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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The evolution of the status and teaching of Amazigh in Morocco: From marginalization to institutionalization

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Abstract

The present paper provides a critical review of the trajectory of the status and teaching of the Amazigh language in Morocco in an attempt to contextualize its state of the art following the recent changes in the Moroccan language policy. The assumptions herein discussed are not based on fieldwork, but rather on previous literature, document analysis, and numerical data reported by the Ministry of Education between the years 2003 and 2010. Such an approach is expected to pave the path for future fieldwork research by investigating the extent to which some of the claims herein advanced tend to align with the de-facto reality of the Amazigh language in a variety of priority domains of public life, governed by the recently validated organic law 26.16, including the Moroccan educational system.

1. Introduction

Amazigh is allegedly the indigenous language of the Maghreb; it is argued to have existed since almost 5000 years ago (Boukous, 1995, p. 18). The language is spoken in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and parts of adjoining Sub-Saharan countries. The word Amazigh is used as an umbrella term to refer to a number of related, but not all mutually intelligible, dialects of the Hemito-Semitic family. The official writing system in which the language is written is known as Tifinagh, an indigenous script which allegedly was used to write Amazigh varieties across North Africa. The language policy the state embraced immediately after Morocco obtained independence has contributed to marginalization of the Amazigh language in a variety of intimate (i.e., home) and priority domains of public life (Idhssaine & El Kirat, 2019).

Moroccan society is qualified as a multilingual setting where a number of languages are in contact. Such intriguing complexity has brought about several sociolinguistic phenomena, including, but not limited to, code-switching, bi/multilingualism, language shift, language endangerment, and language loss. The latter are all closely related that one phenomenon could lead to another. The fact that Morocco is a bi/multilingual country by no means entails that all Moroccans are fluent bilinguals, an allegation often taken for granted among foreigners when addressing the big Maghreb region in general and Morocco in particular. Indeed, it is common to come across people who do not speak French at all in Morocco or have a limited command of the language, a scenario that is observed among the unprivileged communities with lower socioeconomic status. The close interplay between bi/multilingualism and language revitalization does not only concern the community itself, but also education policies whereby endangered languages are incorporated into the school system and other priority domains of public life to guarantee their maintenance and vitality. In fact, this is reminiscent of the Moroccan context in which the de facto promotion of Amazigh was first initiated through its introduction to primary education alongside MSA.

2. Towards Amazigh Legitimization

The 1962 constitution promulgated immediately after Morocco gained independence was instrumental in deciding the fate of the Moroccan language policy. In fact, post-independence Morocco was characterized by an ideological conflict, which was not favorable to the Amazigh language in general due to the prevailing pan-Arabist ideology (Boukous, 2011). Although the Moroccan nationalists advocated for the unification of

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Morocco in the Arabo-Islamic world, they regarded Amazigh as a colonial intervention and a real threat to Arab unity. During pan-Arabism in the 1970s, the Amazigh issue was regarded as a reactionary attitude one could simply be arrested for (El Kirat, 2004). Such marginalization has led to the emergence of a handful of Amazigh associations to advocate for their linguistic and cultural rights, including the Association of l'Université d'été D'Agadir, founded by a new group of Soussi intellectuals in the capital city of Rabat and l'Association Nouvelle de Culture et des Arts Populaires, also known as Tamaynut (El Kirat, 2004). The aim of the Amazigh Cultural Movement (ACM) was not only the recognition of the Amazigh language and culture as integral components of the Moroccan national identity, but also its historical legitimacy and cultural autonomy.

The ACM had to wait until the 1990s to become effectively active thanks to the inauguration of the "Agadir Charter" in August 1991, a declaration which sought to legitimize the movement as a legal organism advocating for the democratization of linguistic and cultural rights in Morocco. In this regard, Ouazzi (2000) states that the ACM has managed to relatively influence the authorities to take positive stands towards Amazigh; yet, the Arabist ideology (i.e., Arab nationalism) was still predominant in the Moroccan linguistic market where the Amazigh language and culture remained considerably marginalized. Therefore, the Amazigh community had to assimilate to the prevailing ideology as a token of embracing Islam and showing their nationalism. The beginning of the 90s was a turning point in the history of the ACM as their demands became more political and started to gain interest in the Moroccan media. This was initially manifested in the historical speech delivered by King Hassan II on August 20th, 1994, in which he publicly legitimized the movement.

> I talked, my dear People, about dialects. Why? I estimate that the dialects are components of our authenticity. Arrived with the Koran, Arabic has not suppressed our dialects. (Translation by Lehtinen, 1996, p. 18)

The king's speech was an immediate reaction to a group of Amazigh activists from the association Tilleli that were all arrested in Errachidia, a city in southern Morocco, for allegedly trying to disturb public order through raising banners and slogans in Tifinagh during the celebration of the International Labor Day on 1st May. The King himself highlighted the importance of integrating national dialects into primary education, arguing that their teaching could potentially enhance the country's immunity to the cultural and linguistic invasion of the colonial heritage. Of interest here is that the same argument used by the nationalists and the state to legitimize the denial of an official status to Amazigh or at least its recognition as an element of the Moroccan national identity has also been adopted to advocate the

teaching of national dialects. Analyzing the King's speech, Lehtinen (1996) observed that the choice of the term "dialects" to refer to a full-fledged language could be interpreted as a political mechanism to divide the ACM through pinpointing to the regional varieties of the language. By and large, despite being a political necessity, one could argue that the speech has fairly contributed to changing the officials' attitudes towards the Amazigh issue, paving the path for subsequent measures I shall discuss in the next subsections.

The speech delivered by the late King Hassan II on August 20th, 1994, was substantially instrumental in legitimizing the ACM agenda where the recognition and teaching of the Amazigh language were central. The politicization of the Amazigh issue as well as its incorporation into the media landscape have brought about a relative change in the authorities' attitudes towards Amazigh, an act which first manifested in the promulgation of article 110[1] included in the National Educational Charter. The latter seeks, inter alia, to accommodate the Amazigh language and culture as a integral reflex of Morocco's pluralism and nation-state building alongside Modern Standard Arabic. The charter is governed by the principle of complementary distribution of languages where Modern Standard Arabic is perceived as the language of national and religious identity, whereas Amazigh is regarded as the vehicle of regional identity. Foreign languages were instead considered as a medium to open on the world. The integration of Amazigh into the educational charter seems to be, at the surface, a crucial step in the recognition of the Amazigh language and identity. However, a careful analysis of the premises of the articles 115-116 of the charter reveals a great deal of ambiguity "not only in the appellation and status of Amazigh, but also in its function" (Ennaji, 2005, p. 67).

Equally important is that the function assigned to the Amazigh language in the charter of education encourages Moroccan schools to practice a kind of "opening" on Amazigh, a term deemed problematic as it implies that the latter is not part of the Moroccan identity. Berdouzi (2000) also analyzed the premises of the charter to conclude that it does not make any explicit reference to Arabization, nor does it allude to the establishment of an Arabic Language Academy to oversee the modernization of the language (p. 21). A new declaration was subsequently issued by King Mohammed VI on July 30th, 2001, in which the latter ultimately recognized the Amazigh language(s) and culture as integral constituents of the Moroccan identity that should be preserved and promoted as a national heritage of all Moroccans. In fact, the king's initiative was rather a safety measure than a linguistic one; it was the result of the increasing pressure from the ACM and the Black Spring erupted in Algeria, which brought about clashes between protestors and security forces in Tizi Ouzou insofar as thousands injured and over 120

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[1] Marley (2004) provides an English translation of article 110, which reads as follows "Morocco will now be adopting a clear, coherent and constant language policy within education. This policy has three major

thrusts: the reinforcement and improvement of Arabic teaching, diversification of languages for teaching science and technology and an openness to Tamazight" (p. 31).

died.

The king also opened up about his Amazigh origins on the part of his mother, thereby contributing to the legitimacy of all the demands included in the Amazigh Manifesto. According to Maddy-Weitzman & Zisenwine (2007), the Amazigh Manifesto does not differ from the Agadir Charter in terms of demands, except that "it addresses Moroccan's recent history in an unabashedly, revisionist, and explicit tone [and] it fairly hammered away at the denial of Morocco's 'Amazighes', and the arrogation by professional politicians and most members of Morocco's elite, since 1956, of monopolistic right to 'patriotism' and political action" (p. 107). This was shortly followed by the Ajdir Dahir on October 17th, 2001, a decree which marked the beginning of a new era for Amazigh through the creation of the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) to allegedly safeguard, promote, and strengthen the place of the Amazigh culture in the educational system, society, and media landscape (Boukous, 2011; El Kirat, 2004). However, Boussagui (2020) asserts that the creation of IRCAM seems to have "produced a row within the ACM, and many activists saw IRCAM as a domestication of the ACM and the integration of IRCAM was viewed as a betrayal to the Amazigh cause" (p. 85).

Some activists have often considered IRCAM as another mechanism adopted by the deep state (i.e., Makhzen) to control the Amazigh issue and weaken the ACM that has often advocated for the linguistic and cultural rights of the Amazigh community. The multiple tasks assigned to IRCAM are clearly listed in the Ajdir Dahir and include the following points: (i) to safeguard, maintain, protect and diffuse the Amazigh culture; (ii) to promote and improve research on the Amazigh culture; (iii) to promote the Amazigh artistic culture; (iv) to study the written form of Amazigh to facilitate its teaching (i.e., production of didactic materials); (v) to actively contribute to the elaboration of training programs; (vi) to help research and training at the university level; (vii) to promote the integration of Amazigh in communication; (viii) to cooperate with national and foreign centers. In pursuance of these goals, IRCAM cooperates with a variety of ministerial departments to successfully execute public policies regarding Amazigh language teaching. Boukous (2011) also states that IRCAM regularly provides "counsel to the king on issues pertinent to the promotion of Amazigh in all its expressions" (p. 62) (see also Royal Decree n° 1 - 01 - 299, 2001).

Of the alleged achievements fulfilled by IRCAM are, inter alia, the ongoing standardization process of the Amazigh language and the choice of the Tifinagh script as its official writing system, an initiative the king has single-handedly taken due to the increasingly ideological and political debate the issue has brought about. However, substantial criticism was leveled against such decision from those in favor of the Arabic script, arguing that the use of Tifinagh hinders the promotion of Amazigh and, most importantly, its spread among Moroccans. A third camp advocated for the adoption of the Latin script as the official writing system for the language, given its popularity and visibility at the international level. The proponents of the Arabic script argue that the latter would indeed reinforce Moroccans' Islamic identity, and that the use of the Latin script would "endanger their attachment to their religion and alienate them from their Muslim community" (Boussagui, 2020, p. 37). Boukous (2004) argues that the codification of Amazigh was allegedly conducted within a framework wherein a number of regional variations were treated as synonymies, of which speakers could choose between the normalized form or the other competing forms. Yet, the aim to turn the Amazigh language into a full-fledged one that satisfies the needs speakers encounter in everyday life has been challenging to pursue and demands time (Ibid. 2004).

The standardization of the Amazigh language should be done on objective and scientific grounds in an attempt to maintain the particularities of regional varieties. The state of the art of the standardized norm does not seem to epitomize the sum of all the local varieties, and thus running the risks of bringing about internal conflicts among members of the Amazigh communities. This is indeed evident in the fact that the variety projected by IRCAM is still not intelligible to a large number of Amazighs that one could simply question the manner in which the standardization is being done, and whether it is ideologically biased. It also hinders the teaching of the Amazigh language, especially among semi-speakers who still do not feel included. Other achievements pursued by IRCAM and the ACM are the relative incorporation of Amazigh into the school system and media landscape through conventions signed with the respective ministries.

3. Evolution of the Amazigh-in-Education Policy

Shortly after the creation of IRCAM, Amazigh was incorporated into primary education in September 2003 as a pivotal step in the promotion of the language. The regression of the Amazigh-in-education policy, however, tends to reinforce the allegation that the policy was driven by political necessity rather than linguistic or cultural concerns. The language was first introduced in 300 schools taught by approximately 1000 teachers who received pedagogical training in Amazigh teaching (Errihani, 2006). Equally important here is the script in which Amazigh should be taught, a debate which ultimately led to the proposal of three candidates, namely the Tifinagh alphabet, the Arabic alphabet, and the Latin alphabet. A political solution was ultimately offered whereby Tifinagh was adopted as the official writing system by virtue of being the indigenous North African script used in numerous inscriptions across the big Maghreb (see also Chabot, 1940; Marcy, 1936). The politicization of the Tifinagh alphabet could potentially be justified by the fact that the majority of the Amazigh community had no say in

the choice of the script, which in turn amounts to the top-down approach adopted by the State to handle the Amazigh issue. Moreover, despite being a political necessity, the majority of the ACM tend to believe that the driving factor behind the use of Tifinagh resides in the symbolic value it represents for the Amazigh community, who consider it as an identity marker through which they retain their cultural legitimacy and avoid assimilating to the Arabist ideology that favors the Arabic script. The third camp, however, that proposed the adoption of the Latin script as an alternative to the Arabic and Amazigh alphabets was accused of being neocolonialists.

Prior to its integration into the Moroccan school system, the Amazigh language has been undergoing a standardization process, one which Boukous (2011) defines as "the intervention on a language to make of it a "standard" based on a linguistic norm defined in advance" (p. 150). He also argues that planning the corpus of Amazigh through its standardization and codification has several benefits. First, it allows for better communication within the community; second, it seems to facilitate the unity of the community; third, it strengthens the feelings of identity, and finally it facilitates the integration of the language into both school and university education. Sadiqi (2011) claims that the teaching of Amazigh was motivated by the need to allegedly safeguard the language as a token of Morocco's ancestral identity, of which the Amazigh language stands as the mother tongue for a substantial number of Moroccans (p. 5). The call for the adoption of Amazigh as a medium of instruction as part of the Amazigh revitalization process was also among the demands of the ACM. The latter has often advocated for this proposal due to its efficacy for the eradication of illiteracy among both the youth and adults, a claim corroborated by experts from UNESCO (1953)[2] who recommend that "the use of the mother tongue should be extended to as late a stage in education as possible. In particular, pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue" (p. 3).

Unlike Algeria where the learning of Amazigh is optional, the Amazigh-in-education policy in Morocco mandates that all Moroccans must learn the language, irrespective of their ethnic or linguistic background.

The politics behind such a decision could be ascribed to the fact that the Amazigh language and culture are a common heritage of all Moroccans to cherish as an integral constituent of their national identity. Errihani (2006) postulates that designing effective educational programs to teach Amazigh to Moroccan pupils could contribute to fostering its maintenance, provided that a certain degree of congruity between language policies and people's beliefs and practices is established (pp. 143-144). In this connection, Fishman (1991) argues that language revitalization depends on the extent to which the community uses the threatened variety, as well as the nature of their beliefs and perceptions about it (p. 368). The implementation process of the Amazigh-in-education policy is also governed by the collaboration between IRCAM and the Ministry of Education. In 2005, 140 teachers and inspectors in around 32 centers were trained to teach Amazigh. Two years later, the number increased to 2000 then dropped to 75 by 2018, as a result of the hectic demand to teach the language, i.e., 807 in 2003 and 1140 in 2008 (Sadiqi, 2011, pp. 9-10). The actual rate at which the ministry of education has introduced Amazigh to the school system revealed few shortcomings that resulted in failure to generalize the experience in all cycles by the 2009-2010 academic year.

Amazigh was recently incorporated into a few Moroccan universities with which IRCAM established partnerships (i.e., Agadir, Fes, Oujda, and Casablanca lately) so as to create departments specialized in the Amazigh language and culture. In fact, the Ministry of Education and IRCAM have maintained an optimistic tone with regard to the successful implementation of the Amazigh-in-education policy; yet, some members within IRCAM itself are concerned about the ongoing regression of Amazigh in the school system, a reality the Ministry of Education is not very explicit about (see Ahmed Aassid, personal communication, May 16th, 2016, as cited in Boussagui, 2020, p. 116; El Kirat & Boussagui, 2018, p.118). The tables below (table (1); (2)) exhibit the Ministry of Education's projections to make Amazigh part of every school curriculum by the 2009-2010 academic year. The data also demonstrate the Ministry's failure to gradually generalize the Amazigh teaching experience for the 1st and 2nd grades by the same academic year.

Table1. Percentage of primary schools expected to include Amazigh in their program by 2009-2010

Level	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010
1st grade	5	20	40	60	80	100	100
2nd grade		5	20	40	60	80	100
3rd grade			5	20	40	60	80
4th grade				5	20	40	60
5th grade					5	20	40
6th grade						50	20

Source: IRCAM, 2003 – 2004. (N.B.: 5% represents roughly 330 schools)

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[2] For details regarding the arguments provided by UNESCO experts in favor of mother tongue teaching, see Boukous (2000, 2001).

Table 2. Number of schools teaching Amazigh according to region

Region	Number of schools	Percentage
Ouad Dahab	9	43
Layoun	20	32
Guelmima	65	17
Sous Massa	1954	56
Gharb	26	3
Chaouia	32	3
Marrakech	306	10
Oriental	422	30
Casablanca	143	28
Rabat	327	42
Doukkala	25	2
Tadla Azilal	434	41
Meknes	1150	67
Fes	138	17
Taza	358	20
Tangier	22	1
Total	**5,431**	**26**

Source: IRCAM, 2010

Table 1 highlights the projected figures of the implementation of the Amazigh-in-education policy between 2003 and 2010. It seems that the academic year 2009-2010 was the period during which the Amazigh language was expected to become a subject of every first-grade student. Over a decade thereafter, one could see that the teaching of Amazigh is rather deteriorating due to, inter alia, the limited number of schools where the language is being taught. On the other hand, table (2) illustrates the extent to which Amazigh is actually taught in different regions across the kingdom, which in total does not exceed 26% out of all elementary schools across Morocco. One could observe the discrepancy between these numbers and the alleged projections of the Ministry of Education concerning the generalization of Amazigh in every school curriculum by 2010. The Ministry's statistics further attest that only 15% of all elementary school students in Morocco study Amazigh, and only 4% of teachers teach the language (Boukous, 2011). The regression in the Amazigh teaching experience is also evident in the significant decline of the number of students who study Amazigh as a subject in school. The table below indicates the decrease in the number of students according to their respective grades during the 2008-2009 academic year.

Table 3. Number of students who study Amazigh according to level, 2008-2009

Level	Number of students
1st grade	186,983
2nd grade	139,433
3rd grade	92,226
4th grade	55,822
5th grade	31,708
6th grade	15,008
Total	**521,180**

Source: Ministry of Education, 2010

The above data corroborates the failure of the projections of the Ministry of Education. In fact, out of the 3,518,753 students enrolled in primary school education, around 527,025 officially learn Amazigh (14.97%), a premise which yet again reveals the de facto status of the language in school curricula where it is still marginalized (see also Boussagui, 2020). Schiffman (1996) argues that discrepancies between what is stated in official documents, and the manner in which policies are implemented remains a common attribution of language policies (Errihani, 2006, p. 144). The top-down approach the state adopted to actually implement the Amazigh-in-education policy has resulted in a number of shortcomings that hinder the projections assumed by the Ministry of Education. Of the major impediments confronting the teaching of Amazigh is the ongoing lack of qualified teachers; those who were first recruited to teach the language received only a two-week training in a script totally new to them. The decision to generalize the Amazigh teaching experience has in turn pushed the Ministry of Education to start recruiting non-Amazigh teachers, who neither spoke the Amazigh language nor received a pedagogical training on how to effectively teach it (Errihani, 2006, p.152). Another challenge facing the Amazigh-in-education policy concerns the beliefs and perceptions of Moroccans, who allegedly had no say in the implementation process. According to Lewis (1981), policies which do not take into account the community's attitudes towards their language are less likely to succeed. That noted, he writes:

No policy will succeed which does not do one of three things: conform to the expressed attitudes of those involved; persuade those who express negative attitudes about the rightness of the policy; or seek to remove the causes of the disagreement. (Lewis, 1981, p. 262).

4. The Officialization of the Amazigh Language

The intense uprisings that the MENA region has recently undergone could not have gone unnoticed without ramifications on the Moroccan political arena where few popular protests raised slogans against the corruption underlying the Moroccan socio-economic system. The increasing tension expressed by the 20 February movement led to a new constitutional reform in 2011, a few weeks after the initial protests, whereby the head of State promised to reinforce the patterns of democratization among Moroccans both at the macro (i.e., institutional) and micro (i.e., socioeconomic) levels. The efforts of the Amazigh militants and groups that participated in the protests did not go unnoticed either. In fact, 2011 was an unprecedented year for the ACM as Amazigh was finally recognized as the second

official language of Morocco alongside MSA. Such status is clearly governed by provisions of article five in the 2011 constitution where Modern Standard Arabic and Amazigh are listed as the official languages of the State:

> *L'arabe demeure la langue officielle de l'État. L'Etat oeuvre à la protection et au développement de la langue arabe, ainsi qu'à la promotion de son utilisation. De même, l'amazighe constitue une langue officielle de l'État, en tant que patrimoine commun à tous les Marocains sans exception. Une loi organique définit le processus de mise en oeuvre du caractère officiel de cette langue, ainsi que les modalités de son intégration dans l'enseignement et aux domaines prioritaires de la vie publique, et ce afin de lui permettre de remplir à terme sa fonction de langue officielle.*

> *Arabic remains the official language of the State. The State works for the protection and for the development of the Arabic language, as well as the promotion of its use. Likewise, 54 Amazigh constitutes an official language of the State, being common patrimony of all Moroccans without exception. An organic law defines the process of implementation of the official character of this language, and the modalities of its integration into the school system and the priority domains of public life, so that it may be permitted in time to fulfill its function as an official language (Moroccan Const. art. 5, 2011, Trans. By Williams S Hein).*

One of the eminent attributions of article five is the call for the promulgation of an organic law, which is expected to define the overall procedural protocol to implement the official character of the Amazigh language as well as the modalities of its integration into the education system and the priority domains of public life. The recently validated organic law would grant Amazigh the institutional mechanisms necessary to fulfill its role as an official language alongside MSA. However, a substantial portion of the ACM are concerned about the manner in which the organic law will be implemented, and whether it will do justice to the Amazigh language. Such skepticism stems from the fact that the law regulating the implementation of the official character of the Amazigh language was promulgated in the last days of the legislative period of the ruling party (i.e., PJD) back in 2016, thereby corroborating the procrastination policy the State has always adopted towards the Amazigh language. The law was harshly criticized by IRCAM and several Amazigh NGOs due to the ambiguities underlying its provisions (Personal Communication, Ahmed Assid, 2019).

Another important measure the State has recently undertaken is the validation of the other organic law regulating the National Council for Languages and Moroccan Culture on February 12, 2020, an act that has raised concerns about the future of IRCAM. In fact, a closer look at article 51 of the organic law reveals that IRCAM will be entirely restructured; the law also refers to the creation of three institutional bodies, namely a section in charge of the Hassani and other Moroccan cultural expressions; a section for the Preservation of the Moroccan Heritage, and a section

responsible for the development, translation, and use of foreign languages. The actual officialization of the Amazigh language opens substantial prospects for its revitalization and integration into the priority domains of public life. In fact, the legal character the language enjoys has led to a change in social representations and attitudes towards the Amazigh language, identity, and culture. While this argument may to some extent be valid, fieldwork data yet reveals that Moroccans' attitudes towards Amazigh range from unfavorable to indifferent, especially among participants belonging to the non-Amazigh community (Idhssaine, 2020).

The present paper sought to critically discuss the state of the art of the Amazigh language by bringing to the fore the recent changes the Moroccan language policy has undergone, namely the creation of IRCAM, the integration of Amazigh into the educational system, and most importantly its recognition as the second official language alongside Modern Standard Arabic. Official data have been presented and discussed to highlight the trajectory of the Amazigh-in-Education policy and its significance in the revitalization process of endangered Amazigh varieties. One may conclude that the Amazigh teaching experience remains considerably limited in the educational system, which could primarily be attributed to the lack of trained teachers of Amazigh, and the procrastination of the state to implement the recently validated organic law 26.16.

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