

Language Policy and Education in Algeria: A Sociolinguistic Interpretation

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Abstract

The present paper aims fundamentally at highlighting the impact of diglossia on formal education in general and on teaching the Arabic course in particular. It examines language education policy in Algeria with focus on the medium of instruction. It mainly endeavours at uncovering linguistic behaviour of Arabic language teachers in classroom interaction in a situation of diglossia; where Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the High ‘H’ variety, is the prestigious variety and the official language to be used as a medium of instruction whereas the Algerian Arabic (AA), the low ‘L’ variety, is reserved for daily speech and informal settings. Both varieties are employed for different communicative purposes, highly governed by their situational contexts. Real classroom interactions, in fact, unveil that the middle variety seems to be the predominant code of instruction and interaction inside classrooms. The concept middle variety or “al-lugha el-wusta” is used here to refer to that variety situated midway between MSA and the vernacular. Through the use of mixed methods to data collection namely; recording classroom observation, questionnaires, and interviews, this sociolinguistic inquiry has hypothesized that code unawareness, the topic discussed; in addition to the enhancement of pupils’ assimilation task are the determinant factors of teachers’ switch. Despite the inclusion of many colloquial forms, Arabic language teachers show negative attitudes towards their behaviours while pupils display positive attitudes towards them.

Keywords: language education policy - diglossia - code switching - language unawareness- topic - pupils’ assimilation – attitudes.

1. Language policy

Defining the phrase ‘language planning’ or ‘language policy’ is, in fact, not an easy task. Though this research topic has been extensively discussed, “a clear definition”; however, “is rarely given” (Fodde, 2002:13). The term Language Planning (LP henceforth) was probably first invoked by the linguist Uriel Weinreich in the early 1950’s in New York (Bianco. J, L, cited in Hornberger. N, & McKay. S, L, 2010:143). The Norwegian American Einer Haugen was another sociolinguistics pioneer in LP whose account of the Norwegian Policy to eradicate the influence of Danish on Norwegian gained a significant favour (idem). Accordingly, Spolsky (1998) unveils that the term language planning has been first introduced by Weinreich; however, the regular failure of national planning activities by the late 1980’s seems to have encouraged the more neutral-seeming term, “language policy” (LP for short) and sometimes it is called: ‘language engineering’ or ‘language management’. Differently put, Ricento & Hornberger (1996) announce that since the introduction of the term Language Planning in 1959 by Haugen who is considered as the father of the field (Johnson, 2013), there has been “no prospect for a unified theory of language planning and policy” (ibid:40). The diversity of theories and definitions brought by various researchers is due to the complexity of the subjects which involve language in society as well as to the intersection of various disciplines such as: linguistics, anthropology, sociology, social psychology, in addition to political sciences. This intersection leads obviously to the availability of colorful multi-definitions for this challenging topic of research. In this vein, Ricento (2006:11) put forwards that “after all, language planning is not just an exercise in philosophical inquiry; it is interested in addressing social problems which often involve language, to one degree or another, and in proposing realistic remedies”. Broadly speaking, language planning is a deliberate effort made by governmental, official or other influential institutions aiming at establishing which language varieties are used in a particular community, directing or influencing which language varieties are to be

used for which purposes in that particular community.

2. Language policy goals

Language policy goals differ depending on the nation or organization, but generally include attaining national unity, improving communication and education, and achieving language maintenance. In this respect, Nahir (1984 & 2003) offers an eleven-point classification of language planning goals:

- **Language Purification:** prescription of usage in order to preserve the ‘linguistics purity’ of language and protect it from foreign influences. Kaplan & Baldauf (1997:60) distinguish between external and internal purification. External purification attempts to remove and protect the language from foreign influences. This process generally focuses on the development of prescriptive grammars and dictionaries; aiming to decrease the rate of borrowings and the prohibition of particular foreign usages. Internal purification, on the other hand, refers to the reinforcement of standards of correct usage within the language.
- **Language Revival:** the effort to restore “a language with few or no surviving native speakers” as “a normal means of communication”. Hebrew is a clear example where revival could be achieved although this process was based on no surviving first users.
- **Language Reform:** the involvement of deliberate changes in, or simplification of specific aspects of language such as: orthography, spelling, grammar, lexicon for the sake of facilitating language use and improving effectiveness. Kaplan & Baldauf (1997:65) include the case of language reform in Turkey in the 1920’s, when Kemal Ataturk successfully changed the writing system to a Romanized one; removing a lot of Persian influences in the language and borrowed terminology from European languages.

- **Language Standardization:** any attempt to garner prestige for “a language or dialect spoken in a region” into one “accepted as the major language”.
- **Language Spread:** the attempt to increase the number of users of one language at the expense of another such as the spread of Latin during the Roman Empire and the spread of the Arabic language during the period of Islamic expansion. Language spread, in communities involving two or more languages, may lead to language shift. If more people are learners and users of a language, they will look for more domains in which to use it.
- **Lexical Modernization:** the attempt to create terminologies. Nahir (1984, cited in Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997:68-69) expounds that the terminological work can be categorized as belonging to two aspects which occur simultaneously:
 - *Lexical Development:* the process of language modernization, i.e., standardizing and enriching language, in addition to expanding its domains of use and activity.
 - *Term Creation and Adaptation:* the process of adding terms for new ideas, concepts, or technology for which the lexicon is unprepared.
- **Terminology Unification:** the standardization of existing terminology through defining the functions and semantic boundaries of terms in order to avoid variation which may blind people in literature search. This process can be also called: ‘Term Planning’ (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997).
- **Stylistic Simplification:** the attempt to make technical or legal language comprehensible, and reduce bureaucratise. It also concerns “making text more readable, more clearly addressed to the audience that must deal with it, and less convoluted in lexicon and syntax” (ibid:75).

- **Interlingual Communication:** its main objective is to facilitate linguistic communication between member of various speech communities by developing the use of either language of wider communication (LMC) or an artificial (or ‘auxiliary’) language.
- **Language Maintenance:** the preservation of the use of a group’s native language as well as the domains in which a language is used; in cases, where the status of the language is at risk due to political, economic, educational, or other pressures.
- **Auxiliary Code Standardization:** Standardization of marginal, auxiliary aspects of language such as: signs of the deaf, place names, or rules of transliteration and transcription.

3.Language policy typology

Accordingly, Language planning has been, in fact, divided into three types labeled respectively: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning.

- **Status Planning**

Status planning is a purely political issue undertaken by policy makers. It is the allocation or reallocation of a language to functional domains within a society. It portrays any official attempt to determine which language or languages is/are to be used in various public functions, by government, the legal system, the media, and the educational system. In Hoffmann’s terms (1991:207), status planning “...concerns decision-making processes regarding the status and function of particular languages or varieties, as well as the allocation of state resources”.

- **Corpus Planning**

Built upon Haugen’s (1983) framework, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997:3) acknowledge that corpus planning concerns “those aspects of language planning which are primarily linguistic and hence internal to language”. Corpus planning is, thus, a purely linguistic activity, referring to the

intervention in the form and structures of the language. Corpus planning activities often arise as the result of beliefs about the adequacy of the form of a language to serve desired functions. This task is often undertaken by “[...] national language planning agencies, whose role differs according to the situation” (Wright. S, Quoted in Llamas, *et al.* 2006:165).

- **Acquisition Planning**

Acquisition planning, a separate third category, has been recently opted by Cooper (1989). The term acquisition planning can be also labelled as “*Language Education Policy*”. Kaplan& Baldauf (2003), in their turn, favour the term “*Language-in-Education Policy*”. The concept has, thus, gained ground typically related to language teaching/learning in schools. It has been associated with education since the latter is noticeably scrutinized by many theorists as “a microcosm of society and both reacts to its concerns and proacts in order to influence society” (Molinero, 2001:158). Moreover, acquisition planning is an activity that develops status planning by identifying the ways in which language use will be expanded in certain domains such as: education, workplace, media, organizations and religious domains.

4. Arabization policy

Arabization is an interestingly multi-faced policy. It has attracted numerous linguists’, sociolinguists’, and language planners’ attention and become a challenge to the colonial language in the Arab world. In post-independent era, the arabization policy was a primordial action in the Algerian LP; especially in education.

Arabization refers to the process of restoring and generalizing MSA as a language of utilized for instruction, as well as public administration, formal written form and media in general. For reconstructing itself, Algeria must first restore the bedrock of its identity, i.e., the Arabic language which is the vivid symbol of all Arab-speaking nations.

Such a policy coincides with the rise of independence. Following the official independence on July 5th, 1962, Algeria’s first president

‘Ahmed Ben Bella’ (1962-1965) proclaimed adherence to *Al-Umma Al-Arabiiyya* ‘the Arab Nation’ through his well-known public statement “We are Arabs”. Such adherence is indorsed in the first Algerian constitution 1963 in which Islam has been declared as the religion of Algeria ‘article 4’ and Arabic as the national and official language of the state ‘article 5’.

Algeria’s arabization policy, therefore, faced ambivalence views. Some views were favouring arabization and hence, monolingualism whereas others were claiming for Arabic / French bilingualism. The first view endeavours at placing an Arab and Muslim stamp on Algeria and instilling a non-Western identity as the latter is “a source of suffering and a sign of alienation or acculturation” (Ennaji, 1991:21). French speakers are considered as Francophiles, on the one side, and implicated in the linguistic and cultural alienation (Grandguillaume, 2002). The second trend, on the other side, favours bilingualism. It does not reject Arabic; yet it demands to maintain French as a source of modernization. The policy of arabization touched many spheres: administration, media, and government, in addition to other economic spheres. Education, which is the concern of our research work, is one of the spheres of arabization where significant measures have been undertaken.

5. Arabization of education

Education plays a large part in personal lives. It is only through education that a speech community can progress. Yet, this progress can be achieved solely when education is carried out in a context of a good language policy.

• Education in the Pre-Colonial Era

Prior to the French colonialism, education was ensured by Koranic schools. These schools, called either *zawiya* or *madrasa*, are associated with religious settings and domains (Herrera, 2007:49). At this stage, many Algerians attained these traditional schools where they had the opportunity to learn Koranic verses ‘*hafadha*’ or the Hadiths of the

Prophet Mouhammed (Peace Be Upon Him). They tried to interpret and memorize them. Such a teaching-learning method intended strongly to socialize young children into a certain vision of Islam via reciting Koran by heart. This kind of schooling is, though the profound effect left by the French, still persisting up to now

- **Education during the French Colonialism**

Unlike the other Arabic countries, Algeria is the only country which lived under assimilationist colonial rule for one hundred and thirty two years, from 1830 up to 1962. The French policy was a severe and a harsh one. It endeavours at destroying all the pillars of the Algerian identity namely; Islam as a ‘Religion’ and ‘Arabic’ as a language. Understandably, the prince Napoléon-Jérôme, in 1858, proclaimed that assimilation should be extended to the Muslim population when stating that “we are confronted by a hardy perennial, a strongly rooted national identity which must be eradicated by assimilation” (Ageron, 1991:35, cited in Suleiman. Y, 1994:26).

The French did their best to assimilate the French language and culture to children at a crucial age to the extent that they attempted to label nearly several cities and places using the French language. Their prominent goal lies in suppressing the Arabo-Islamic culture in general and the Algerian identity in particular. Through an adherent policy, the colonial powers deprived the Algerians from their civic and linguistic rights. Education programs, as a result, were given just to a limited elitist group for exceptional given ends. Yet, all over the colonial era, the Algerians continued to serve the struggle for recovering the lost identity and dignity. Consequently, the Algerians did all their efforts to gain equality and achieve independence and hence nationalize the instruction at schools.

- **Education in Post-Colonial Era**

The most important question raised at the post-colonial era concerns language of instruction, i.e., which language should be used as a national one in the state and as a medium of instruction: French which was considered as a symbol of “*dark years of colonialism*” or Arabic

“*language of Quran and of identity*”. As the school is the prominent agency for the diffusion of the Arabic language, a set of significant linguistic legislative measures had been undertaken at the educational level. The Arabic language could gradually gain status and was slowly introduced as an important medium of instruction.

Education knew many difficulties and obstacles due to the French policy; even after independence because of the existence of many leaders and different linguistic policies. Many controversies have been reported among these political leaders. This is why, Algerian policy makers themselves have recognized weaknesses and shortcomings of arabization which has been viewed as the responsible factor for the decrease in pupils' achievements and schooling. The new picture of the educational sectors shows, undeniably, the use of the French language at many levels as well as the integration of many colloquial forms.

6. Method

The data needed in this fieldwork are collected by means of three research instruments. Recording classroom observation permits a direct study of the linguistic setting. Questionnaires and interviews are used to elicit data explicitly from the informants. The researcher used two questionnaires; one is administered to forty eight Tlemcen middle school teachers and another one for three hundred sixty pupils from the fourth levels. The three tools may lead to yield more valid and authentic data.

7. Findings

1/ Questionnaire Results

- *Code Use in the classroom by Teachers of the Arabic language*
- *Pupils' Competency in MSA*
- *Pupils' Code used with teachers*
- *Teachers' Preferences towards Pupils' Use of the Middle Variety Vs AA*

2/Interview Results

- *Teachers' Aware Vs Unaware Switch towards the Middle Variety/ AA in Classroom Interaction*
- *Reasons affecting Teachers' Linguistic Behaviour Teachers' Spontaneous Use of AA Teachers' Aware Use of AA*

8.Discussion

This empirical research work provided us a closer picture about the various linguistic behaviours of Arabic language teachers in classroom interaction; a formal context where only MSA must be used. It carries out observations concerning the form of Arabic used by the teachers in actual situations. It also unveils the social psychological motives behind teachers' linguistic behaviour in the class.

The recorded data display that all Arabic language teachers from the eight middle schools indicate a diglossic switching towards colloquial Arabic. Three forms of Arabic can be used in an Arabic language session which are: MSA, middle variety, and AA solely. MSA is the programmed and the only code to be used in classroom interaction; a point which is related to LP. It is, typically, used in sessions of reading comprehension where texts are written in MSA. The same session indicated an extensive use of many expressions in AA. They mix both varieties MSA and AA; resulting in a new instruction code called the middle variety. Therefore, it can be noticed that the middle variety is the characteristic of almost all Arabic language sessions. Teachers, in real situations, focus more on transmitting the message and neglect the code through which the message is addressed. In specific situations, a tag switching is used where teachers insert ready-made AA expressions due to bad learners' behaviours for instance.

Many teachers declared that they do not include AA forms. Real situations, however, are full of Colloquial forms. It refers to the fact that teachers' linguistic behaviour is, in many cases, unconsciously done. The frequency of this switch depends on the notion that AA is the teachers' mother tongue which is acquired from childhood. Hence, there is a sense of unawareness among teachers in which the switch is marked (unexpected). Many expressions are, in fact, used unconsciously; notably expressions such as: /tebba3/: 'follow', /rijjaħ/: 'sit down', /door/: 'turn!', /rwah/: 'come!', /nood/: 'stand up', /fhamtu/: 'have you understood?', /mliħ/: 'good', or /bella3 fummak/: 'shut up'. These AA expressions are used either as a reaction to pupils' bad behaviours or spontaneously done as they are part of our daily life speech. In specific contexts where the teacher finds it necessary to create a good and relax atmosphere or to re-explain and clarify difficult points, teachers tend to show a clear sense of awareness towards their linguistic behaviour.

Moreover, Changes in the topic discussed in each session drive teachers to various linguistic behaviours. Arabic language teachers are familiar with literary, educational and religious subjects which are handled in MSA and sometimes a middle variety is used for the sake of simplifying concepts and clarifying ideas. Social topics like: 'smoking', 'internet', topics about 'sport' or even interrupted topics, in cases of providing illustrations, the teacher switch to AA. Therefore, metaphorical switching, as named by Gumperz, is subconscious and characterizes almost all teachers' linguistic behaviour.

One of the salient factors that stand behind teachers' use of different codes is correlated to pupils' weak proficiencies and, thus, pupils' lack of understanding. To that end, teachers tend to use a simplified form of Arabic, i.e., a middle variety which is the interplay of written Arabic and vernacular Arabic (Mitchell, 1986:8). Due to the topic and concepts' difficulty, the middle variety is "employed for semiformal

discussions, and on other social occasions when the colloquial is deemed too informal, and the literary, too stilted” (Ryding, 1991:2012). The middle variety seeks consciously to “facilitate inter-regional intelligibility and to show solidarity with speakers from different regions [...] Educated Spoken Arabic [...] provides space for expressing local allegiances because speakers select certain standard forms and at the same time retain other local features of their choice’ (Mitchell, 1986: 8). The middle variety is considered as a mesolect form that aims at facilitating the teaching and learning processes and enhancing pupils’ assimilation. According to Hary (1996: 71-72, Cited in Moshref, 2009:15), “a set of variables [...] drive speakers to move back and forth along the continuum. These variables determine the degree of standardization in spoken discourse. They include the setting (formal/informal), topic, interlocutors’ proficiency in MSA, and their emotional state”. Pupils’ assimilation is, indeed, a social need that motivates teachers’ choice.

Positive attitudes towards MSA and its use in the classroom is related to LP as MSA is the language of education. In this respect, Cohen (1964:138) alludes that “attitudes are always seen as precursors of behaviour, as determinants of how a person will actually behave in his daily affairs”. Despite the negative attitudes held by Arabic language teachers towards the middle variety and AA, teachers’ speech evidently show inconsistency between attitudes and actual behaviour. The use of both AA and the middle variety, in fact, reflects that actual behaviour in the class is seemingly incongruent with expressed attitudes. Accordingly, Baker (1992:16) explains that “behaviour tends not always to be consistent across contexts”. Consequently, attitudes are imperfect explainers and predictors of teachers’ use of different forms of Arabic. Here, it is the situation that determines language choice. Pupils’ positive attitudes towards AA and/or the middle variety and their low proficiency in MSA motivate strongly teachers’ code choice. When people make mistakes, the teacher generally reacted

spontaneously using AA; in most cases using stress and rising intonation. For creating good atmosphere in the classroom, the teacher also switches consciously from formal to informal and from serious to joyful situations. Arabic language teachers' negative attitudes towards their use of AA clearly reflect their awareness towards the value and importance of MSA. Understandably, teachers' switch is tightly correlated with the topic discussed, pupils' linguistic needs as well as their positive attitudes towards AA.

9. Conclusion

This paper has been able to deduce some remarkable results about Algerian educational language policy and real classroom situations. It highlights the various linguistic behaviours of Arabic language teachers when interacting in the classroom. Teachers' diglossic code switching phenomenon is conceived as a conversational strategy to enhance communication which may be interrupted in certain cases. To put it differently, teachers, though seem to be aware of the importance and high position of MSA, they tend in many cases to switch in order to help their pupils to enhance the lecture in an easy, relax, and a quick manner. They focus more on giving pupils knowledge about the language rather than teaching them the language functionally. That is to say, interlocutors are considered as the most affective element that determines teachers' code choice. Undoubtedly, teaching Arabic in such a way has its impact on learning the Arabic course and quality of education as a whole. Pupils may befall as a result of the recurring use of the dialect. Arabic language teachers, therefore, must receive an adequate degree of pedagogical and academic qualification and must be aware of the importance of the Arabic language as the school is the primary source from which our pupils learn it.

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