account of any future reforms can be suggested by educationalists. Accordingly, one headmaster says:

**I hold no conflicting ideas towards Tamazight however I do not see the possibility of its implementation since we live in a non-Berberphone zone. If it is widely spread in the country, I would think it could probably happen. Afterwards, a teacher mentions that Tamazight needs to become a written language**

**before thinking about its spread; it needs huge efforts.**

**(Pseudonym: Toufik)**

Among the teachers that we interviewed, one of them stated that:

**Tamazight is threatened by the dominance of Arabic and other foreign languages. As language learners, we tend to follow the language that offers opportunities. I do not blame anyone, Tamazight has its own native speakers and they have the right to perceive it positively. (Pseudonym: Soumia)**

Only one participant mentions:

**In the future we hope to see our local languages holding a better status in society and even in education; they symbolize our identity and unity. (Pseudonym: Abdullah)**

#### **Question 4: Suggestions about a better language policy design at the primary level**

Participants were asked about their perceptions and attitudes towards the language policy implemented at the primary level. Indeed, educators can help language planners build an evaluative account about acquisition planning. One informant described her own experience by saying that:

**The primary educational level is a very critical phase for learners because they are required to learn Arabic and French. From my humble experience, I could mention that sizable efforts need to be done to reach better results. Though, I believe that children at this stage are able to learn quickly and more than we can expect. (Pseudonym: Leila)**

Another informant explained a positive aspiration. He seemed to be satisfied with the current LP. He advocates:

**Arabic is our national and official language and it represent our identity. Since scientific subjects are taught in French at the higher educational system, I suppose that learners need to learn it from an early age as it is the case currently. I also want to say that we always hope for better alternatives that serve all angles of life. (Pseudonym: Abdullah)**



#### **4. Discussion and Recommendations**

Drawing on the interview results, this study revealed that educationalists' attitudes have proved to be the outcome of cultural, historical and economic factors. The majority revealed a sentimental attachment to Arabic. More importantly, perhaps, there is a number of challenges that merit constant planning. Hence, there is a question of plurality that shapes the sociolinguistic profile of Algeria. To counter these arguments, Arabization for them has meant to spread Arabic in education but rather has gained Arabic the priority to be revived especially in a globalized world. However, it seems quite obvious that huge efforts need to be paid so as Arabic can be well presented in all domains.

From a pragmatic perspective, standard Arabic is by far predominant in the educational system. The argument put forward is that it would be reasonable to settle balance between the linguistic practices and expectations set in education. Within this reality in mind, Algeria inherited a linguistic plurality that shapes the colloquial variety at a greater extent; this situation is widely known by linguists, policy makers and even educationalists. As such, Arabization is meant to be a vehicle of a sustained programme. On the counter part, important subjects are taught in French once learners reach university level. Standard Arabic does not dislocate children from their linguistic environment; meanwhile, this worry is felt on the basis of a long term perspective. Oral cultures need to be preserved as they mirror Algeria's heritage that go hand in hand with the ecology of language (Haugen, 1972).

Building upon the findings, the Arabization policy should be looked at from new lenses in order to reach effectiveness. There is an awareness from the educationalists which is in a broad image illustrating their expectations for free- divergent LEPs at the primary level.

From the outset, Tamazight widely exists throughout the North African region. In Algeria, for instance, it is spoken by approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the whole population as estimated by Chaker in 2004. The question whether this non-standardized variety faces threat of loss remains on the top pyramid issue of language planning. From the

perspective of linguistic environment whereby Tamazight is non-existent; it is essential to raise a call for language maintenance and revitalization for its favour.

Language choice is indicative to favour or disfavour a given language. The educational domain promotes towards building a cognitive ability that helps learners express themselves. Even language attitudes are the outcome of which role a certain language plays. The implementation of a new language in totally new environment stands against achieving mutual intelligibility among speakers. With this trend, a language that preoccupies a social function is unable to generate favourable attitudes since these attitudes are:

**Disposition to reach favourable or unfavourably to a class of objects. This disposition is often taken to compare these components: feelings, (affective element), thoughts (cognitive element) and following upon these predispositions to act in a certain way (behavioural element)”. (Edwards, 1994, p.97)**

Educationalists recommend dealing with language policy systematically since Algeria is part of the African continent that is widely known by its hybrid linguistic diversity. As a matter of fact, the human language itself is a treat of value and identity. All initiatives to preserve one's language are a step forward to preserve its speakers' rights in selecting their language for communicative purposes. However, the whole situation is accompanied with multiple impacts. Only effective cooperation between bottom-up and top-down actors could promote or safeguard languages being into existence.

Overall, the sound language policy is one of the major wills and expectations of the whole educational staff not solely teachers and headmasters. The ongoing discourse in regards to the manners through which satisfactory ends can be reached, rely heavily on micro and macro levels of LP. Arabization for instance should encompass the fact of identity to widen its horizons nowadays as it is very inescapable to deny the role of foreign languages and mostly English over economic and scientific world exchanges.

## **5. Conclusion**

In a nutshell, endangered languages still face severe challenges to be omnipresent amidst other instrumental languages. The school is the place where a language grows

and spread besides all languages need to live in harmony in a complementary relationship underlying the importance of minority languages that process credibility.

## **6- Bibliography**

Suleiman, y. *The Arabic language and national identity*, Edinburgh university press. (2003).

Mostari, H.A. A sociolinguistic perspective on Arabization and language use in Algeria . *language problems and language planning*, 28(1),25-43. (2004).

Spolsky, B. *Language Policy*. New York : Cambridge University Press .2004

Johnson, D. C. *Language policy*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013a

Albirini, A. *Modern Arabic sociolinguistics: Diglossia, variation, code switching, attitudes and identity*. London & New York: Routledge. 2016

Belmihoub, K, *Language Problems and Language Planning* 42:2 pp. 144–172. issn 0272-2690 | e-issn 1569-9889 © John Benjamins Publishing Company 2018

Chemami, M.A. Discussing plurilingualism in Algeria: The status of French and English languages through the education policy. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*. 4: 227–34. 2011

Garrett, P.,et al. *Investigating Language Attitudes: Social Meanings of Dialect, Ethnicity and Performance*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 2003

Eagley, A., & Chaiken, S. *The Psychology of Attitudes*. London: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993

Haugen, E. The Ecology of Language. Standford, CA: Standford University Press. 1972

Edwards, J. Multilingualism (1<sup>st</sup> ed). Routledge, 1994