

## On Language Policy in Morocco: Towards a Prestige Planning Approach<sup>1</sup>

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**Résumé:** Le présent document examine la question de la politique linguistique et de la planification linguistique au Maroc. En particulier, nous soutenons qu'il y a un manque de stratégie claire de planification linguistique basée sur une justification politique, socio-économique, idéologique et académique solide. Ce problème a entraîné une approche éducative incohérente, créant une incompatibilité entre les différents niveaux d'enseignement, les classes sociales ainsi qu'au niveau des environnements professionnels. Pour cette raison, nous suggérons que trois éléments doivent être intégrés dans tous les efforts déployés dans la planification linguistique au Maroc tel que: le Prestige artistique, économique et celui académique/scientifique.

**Mots clés:** politique linguistique; arabisation; planification linguistique; plurilinguisme; planification de prestige.

### Abstract

The present paper addresses the issue of language policy and language planning in Morocco. In particular, it argues that there is a lack of a clear language planning strategy that is based on a sound political, socio-economic, ideological and academic justification. This problem has resulted in an inconsistent education approach, creating an incompatibility between different levels of education (e.g. high schools vs. universities), social classes (e.g. low class vs. middle/high class) and professional environments (e.g. academia vs. job market). For this reason, we suggest that three elements need to be integrated into any language planning effort. These are Literacy Prestige, Economic Prestige and Academic/Scientific Prestige.

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**Keywords:** language policy; language planning; prestige planning; economic returns; mother tongues.

## The Dilemma of Linguistic Diversity in Morocco

In Morocco, a plethora of local and foreign languages vie for prominence and dominance. The kingdom's long-standing official language is Standard Arabic (SA). However, it is no one's *de facto* native language. People learn it only in schools and often struggle to master it. Arabic, the language of the Quran, has a very strong historical and religious legitimacy. People regard it as a major part of their Islamic identity. Amazigh, the mother tongue of almost a quarter of Moroccans, is a relatively newcomer to the kingdom's constitution. Nevertheless, not much has changed for the language (Zouhir, 2014). This is mainly because Amazigh is not a single entity. The name rather refers to three different, sometimes unintelligible, dialects spoken in various regions of Morocco (Boukous, 1995). The three compete with each other to maintain their particularities in the standardization project of Amazigh, orchestrated by the IRCAM.<sup>4</sup> This is added to the fact that the three together still struggle to capitalize on their constitutional privilege to become more included in the country's social, economic and cultural domains. Moroccan Arabic (MA), the Arabic variety spoken in Morocco, is without any doubt the *lingua franca* of the country. Almost everyone can speak it either as a native or a second language. Yet, MA is perceived negatively even by its own native speakers (Loutfi, 2012). It is regarded as a low variety short of the expressive power and the academic appeal.

As if matters were not complicated enough, the linguistic scene of Morocco includes other foreign languages battling among each other and against the local varieties to maintain a certain position or scale up to a new one. French, the language of the previous main colonizer of Morocco, has a strong standing that sometimes overshadows even the local varieties. It is the language of private businesses (e.g. banks), public administrations (e.g. ministries) and academia, especially science majors. The country's elite consider French a privilege that they are not willing to give up on easily. Speaking French sets them and their children apart from the rest. The rest, however, see French as a symbol of colonization and a social destabilizer. French is taught both in public and private schools, but, unfortunately, not with equal efficacy and success. In public schools, it is merely taught as a subject. In private schools, it is used as a means of instruction to teach a variety of subjects, making private schools goers more fluent in speaking French. At universities, students with a public-school background have no choice but to study science majors in French after years of learning science subjects in Arabic. Many of them either drop out as a result or struggle to get their License (i.e. BS) in due time. As for students with a private-school background, French is not a problem to worry about.

As it stands, the richness of the linguistic marketplace in Morocco creates a dilemma for any language policy and planning effort. The dilemma consists of the necessity of promoting foreign languages as dictated by the dynamics of globalization, on the one hand,

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<sup>4</sup>IRCAM stands for 'Institut Royal de Culture Amazigh' (Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture). It was founded by king Mohammed VI in 2001 to promote the status of Amazigh language and culture.

and the obligation of maintaining and preserving local languages for cultural and political reasons, on the other hand. If foreign languages are promoted at the expense of local languages, language loss or death becomes inevitable, which has been the case in several speech communities (El Kirat, 1997, 2004; Ech-Charfi, 2004). If, on the contrary, local languages are promoted to the detriment of foreign languages, this will largely affect the country's socio-economic and socio-political advancement and undermine cross-cultural communication. Therein lies the crux of the dilemma.

Another perennial question characterizing the language policy and planning in Morocco has been the status of mother tongues. Although the state has recognized Amazigh as an official language in its constitution and has integrated it in primary schools, nothing has been done to promote the language to a level where it can compete with foreign languages. There is no denying the fact that mother tongue-based teaching and official recognition are effective factors in maintaining and preserving endangered languages (Ouakrime, 2010); they also give local languages the competitive edge to compete with foreign languages whose power is mostly driven by the forces of globalization. However, reality has indicated otherwise. Teaching through mother tongues and official recognition alone are not sufficient. This state of affairs is demonstrated when one looks at the language consumers' attitudes (see Errihani, 2008 and Loutfi, 2017).

In Morocco, the status of MA remains a mystery. The lack of interest in MA might be motivated by basically two reasons. First, the language is taken to be a derivative, if not a corrupt, form of Classical Arabic. Thus, it would be redundant and inappropriate to promote both, thereby reducing MA to everyday communication only. Second, MA lacks a written system, and its lexicon is not rich enough to cover domains otherwise covered by SA<sup>5</sup>. In the domain of education, however, there have been calls to make MA the language of instruction in public schools, as a replacement for SA. One big proponent of this idea is Nourddine Ayouch, a social activist and member of the Supreme Education Council. He is also popularly known as an adamant francophone. Allegedly, Ayouch is basing his suggestion on studies that have shown that studying in one's own mother tongue is more beneficial for academic achievement. However, many are criticizing him for ignoring the linguistic diversity of Morocco, in the sense that not all Moroccans speak 'standard' MA as a mother tongue (see section 3.2 and footnote 3). There are people who speak different forms of MA: others speak one of the Amazigh varieties, and for some Moroccans French has become their *de factio*native language. Maybe Ayouch is well-aware of this, some suggest; hence, he might be implying to follow the diversity where it would lead us. Some critics of Ayouch have accused him of trying to serve a foreign agenda against the Arabic and Islamic identity of the country, through creating a dis-unified society whose communities would have different world views shaped by their distinct languages, which would eventually lead to the alienation of SA. On scientific grounds, Ayouch's proposal lacks a well-grounded language policy as it ignores and overlooks that there are several factors at play with regards to the linguistic debate in Morocco (see Cooper, 1989).

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<sup>5</sup> An emergent variety has been suggested that combine both SA and MA. This variety is referred to as Middle MA. Although its linguistic system has not been studied explicitly, it is said that Middle MA enriches its lexicon from SA, while it still maintains the phonology, morphology and syntax of MA. See Benhallam and Dahbi (1990), Youssi (1995) and Ech-Charfi (2004), amongst others.

Also, for many, the privileges attributed to French are not justified, raising many eyebrows as a result. Why has French stayed after the French left? Who is benefitting from the current status quo? France, Maybe? Is not English a more global choice? The last question is the easiest to answer. Yes, English is undoubtedly the language of science, technology, global business and international relations. Many foreign investors have repeatedly voiced their concerns about the weak presence of English and the unjustified use of French in business in Morocco. English is also appealing to young people who find it more useful for looking for information and entertainment, especially in the era of the internet. When it comes to Morocco's northern regions, Spanish is the default preferred foreign language among locals due to the geographical closeness to Spain and the latter's colonial past in those regions.

After 100 years of French as the official and national language of Rwanda, the latter has abandoned French in favor of English in the domains of education, business and administration (Samuelson and Freedman, 2010). Despite this disruptive and sudden move, Rwanda is considered to be one of the fastest growing economies not only in Africa but also in the whole world. The case of Rwanda breaks the long-held myth which says that French is here (i.e. Morocco) to stay and that abandoning it would set us back decades.

Whatever Morocco's language policy now is, it is proving to be a failure. The policies at work have created a situation where languages are defined by their roles in society. MA and Amazigh are the languages of everyday speech (e.g. at home, in the street). Arabic is used in courts, religious sermons and public media outlets. French is found in public and private administrations, and has become a mandatory requirement for, among other things, securing a position in the job market. What is worse is that these languages compete with each other over certain domains. With all this in mind, it is no exaggeration to claim that this linguistic mayhem is hindering Morocco's development and threatening its unity. As a result, new policies should be adopted to change the status quo. These policies have to take into account all the challenges that have been discussed above and are summed up below:

### ***(1) Challenges facing language planning in Morocco***

- a. Negative Attitudes (e.g. MA is a hybrid language)
- b. Ideological Differences (e.g. Arabization vs. Francophonism)
- c. Economic Benefits (e.g. English vs. French)
- d. Religious Identity (e.g. Arabic is a holy language)

On this view, to ensure a realistic and reasonable management of the linguistic diversity and linguistic justice in Morocco, our proposal consists mainly of blending various elements into our proposed language planning strategy. We refer to our proposal as Prestige Planning (PP henceforth). The elements that we argue are essential to the execution of the proposed policy are listed in (2) below, each of which will be discussed in detail in the section that follows.

### ***(2) Types of prestige planning***

- a. Literary Prestige
- b. Economic Prestige

c. Academic Prestige

## **Prestige Planning**

The issue of language policy and planning is brought to the fore locally as well as globally. As it stands, language policy and planning involves some degree of politics, whereby a government institution defines the languages that could be used, learnt and taught in a given polity. In this context, language planners try to make choices that could empower certain languages at the expense of others. Hence, the policies set in motion by a specific political entity tend to affect the acquisition of languages, their development and functions in the society.

One well known model is the *One Nation, One Language* approach. In this approach to language planning, a language becomes a symbol for a nation and a major identifier of its identity and culture (Wright, 2012). Such a state of affairs is very common in the European context, where languages such as French, German and Italian, to name but a few, automatically refer to their corresponding countries of origin, namely France, Germany and Italy, respectively. In these countries, the language of the majority had been selected to be the prime tool for communication in almost all domains of society. One of the merits of this approach is related to maintaining national unity. Another advantage consists in achieving institutional harmony, in the sense that the possibility that different sectors use different languages is absent. However, there are disadvantages to this approach that cannot go unnoticed. For instance, in the case of language diversity, where more than one language exists, minority languages could be discriminated against in favor of the majority languages, resulting into language endangerment, which later could lead to language loss.

For the sake of preserving language diversity, many have called for a *Human Linguistics Rights approach* to language planning (see Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1995; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1998 and Phillipson, 1998). Proponents of this approach suggest that language policy and planning should no longer ignore the human rights dimension of the issue. They argue that, most of the time, people do not choose their mother tongues as they do not choose their race or ethnicity. Thus, no one has the right to impose any other language on people who already have theirs. Instead, these people should be given the right to use and preserve their own language, and hence preserve their identity. This cannot be achieved unless language planners and language policy makers include the linguistic human rights perspective in their planning and policy making.

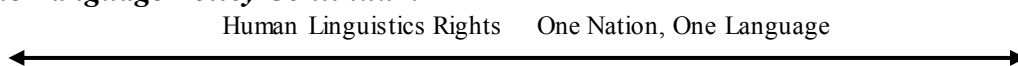
In this context, many countries around the globe opt for language policies that are, most of the time, not compatible with the linguistic diversity that they have. These countries tend to prioritize one language over the others and make of it the *de jure* official language of the country, whereas in fact not everyone speaks that language. The prioritized language happens, in most cases, to be the language of the majority. As a result, this leads to the loss and death of the other minority languages. Therefore, the native speakers of underprivileged languages are forced to learn and use the language being prioritized so that they can benefit from the privileges that this language offers such as: better jobs, education, access to information and so on.

Having said that, a *Human Linguistics Rights* approach guarantees the protection of linguistic diversity. On the downside, however, a language policy which is totally based on a

Human Linguistics Rights could go against the well-being of nations. For example, a language policy that tries to give equal attention to all the languages which concern it may produce a society which is divided into linguistic communities, each rooting for its own language. India is one of the most linguistically diverse societies in the world. Due to its linguistic diversity, India is now suffering from different forms of disunity. Despite of the fact that Hindi (spoken by 40% of the population) was made the official and national language of India, local governments have rejected it, favoring their own local languages (Lo Bianco, 2012). At the heart of this act of resistance against Hindi as a national language lies the philosophy of the Human Linguistics Rights approach.

Accordingly, one can think of language policy and planning as a continuum that stretches from purely political approaches whose only concern is the unity and harmony of society (e.g. One Nation, One Language approach) to fundamentally human-rights based approaches whose main focus is on maintaining linguistic diversity (e.g. Human Linguistics Rights approach). These two extremes are demonstrated in the diagram below:

### **(3) The Language Policy Continuum**



Singapore represents a successful story of managing linguistic diversity. Crucial to the success of Singapore is a language policy that is based on creating a neutral national language without sacrificing the languages of its ethnic communities. In the case of Singapore, English was chosen to be the national language that unifies the various ethnicities. Local languages are also recognized and maintained as secondary means of communication in the domains of arts and media. The case of Singapore can be seen as a middle ground between the previously mentioned approaches.

The main idea here is to construct a scale of languages with different degrees of prominence. One language should be entitled to be the primary choice for all speakers, without necessarily being their native language. Other languages, however, can be given a secondary status, which should be enough for them to survive and, why not, thrive. To illustrate, we could think of languages A, B and C. Language A should be officially recognized and officially used in education and professional life. Languages B and C could also be officially recognized but restricted from competing with Language A in its domains of use. Instead, they could be promoted through other venues such as arts and media. We believe that this type of regulated diversity can be achieved through the implementation of the PP approach. In this regard, we raise the following questions:

- a. How do we define prestige?
- b. How can a language acquire prestige?

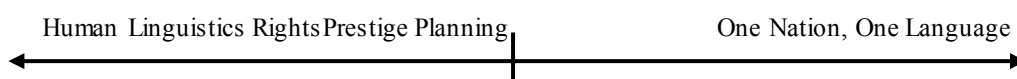
Prestige can be simply defined as the process of improving the status of a language in a given polity. As to how prestige can be acquired, we suggest it can be done through what we argue to be the incorporation of three types of prestige, namely Literacy Prestige, Economic Prestige and Academic Prestige. As far as Literacy Prestige is concerned, a language should be promoted in the domains of arts and media. For example, the government could invest in producing movies, shows, and books that could keep a certain variety in circulation. By doing so, the relevant language is clearly given some ground that could add to its prestige, and hence prevent its loss.



Economic Prestige, as its name indicates, is primarily concerned with linking economic value to the language in question. This takes the form of treating a language as a commodity which language consumers would be eager to invest in (Kamwangamalu, 2016: 160). In this sense, Bamgbose (1991) metaphorically equates language with currency. For him, the more a language can buy, the greater value it has in the linguistic marketplace. The most important principle of Economic Prestige is the explicit economic return that should be established between education and the job market. That is, a language with an economic value would serve as an instrumental motivation for people to learn it. This makes of Economic Prestige as the central component of the PP approach.

Last but not least, Academic Prestige deals with the linguistic maintenance of languages. This means that the status of a language can be improved through the thorough academic studies that could help standardize and codify any selected language. Applying Academic Prestige to a given language would help ensure enriching and updating its lexicon and structure to meet the necessary requirements desired by a specific speech community. By going back to the idea of regulated diversity, it is suggested that the chosen primary language should necessarily be granted all these types of prestige to maintain its primary status. However, secondary languages can be still maintained and preserved through Literacy Prestige and Academic Prestige. Meanwhile, they would deliberately be deprived of Economic Prestige promotion since it represents the area where languages tend to clash the most. With this background in mind, the picture looks as follows:

(4) *Balancing the Language Policy Continuum*



This means that a language policy that is based on PP has the benefit of eschewing the downsides of the approaches on the extremes of the continuum.

## Challenges to the Current Proposed Model<sup>6</sup>

There are several challenges that face any proposed language policy and planning in Morocco. These challenges range from existing ideologies and negative language attitudes to dialectal variation that directly affects the language selection. In the two subsections that immediately follow, we attempt to discuss each challenge separately along with proposing some tentative solutions.

### Prevalent Ideologies and Language Attitudes

Relevant to the discussion of language policy and planning are the following ideological challenges:

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- a. Elitism
- b. Colonialism/Francophonism

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<sup>6</sup> There are other challenges that we do not discuss here. Of these, we particularly mention codification and lexicalization.

- c. Pan-Arabism/Arabization
- d. Amazigh Activism

While each challenge can deserve a lengthy paper on its own (see section 1), suffice it to say that these challenges hinder any reasonable and effective language policy decision. Of no less importance is the question of the already existing Moroccans' negative language attitudes towards their mother tongues (Errihani, 2008; Loutfi, 2017).

This type of negative attitudes is spurred by the limited roles that local languages are confined to such as being associated mainly with everyday communication and no economic value. Such a state of affairs certainly reflects on the promotion and integration of mother tongues into schools in a negative way. In this regard, Ager (2005) argues that PP is strongly associated with speakers' psychological attitudes. Therefore, changing speakers' attitudes is crucial to the success or the failure of any proposed model. Since PP is primarily concerned with speakers' attitudes, it is safe to say that it targets speakers' psychological state. To meet this end, Haarmann (1990) argues that PP should highlight the positive values of the language in question in order to ensure a positive response from both the planner and the people on whom the PP will be applied. In much the same way, Kamwangamalu (2016: 159) argues that stakeholders' negative attitudes towards African languages may change if those languages are associated with an economic value in the linguistic marketplace.

To change the negative attitudes is to change the commonly held assumptions towards these languages. As far as MA is concerned, for example, one should recognize MA as a self-contained linguistic system with its own rules and mechanisms. Taking a comparative look at the linguistic characteristics of both SA and MA, one realizes that the two differ significantly. Changing such a preconceived assumption might grant, though by no means necessarily, that MA is no longer regarded or recognized as a corrupt form of SA.

### **Language Selection and Dialectical Variation**

MA is a cover term that covers several varieties spoken in Morocco. These varieties are 'Urban', 'Bedouin', 'Jebli' and 'Hassania' varieties (Boukous, 1995). To circumvent this selection problem, one would suggest using the so-called Middle MA (Youssi, 1995), or what Ech-Charfi (2004) has referred to as Standard MA. Although the main structural characteristics of this variety are still under-researched, mutual intelligibility of this language across Morocco is less severe considering other varieties. For one thing, the bulk of its lexicon is derived from SA, a language with which the majority of Moroccans are familiar. For another, the national Moroccan TV channels are already using a variety of MA in their dubbed serials and advertisements. As discussed in detail in Bensoukas and Blila (2011), the MA variety used is a medley of MA, namely the one spoken in Casablanca and Rabat, SA and French. In the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, it seems practical to use this variety of MA as a standard variety.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the paper has been to propose a new model of language policy and planning. We have couched our proposal within the framework of PP. We have argued that official recognition and mother-tongue education alone are not sufficient to change speakers' language attitude and promote the language. For this reason, we have suggested the incorporation of three main components we subsumed under the heading of Prestige



Planning. One important component is Economic Prestige. This prestige will create demands for the language/languages in question. These demands are in the form of socio-economic incentives. The link of language and the economic value with which a given language, in this case mother tongues, are associated ensures that they sufficiently compete with foreign languages in the linguistic marketplace. Finally, we have listed several challenges that would face the proposed model. These challenges are incarnated in the prevalent ideologies that run vehemently rampant in the Moroccan speech communities which result for the most part in negative language attitudes.

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