

New Media of Communication and Language Shift in Morocco

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Abstract

In the wake of globalization, Morocco witnessed the emergence of highly sophisticated media of communication which affected people's life and the way they communicate with each other. Communication facilities such as Internet and mobile phones had various effects on the linguistic situation of the country. One of the remarkable changes the Moroccan linguistic repertoire knew in the last decade due to the wide use of Internet and mobile phones is the promotion of the status of Moroccan Arabic (MA) from an oral linguistic variety to a written medium of communication in social media and text messaging. Students, as will be revealed in this study, showed positive attitudes towards MA as a new medium of communication in Internet and mobile phones. They regarded it as an intimate language which transfers meaning in an easy way. This wide use of MA among students had also a remarkable effect on its spread in education, for many secondary school teachers started to give it importance due to its easiness in explanation. Such promotion of MA encouraged many scholars (Caubet 2004; Bowen 2008; Dorian 2012; Hall 2015) to talk about a new diglossic shift which Moroccan society is undergoing. The aim of this empirical research is to study the effects of new media of communication on language use in society and education, and the reason behind the shift in role of MA as a written medium of communication.

Keywords: media, language shift, Moroccan Arabic, education, globalization, communication

Introduction

Morocco's liberal economy and openness to the world eased its benefit from the technological revolution in new media of communication. Internet and mobile phones were introduced to the Moroccan society in the nineties. They exert a strong influence on Moroccans communication with each other and with the rest of the world. Thus, new languages have changed their social status and others appeared in the linguistic scene of the country. One of the most significant changes which the linguistic situation has known due to the spread of new media of communication is the promotion of MA from a low oral variety to a written one. It is, nowadays, widely used in writing messages and chatting in Internet. It has also become an informal medium of communication and teaching in science classrooms though officially rejected (Zakhir and O'Brien, 2016). To examine this linguistic shift, a number of students and teachers were studied and a standard set of instruments and techniques were used. The aim is to study the effects of the new media of communication on students' and teachers' linguistic habits in and outside classrooms.

Research methodology

Based on a quantitative and qualitative study, the present empirical research studies the influence of new media of communication on MA use in the attitudes of students and teachers. It aims to see to what extent the widespread of new sophisticated media of communication alters students' and teachers' views on MA as a practical language in education and social media communication. The author of this paper presumes that the spread of new media of communication has a significant influence on the promotion of MA in education and society. This study, therefore, is an attempt to examine the assumed diglossic shift of MA from an oral variety to a written non-standard one.

Informants: The study examined the case of 69 informants. Sixty three students were randomly chosen from two public high schools in the centre of Morocco. Twenty two are male students and forty one are females. The majority of students belong to the middle class society, for their parents occupy clerical jobs that range from blue-collar activities to public services. The age of (58) students ranges from 14 to 20 while only (5) have 21 years old. Fifty of the students are Arabs, whose mother tongue is MA, while ten are Amazigh. All these students follow their studies in science disciplines.

Six teachers were chosen to participate in this study. Five are male teachers and 1 is a female. All of them have the BA degree and their working experience ranges from 6 to 23 years. They teach different science disciplines such as Math (1), Physics (3) and Life and Earth Sciences (2). Four teachers are Amazigh while two are Arabs.

Instruments: To study the above informants, a number of instruments and techniques were used. Questionnaires were used to examine students and teachers' attitudes towards MA as a medium of communication in and outside classrooms to see the role of new media in the promotion of MA in education and society at large. Questionnaires include yes/no questions and open-ended questions. Below is an overview of the two questionnaires used in the study.

Students' questionnaire: The questionnaire addressed to students involves three main parts. The first provides information about students' sex, age and origin; the second examines

students' use of MA in media of communication; and the third studies their attitudes towards MA in education.

Teachers' questionnaire: Teachers' questionnaire is divided into four major parts. The first component gives information about teachers' sex, age and social background; the second examines their perception of MA in new media of communication; the third studies their attitudes towards the use of MA in classroom; and the fourth examines their views on the role of new media in promoting the use of MA.

Results and discussions

Students' attitudes: The following section provides an overview of the results of the questionnaire addressed to 63 students in high school. It discusses students' attitudes towards MA and its use in new media of communication.

Forty six students stated that they had Standard Arabic (SA) education in primary school, while seventeen opted for French. However, when asked about their current language of learning, all students chose SA. These attitudes were expected since Moroccan schools follow a project of Arabisation which has been implemented in the independence era. Except for few private missionary schools which adopt French as a medium of education, public schools use SA. MA, on the other hand, is limited to some informal scenes of communication or when teachers want to further explain a difficult lesson. Respondent 14 stated, "MA is used when there is a problem of understanding of a particular course."

When asked about the language of oral communication with friends, (39) students chose MA, (19) opted for French and (5) chose Amazigh. MA here is rated higher due to its dominance in informal communication among Moroccans. It also occupies the status of lingua franca between Arabs and Amazigh students. "We use MA because we all understand it," said respondent 3.

To study the impact of new media on students' language use, they were asked about their language of communication in the Internet. The majority (40) chose MA, (15) selected French and (8) opted for English. What is ironic is that all students' confirm their use of French or Arabic alphabets while writing in MA. This can be explained either by the absence of a MA script or by students' inclination to simplicity and easiness in communication. Respondent 5 claimed, "It is easy to use MA with Latin Alphabets." Another student (7) argued, "Our mastery of French is weak, and the use of SA sounds formal, that's why we resort to MA."

Students also confirmed the use of MA in writing messages in mobiles, for (47) answered in the affirmative. Again, students justified their use of MA by its easiness and practicality. "Communication with messages requires quickness, and MA offers me this," said respondent 4. Some students justified their use of MA with Latin letters by the shortage of mobiles which have Arabic keyboards. They also argue that their use of MA in writing SMS reflects the keen relationship between MA and their thoughts and feelings. "I write in MA because I think in it, not in SA or French," stated respondent 22.

To learn more about the effects of media on the spread of MA among students, they were asked whether they watch TV programmes in MA. Here, the total number of students is divided between positive and negative choices. Those who responded negatively state that MA in foreign series sounds artificial. "The variety of MA used in TV is ridiculous. It is neither the one we hear in street nor a standard Arabic. It sounds artificial," said respondent

20. The student here makes reference to the role of actors and TV reporters in cleaning MA from low street expressions and taboos, and promoting it by using a style similar to SA. Concerning students who responded positively, they argue that audiovisual media eases the spread of MA even among Amazigh families. They also pointed out that media plays an educative role in spreading literacy in MA. Respondent 1 stated, "My mother is Amazigh. She didn't use to speak any Arabic. Now due to TV and radio, she is able to communicate in MA. She learned a lot from TV."

Similar to TV programmes, Moroccan newspapers represent a new source for MA to spread in society. Students were asked if they read MA newspapers, and few of them answered in the affirmative. This is due to the limited number of newspapers which use MA. Except for some electronic MA journals (*goud*), newspapers use only few annexes in MA such as *Akhbar souk*, *hab watban*, etc. The problem of these newspapers is that they present news in a sarcastic way which makes the language sound trivial.

It is worthy of notice that students' access to media in MA positively alters their attitudes towards it as an oral low variety. For the study shows that out of 63, (57) feel that MA can be effective in education and print media. Respondent 11 said, "MA facilitates the task of learning." He added, "I feel at ease when our teachers use it in explaining scientific lessons." "MA can bear scientific theories. It is like all other languages; it just needs work," added respondent 7. Students even believed that MA may play a role in learning the official language, SA. For (45) thought that MA is similar in vocabulary to SA and eases its learning.

However, when asked about their perception of the nature of MA, the majority of students (53) regarded it an oral variety which has a lower status. This seems quite odd; for though students use MA in writing messages and emails, they still perceive it as oral. These attitudes show that students are influenced by the overall ideology which regards MA as a variety of SA. Actually, this finding has already been discovered by Hall (2017: 318) who argues, "Because media ideologies defining texting as more speech like than writing align with hegemonic ideologies of MA as an oral language and SA as a written language." Diglossia (Ferguson, 1959), then, is perceived by Moroccans as an ideology of language which is unchangeable. Some even view it as a plus for the Moroccan linguistic situation. Still, the practices of students show that the status which diglossia enjoys in Morocco is no longer stable, particularly with the increase in use of modern media of communication.

In short, students' attitudes reveal that MA is gaining more grounds in Moroccans' communication in schools and in society, at large. New sophisticated media of communication such as Internet, mobile phones and TV play a significant role in spreading MA use among students. This, perhaps, may question the validity of the ideology of a stable diglossia in Morocco in the future.

Teachers' attitudes

This section presents the results of the study of the attitudes of 6 teachers towards MA in new media of communication. These results are classified into three categories: teachers' perception of MA in new media of communication, their attitudes towards the use of MA in classroom, and the role of media in spreading MA use.

The study shows that (4) teachers are inclined to the use of MA in Internet communication while (2) prefer SA and French instead. The former teachers stated that they use MA in intimate chatting with their families and friends while they rely on SA or French in official

communication. They argue that social media of communication requires intimate languages, and MA fulfills this goal. "It is funny to use MA in writing, but it is easier in conveying our feelings," said respondent 3. These views were not accepted by the two remaining teachers who refused using MA in social media. They regard it as a sign of ignorance and lack of mastery of SA. "We are teachers; we are supposed to have a good mastery of SA and French. Why using MA?" asked respondent 6.

Teachers also show overlapping attitudes towards MA in writing SMS in mobile phones. Five teachers claimed that they use MA while one said no. Again, practicality and easiness were the dominant motives in teachers' justifications. Respondent 1 stated, "Except when I write to my colleagues in French, I always use MA in my casual messages. It is easy and helpful for expressing true emotions." This attitude brings back to discussion the idea of the ideological classification of French as a language of science education and social prestige, and MA as an oral language of intimacy. It seems that this ideology exerts a strong influence on both students' and teachers' attitudes despite their use of MA in writing.

To know more about teachers' exposure to MA in media, they were asked if they follow TV and radio programmes in MA. Here, all of them provided positive answers. They all agreed that entertaining programmes should better be broadcast in MA because they directly affect and reach the maximum of viewers and listeners. "MA in TV can ease fighting illiteracy in the country. It helps even remote families who live in far mountains to learn how to deal with issues such as child-rearing and healthcare," said respondent 6. It is indeed fruitful in educating Moroccan families, but this solves only half of the problem because a large proportion of families speak Amazigh and their understanding of MA is limited.

Unexpectedly, when asked about reading newspapers in MA, the total number of teachers responded negatively. They argue that the use of MA in newspapers reduce their credibility. "MA newspapers are trivial. They are weak and use street expressions," said respondent 1. "I don't know why they permit some journalists write in MA. It's shameful for our press," added respondent 4. Such views are ironical, for although teachers use MA in writing, they refuse reading it in newspapers. This puts the maxim of practicality of MA into question. Perhaps, teachers' perception of SA as a language of religion and identity let them see the use of MA in written media as a threat to it.

To know more about this issue, teachers were asked if they use MA in classroom, and the responses were staggering. Five teachers stated that they use it in teaching while one said that he doesn't. The former teachers argue that MA eases transferring information to students. "It is good to teach students in a language they all use and master," said respondent 5. "Why not using MA? At least, we will not spend time fighting with SA terminology in science classes," suggested respondent 2. It is clear from these attitudes that teachers are not satisfied with the project of Arabisation and revenge using MA in teaching. These results align with Zakhir and O'Brien (2016) who argue that teachers' rejection of the current incomplete Arabisation project let them use MA instead.

Teachers were also enquired if there is any effect of new media of communication on their use of MA in classroom, and they all responded negatively. They argue that their use of MA is conscious and purposeful to help students better understand. Teachers also see no threat of MA on their use of SA, as they believe that each language serves a particular need, that is, MA for informal communication and SA for formal one. Again, the ideology of language status confines MA to a low status despite its wide use among teachers.

Yet, when asked if they accept students' use of MA in classroom, half of the teachers responded in the affirmative and half said 'no.' Those who said 'yes' argue that it's easier than SA, while the others claim that MA used by students is not clean and is full of street expressions, which is not like the variety teachers use. Maybe, the clean MA which the latter teachers talked about is what proponents of MA, such as Ayouch and his colleagues, are supporting to use in education. Still, this new variety of MA is perceived by many to be artificial and ridiculous. "It is known among Moroccans as Mexican MA," said respondent 4. The teacher here makes reference to the language used in Mexican dubbed series, which are famous among Moroccan women.

Teachers also showed similar attitudes towards the effect of new media on MA spread in education. They all agreed that the wide use of social media and TV exerts a strong influence on students' use of the language in classroom. "The adoption of new alphabets for MA in writing and its use in contexts where it was forbidden before changes students' attitudes towards it," claimed respondent 5. In fact, this view was recorded among all teachers. They argue that students' use of MA in chatting makes them familiar with it in writing, which affects their writing in SA. "Sometimes I find MA words written in SA texts in exam papers," stated respondent 3.

In brief, teachers' attitudes reveal that MA is developing day-by-day through media of communication such as Internet, phones, TV and radio. They view the promotion of MA as an example of a natural language evolution which coincides with the development of contexts where it is used. Yet, they all see it as an oral language which is limited to informal scenes of communication despite its use in classrooms.

Conclusion

The above results reveal that new media of communication have significant effects on the spread of MA in society. Both students and teachers use MA in sending messages, chatting with friends, exchanging emails and following TV and radio programmes. These new functions of MA gave it an advanced role in Moroccans' communication. It shifts from an oral low variety to a written non-standard one. Hall (2013: 321) perceives the new status of MA as a diglossic shift in Morocco. However, MA use in education is still hindered by the ideology of language status which favors SA and French over MA. Students and teachers reproduce the already existing ideology which regards MA as an oral language even if it is used in writing. For the majority of them, MA is associated with intimacy and easiness in conveying meaning and emotions, but it cannot be effective in positions reserved for SA and French. What is evident is that there is an ideological conflict between MA and SA which paves the way for French to flourish in Moroccan schools and society at large (Bouteiri, 2011). Unless authorities navigate this language rivalry, new practices of MA will pervade in classrooms, which may destabilize the entire education system.

Recommendations

The issue of new media of communication and its influence on Moroccan languages needs a thorough study. To know about the rationale behind teenagers' use of MA in social media, an analytical study of their comments on facebook, twitter and emails should be conducted. Also, students' messages in mobile phones can be analyzed to see the contexts where MA is given more priority over French and SA.

The study of the effects of media on Moroccan linguistic repertoire can also focus on the increase in use of English as a scientific, modern language. Researchers, for instance, may examine the factors which attract students to learn English at university. They may also study the varieties of English which start to appear in social media due to the imperfect use of the language. Finally, English spread at the expense of SA and French can also be studied to divulge the role of new media of communication and globalization in paving the way for Anglo-Saxon values and civilization to spread in Morocco.

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