

Contextualizing Multilingualism in Morocco

Mayra C. Daniel, Ph.D.
Alexis Ball, M.S.Ed., MFA

Abstract/Resumen

This article discusses the educational system of Morocco and the ways the country's multilingual history has influenced and continues to direct the choice of the languages used in schools.

En este artículo se presentará información acerca del sistema de educación en Marruecos y las influencias que la historia de este país multilingüe ha tenido en la escolarización.

Keywords/Palabras claves: multilingualism, Moroccan education; multilingüismo, la escolarización en Marruecos

Introduction

This article discusses the educational system of Morocco and the ways the country's multilingual history has influenced and continues to direct the choice of the languages used in schools. We offer suggestions that will eliminate cultural mismatch and thus facilitate interactions with Moroccan students and their families. The research begins by focusing on the linguistic complexity within Morocco. The numerous languages spoken by Moroccans and the situational needs for interacting in a

specific language create educational needs and everyday challenges that are prevalent in third-world countries in general.

Morocco's case serves to inform bilingual educators of issues faced by multilingual populations all over the world. Decisions about the language or languages chosen for instruction, as well as teaching methodology for multilingual students, are a matter of socioeconomic status, political influence and the status-quo power structures that dominate schooling (Collins & Blot, 2003). In Morocco, languages have been in conflict with regard to their appropriateness for use in education and government. Marley's study (2005) reveals that young Moroccans are "very conscious of the different languages present in their society" (Marley, 2004, p. 1493). For example, speakers of the Berber dialects have been well aware that their voices are not heard if they utilize their primary language in educational spheres (Marley, 2004).

As has happened in many other parts of the world with the language of colonizers, in Morocco, French has held a prestigious classification, while the dialects of the native people have been assigned less desirable positions. Berber dialects spoken in geographically remote areas and the speakers of these languages have been reported to receive little respect (Diyen, 2004). In these regions one finds few primary schools, and since secondary school is a rarity, literacy in Berber has not been possible. Nevertheless, Morocco's landscape of languages is shifting in a positive direction. While in the past, indigenous tongues have not been considered to merit inclusion in elementary, secondary or higher education institutions, today the use of Moroccan Arabic is increasing and elementary instruction has begun to be offered in the Berber dialects.

In addition, issues related to financing education and Moroccan women's perception of their need to be educated have affected schooling around the nation. Monetary needs limit access to education for the many Moroccans unable to finance schooling within a system that is under-funded. It is important to note that 50% of Moroccans live on less than \$2 dollars per day. Females constitute a group that has not been encouraged to attend school as women's typical role has been to stay at home. Education has not been within the reach of all Moroccans but, instead, accessible to those at higher socioeconomic levels. As Abadzi's (2004) work suggests, children in poor schools have higher ratios of linguistic diversity. This is true for the many Moroccans whose language receives little validation.

Languages of Morocco

Morocco is situated in the northern part of the continent of Africa. It is considered to be part of the Maghreb Union along with Tunisia, Mauritania, Libya and Algeria. It is a country that has been influenced by

both its African origins as well as its proximity to Europe (particularly to Spain and France). The languages spoken in Morocco today are Standard Arabic, Berber, Moroccan Arabic, French and Spanish. There are also remnants of the Moroccan Judeo-Arabic spoken in Sephardic and Arab Jewish communities. French has been the most influential language due to occupation by France from 1912 to 1956. However, the implicit culture of Moroccans hinges less upon language than religion. Adherence to the Qur'an and acceptance of the tenets of Islam provide Moroccans a greater sense of their national identity and pride than any language. In the next section the research will focus on the languages utilized within Morocco: Modern Standard Arabic, Berber, Moroccan Arabic, French and Spanish; where exactly these languages are spoken in the country; and the reasons why.

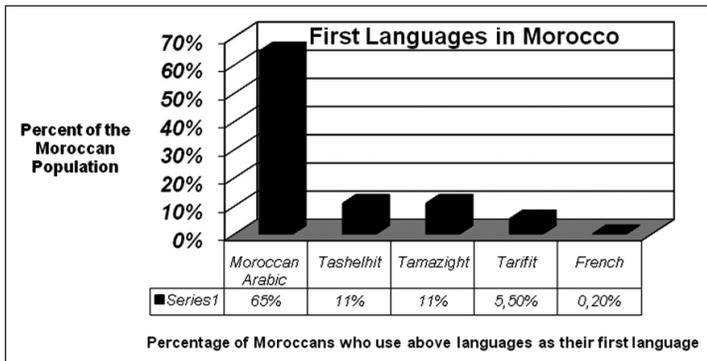


Table 1. First languages in Morocco.

Moroccan Arabic

Although Moroccan Arabic (MA) is the most widely spoken first language of Moroccans, and is the mother tongue for over two thirds of the Moroccan population (El Amraoui, 2007), it is not the country's official language nor has it been the medium of instruction at K-12 levels. This has posed great challenges for Moroccan children in that they have been educated in a second language. MA is mostly used in social and familial communication and is part of informal conversations in academic and professional settings. In the latter it is evolving into a more formal version and is seen as contributing to the Moroccan identity of this millennium (Marley, 2004). Although it uses the same alphabet as Standard Arabic, it has lexical, morphological, phonetic and syntactic differences from those of Standard Arabic. MA is not used at all in remote areas where, rather, Berber is found to be the exclusive language.

Berber

Morocco's original and oldest language is Berber. A generic name used to refer to all Berber dialects is *Tamazight*. Berber is mostly an oral language that is used among people who identify themselves as ethnically Berber. Communities that speak solely Berber have high illiteracy rates. In the past, learners from areas where Berber is spoken who have had access to education have not received instruction in their primary language. Schools have only recently incorporated Berber into the curriculum. There are three main dialects of Berber: *Tarifit*, which is spoken in the Rif mountains; *Tamazight* in the Atlas region; and *Tashelhit* in the Souss region. Berber has a script form called *Tifinah* that bears no resemblance to Arabic script and is used very infrequently.

Berber is currently experiencing a cultural renaissance in films and literature; when used in social interactions it demonstrates ethnic pride. This is a welcome change because in the past Berber was considered a language of low prestige that carried with it the stigma of belonging to the uneducated lower classes. Ethnic prejudice against the Berber population has attempted and succeeded in limiting their access to formal schooling (Diyen, 2004).



Figure 1. Map of Morocco and Moroccan Berber dialects.

Standard Arabic

Standard Arabic (SA) is the official language of Morocco yet few Moroccans speak it as a first language. SA is the first language of instruction in the country's public schools. Some children are exposed to it for the first time when they attend Qur'anic pre-schools at ages 4-6. SA is similar to Classical Arabic, the language of the Qu'ran, and is used widely in the practice of the Islamic religion. In total, there are 22 nations in the Middle East, North Africa and some countries in West and East Africa where Arabic is the official language. In contrast, Modern Standard Arabic refers only to the dialect spoken in Egypt and the Middle East.

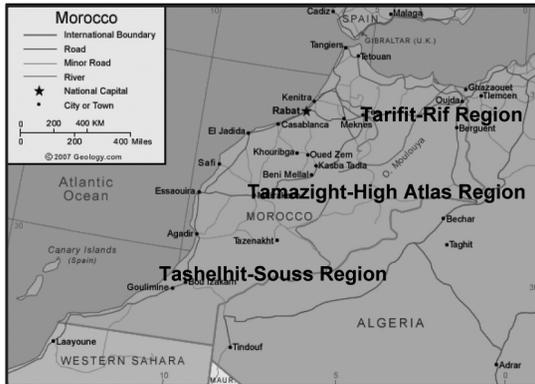


Figure 2. Map of Arabic speaking countries.

French

France colonized Morocco between the years 1912 and 1956. During that time, Moroccans were expected to learn French and to be educated in the ways of the French even though France did not give citizenship rights to Moroccans (Ennaji, 2005). The French attempted to modernize the nation and to inculcate the belief that all Europeans and the French language were superior. The country's leaders became those lucky enough to have been educated in French and to meet this desired criterion. Many Moroccans went to university in France. Clearly, this education was reserved for the upper socioeconomic levels of society and not for the ethnic Berber. Few Moroccans were exposed to the language at home yet this was the language of instruction beginning at the elementary school level during the colonization period. In reality, at this time, children were receiving instruction in the content areas in a foreign language and schools were not offering dual instruction. The goal was to learn in French only. French became the official language of government, education, business and the sciences.

During this 44-year period, the upper classes would send their children to study in France. Even today, some consider French the door that opens opportunities in science, technology and business. French and English are taught as foreign languages with French continuing to be the language of the sciences and technology. Educated middle/upper class families continue to arrange for their children to learn French because they acknowledge its usefulness in academic professional life within today's global economy (Berdouzzi, 2000). Others view the continued use of French as a reminder of past colonialism and a denial of Morocco's identity as a non-European Muslim nation.

Spanish

Spain and Morocco have a long history partly due to the geographical proximity of the countries. However, it can be proposed that the Moorish presence in Spain influenced Spanish civilizations more than the Spaniards affected the Moroccans. For example, the Spanish language adopted as the phrase *ojalá* (from “May Allah be with you,”) and designated that the verb to follow this expression would require the subjunctive tense. Spain’s presence was visible in Ceuta and Melilla in the northern part of Morocco and still is visible in Tangier and Spanish-speaking Western Sahara, an area currently in dispute between the nations of Morocco and Algeria. The presence of Spanish loan words in Moroccan Arabic is well documented; for example, the use of words like *pelota* and *cocina* in place of their Standard Arabic counterparts *cura* and *matbah* indicate that the Spanish language has influenced the Moroccan lexicon. However, the Spanish language has not played a significant role in the educational realm in the greater part of Morocco due to the fact that it is not normally a first language even for the relatively few who speak it fluently.

Language Use in the Schools: Past

The arrival of Arab Muslims to Morocco in 640 AD solidified the country’s link to the Arab world. After one of the oldest universities in Morocco, *El Khairouin*, was founded, it became a haven for Arab-speaking intellectuals that made Morocco an important Arabic center for learning. Beginning in 1912, French occupation changed the national landscape completely. Thus, French, a language derived from Latin, that uses Roman script, became the language of education. Although currently instruction is delivered in French or SA, many instructors prefer to teach in French because they are better prepared to give lessons in the language that was used to instruct them. French therefore is the more prestigious language in Morocco.

Arabization’s Effects on Language Use in Education

Arabization refers to an Arabic-only policy that was adopted in Morocco after French colonization ended in 1956. Its purpose was to restore both the role and place of Arabic in Moroccan society and the sense of identification with the Arab world that French colonization had put in jeopardy. This policy mandated that Arabic become the official language of Morocco and that Islam become the state religion. In the 1970’s change was visible when elementary and secondary schools added instruction in MA to existing curricula in French. Unfortunately, Arabization had many unforeseen negative consequences on some of Morocco’s population. First, it ignored the multilingual and multicultural nature of the Moroccan identity. Secondly, it made it impossible for

educators to adequately serve their multilingual student populations because these teachers had to adhere to the strict Arabization policy and were not free to address students' primary language needs. Thirdly, students whose parents had the financial means continued to send them to bilingual private schools so that their children would learn French and other languages. Fourthly, students who could not afford private schools were either relegated to sub-standard public schools or simply dropped out. Lastly, and most importantly, 95% of the Moroccan school population consisted of second language learners who were being taught by teachers who were equipped with no appropriate methodology to help students negotiate learning in a second language. Arabization continued until the year 2000 when the National Charter of Education offered reforms. Because Arabization was not completely successful in the areas of science and technology, the charter served to promote bilingual education in these disciplines and contributed to the birth of an educational system that values the multiple languages of instruction and recognizes local needs.

After Arabization

Mohamed VI instituted the *Charte Nationale d'Éducation et Formation* (National Education and Training Charter). The charter acknowledged Morocco's linguistic issues in Act 9, Article 110 (COSEF, 2000, p. 41) where the stated goal was "to perfect the teaching and use of Arabic language, strengthen foreign languages and be open to the teaching of Tamazight." It declared the Tamazight languages as important to being a citizen of Morocco as any other languages. It is of utmost importance that in the charter, Berber culture and dialects were emphasized to be "part of the country's cultural inheritance" (COSEF, 2000, p. 43). This pronouncement freed teachers to promote and validate the identity and cultural heritage of the Berber. The charter opened the door to instruction in the Berber dialects of Tarifit, Tamazight and Tashelhit because it gave regional autonomy to schools. The document also called for educators to perfect the teaching and use of SA. Lastly, the fact that the charter promoted the diversification of languages for teaching science and technology means that these subjects do not have to be within the reach of students who speak French (COSEF, 2000). One of the charter's goals was for students to learn Modern Standard Arabic, the national language of Morocco, and to acquire high levels of mastery in two additional languages, preferably English and French. It seems logical to conclude that the charter's intent was to promote equity in education by making it possible for more students to have access to study in the content areas in a language they could understand.

Student Achievement per the PIRLS Study

The 2006 Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) compared achievement for students in the fourth-grade across many participating countries. Data revealed significant decreases in average reading achievement in Morocco since 2003. The PIRLS report documents that in all the countries that submitted data there was “a positive relationship between an absence of school resource shortages and average school achievement” (PIRLS, 2006, p. 11), and that the average difference between students from homes with more than 100 books as compared to those with less than 10 books was “91 score points or almost one standard deviation lower” (p. 5). Not surprisingly, average reading achievement was higher for children whose parents were frequent readers in all countries that reported statistics.

Evidence from PIRLS presents encouraging results for educational trends in Morocco. Net enrollment in school increased from 39.1% in 1970 to 92% in 2003, repetition rates decreased from 29.8% to 13.8%, and students reaching fifth-grade increased from 65.8% to 75.6%. In the same 33 year period, the total number of students enrolled in secondary schools jumped from 12.6% to 47.6% (PIRLS, 2006). The figure that most suggests that the country of Morocco is on the right track is the one which reflects the number of students who attend university. In this same 33 year period there was over a 700% increase in the number of students who went on to study past secondary school.

Illiteracy rates for males and females also merit emphasis. In Morocco, women’s role is more limited to the home and therefore, in the past, fewer women than men have received an education. A comparison of illiteracy rates for women in 1980 vs. 2003 shows a drop of 20.1%. For men the decrease totaled 23.6%. Still, this reflects an educational need in that 60.4% of the women of Morocco and 34.3% of the men are functionally illiterate. Although 95% of the schools in Morocco are free and public, there are an insufficient number of schools to meet existing needs. All school-age children are not enrolled in school (Ameziane & Lietz, 2001).

The Future

It is crucial for Moroccans to consider the ways the past has influenced the present and the ways it will affect the future of their multilingual populations (for nationally educated learners as well as for those who decide to immigrate to other countries). Moroccans have made great efforts to improve the country’s educational system through Arabization and later by implementing the National Charter’s mandates. In this process, Morocco has faced numerous obstacles that stem from

the unacknowledged and often devalued multilingualism of its people. Issues related to the language in which teachers have been taught have set the standard for the language to be utilized for school instruction. An explanation is that during the time of the French protectorate there was an insufficient number of teachers available who were able to instruct in French, so teachers were brought in from France to do the job. Those in school during that time who went on to become educators subsequently felt more comfortable teaching in French. This contributed to keeping the French language as the medium to teach the content areas and most specifically, technology and science (Ennaji, 2005).

Still today, an unmet challenge is that the official language of Morocco, Modern Standard Arabic, is not spoken by the majority of the country's citizens. Furthermore, schooling delivered in Modern Standard Arabic implies that children are being taught in a second language. Yet another challenge is that a recommended educational goal for all Moroccans, because they live in such a multilingual country, would be to study and master two foreign languages. We can make the observation that although levels of student achievement are rising in Morocco (PIRLS, 2006), demands on learners have increased and it may not be pedagogically appropriate nor financially sound policy to expect all Moroccans to achieve literacy in the home language, in Modern Standard Arabic, in French and in English. It is indeed remarkable that in a climate of rapid linguistic movements Morocco "has been able to halve its illiteracy rate during the last 3 decades" (Lavy & Spratt, 1997, p. 139).

In conclusion, educators in Morocco and other countries may be facing similar challenges. These problems might be delaying educational progress in other countries, but they appear to be positively encouraging Moroccans toward the lofty goal of assuring that all children receive the education needed to strengthen a country and educate its people.

References

- Abadzi, H. (2004). Education for all or just the smartest poor? *Prospects*, 34(3), 271-289.
- Ameziane, A., & Lietz, J. (2001). Educational accountability: The structure of education in Morocco. *Education*, 103(4), 378-382.
- Ball, A., & Daniel, M. (2009, January). The bilingual context of education in Morocco. Presentation at the Illinois Association of Multilingual Multicultural Educators, Oakbrook, IL.
- Berdouzi. (2000). *Renover l'enseignement de la charte aux actes*. Rabats: Renouveau.

- Charte Nationale d'Éducation et Formation, Royaume du Maroc, Commission Spéciale d'Éducation Formation (COSEF). Retrieved July 28, 2000 from <http://81.192.52.38/NR/rdonlyres/CAF0FEC1-2E4D-4A54-9C6A-9CB26780C33F/0/Chartenationale.htm>
- Collins, J., & Blot, R. (2003). *Literacy and literacies: Texts, power, and identity*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Diyen, Hayat. (2004). Reform of secondary education in Morocco: Challenges and prospects. *Prospects*, 3(2), 211-222.
- El Amraoui, A. (2007). Berber language gets an airing. Aljazeera.net. Retrieved December 12, 2007 from <http://english.aljazeera.net/News/asp/print.htm>
- Ennaji, M. (2005). *Multilingualism, cultural identity, and education in Morocco*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Marley, Dawn. (2004). Language attitudes in Morocco following recent changes in language policy. *Language Policy*, 3, 25-46.
- Project in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). (2001). National Center for Educational Statistics. Retrieved July 18, 2008 from http://timss.bc.edu/pirls2001i/PIRLS2001_Pubs_IR.html

Mayra C. Daniel is an associate professor in the Department of Literacy Education at Northern Illinois University, De Kalb, IL. She earned her Ed. D. in curriculum and instruction from Illinois State University. Her work with practicing teachers in the United States focuses on preparing educators to plan and modify curriculum so that it appropriately address the needs of multilingual, multicultural populations of students. Her work and research in Guatemala includes practicing teachers and the methodology they use to teach reading and writing, teacher trainers and the ways they prepare future teachers, and students enrolled in Guatemala's normal schools. Dr. Daniel's research interests are critical literacy, multicultural education, and reading and writing in a second language. She teaches courses related to cultural pluralism and multilingualism, TESOL/second language pedagogy, bilingualism and reading, and assessment of English language learners. She is active in the Teachers to Speakers of Other Languages Organization and is the chair-elect of TESOL's Bilingual Interest Section for the 2009-2010 academic year.

Alexis Ball is a doctoral candidate at Northern Illinois University in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in literacy education and second language acquisition. She has also received an M.S.Ed. in literacy education from Northern Illinois University as well as an MFA in visual arts from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. She has taught in and developed ESL and bilingual programs for elementary, middle, high school, adult and university-level groups since 1993 in both Mexico and the United States. She taught in the Chicago Public Schools as an ESL reading teacher for 3 years. She currently is a research assistant in the Research, Evaluation and Policy Studies Office at Northern Illinois University as a project coordinator for educational research activities and has taught multicultural education there as well. Her research interests include multilingualism/multiculturalism, multicultural education, TESOL methods, literacy acquisition for second language learners, reading and writing development for learners whose first written language is in a non-Roman writing system, cultural and linguistic contexts of Arabic speakers.