

University Students 'Attitudes Toward the Use of Moroccan Arabic and/or Standard Arabic as a Language of Instruction in Moroccan Educational System

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Abstract

The language of instruction is a very debatable issue in Morocco. It sways between the use of Standard Arabic and French in higher education. This debate is rooted in Moroccan history since the colonization period of France. The latter has forced the use of its language, as a language of instruction in the Moroccan Educational system. It has been controversial during the Arabization process, which has promoted Standard Arabic (SA) as a language of instruction. In recent years; many attitudes have been raised owing to the historical and current factors that surround this issue. The majority of these attitudes are based on the theoretical framework, which has become an inadequate way of scientific study, especially in a topic like the language of instruction. This paper investigates these attitudes and constructs the grounds from empirical fieldwork using observation and a questionnaire. The informants are 80 university students of English studies and Islamic studies. The main findings lie in the gap between theoretical and empirical research, the necessity of SA use as a language of instruction in many fields, such as Islamic studies, and the possibility of using reduced Arabic in other domains. Moroccan

1. INTRODUCTION

Sociology of language has become a flourished field of research in Morocco, especially at the level of French and English departments. The issue of language attitude has gained an important concern among researchers to seek the different attitudes toward multilingualism in Morocco. Diglossia has been the most attractive era of research due to its relevance to the dominance of Arabic at the written and spoken level within Moroccan society. Arabic consists of two main varieties, Standard Arabic (SA) and Moroccan Arabic (MA). The use of the first as a language of instruction in the Moroccan educational system since independence through the Arabization process has recently evolved controversial attitudes sways between adopting SA or/and MA as a language of instruction.

This paper sheds light on the situation of the theoretical framework in Morocco as far as the language of schooling is concerned and evaluates this theoretical framework based on empirical research to foster association or disassociation between the two.

The review of literature has covers the overall stands in Morocco regardless of the nature of the research. That is to say, it takes into account all kinds of attitudes whether they are adopted by specialists in the field or activists that are usually ideologically motivated.

The researcher used two research instruments, observation and questionnaires. The sample is randomly chosen from the English studies (ES) departments at Mohammed 5th University, Rabat, and the Islamic Studies (IS) department at Dar Elhadith Elhassania Institute, Rabat.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The issue of instruction's language in Morocco is controversial and debatable though the fact that standard Arabic (SA) is officially regarded as a language of instruction in the Moroccan educational system, mainly during primary, preparatory and secondary levels. In this respect, Redouane (2010) states that "The language of instruction at most elementary and secondary schools is formal Arabic, but at the university level French is the primary language of instruction" (P 4). Many researchers cast light on this issue under the general discussion of substituting SA for MA (Moroccan Arabic) at the level of administration, media and education. The attitudes toward the language of instruction vary among Moroccan researchers and academics. I found three main different attitudes based on certain arguments and claims.

The crucial debate of MA goes back to 2010 when many francophones called for the replacement of SA by MA in Morocco. Bodhan (2012) argues that "the debate moves from the French and Amazigh threat of SA to the MA threat of SA in 2010 when many voices raised to hail using MA as an alternative to SA. SA supporters regard this call as a French and Western complot led by francophone and Amazighophone in Morocco. In this regard, Alwadghiri(2011) states that this claim goes back to the colonial era in the Arab world when the colonizer spread the learning of his language and focused on locking down classical Arab schools which were used to teach SA and use it as a language of schooling (P.5). It seems that the subject under study is very old and is not limited to Morocco, but it has concerned all Arab countries.

There are different views of the linguistic situation in Morocco, especially when MA and SA are concerned. This view is related to the attitudes towards language use in instruction. Francophone pretends that SA and MA are not a situation of diglossia as it is stated by Ferguson (1959) in which there are two varieties of language. They argue that there is a huge difference at various linguistic levels unlike the other diglossic situations in Europe (Bodhan 2012 P.3). The latter states that the comparison between Western diglossia and Arabic diglossia is inadequate due to the asymmetries that exist between the relationship between MA and SA in one side and the official language and its varieties in Europe in another side. Another argument is that SA leads to the failure of the Moroccan educational system; Maamouri (2000) identifies the gap between the language of formal education; the vernacular spoken at home, the marketplace and almost everywhere outside the school; and the absence of the mother tongue as a major cause of low learning achievement rates in schools and low adult literacy. Additionally, SA and French as keys to socio-economic promotion are difficult to learn because

they are not native languages; lack immediate relevancy; are abstract and decontextualised; and bring with them linguistic insecurity. It is implied that Maamouri (2000) and others regard SA as a foreign language that should be replaced by the mother tongue, MA.

Many linguists and intellectuals lead the counter stand. For instance, Alfasi Alfihri (2011) and Alwadghiri (2011). The first has called for the establishment of Academia of SA that works on preserving and maintaining this language that is threatened by foreign languages and local languages. The former tries to analyze the objectives and pretexts used by the defenders of MA in Morocco. He argues that France and the west stand behind these voices and support them financially and academically to fight SA which is a symbol of Islamic and Arab identity and intellectual heritage. SA is targeted since the colonization period all over the Arab countries. This claim can be supported empirically by the existence of American and French schools and organizations that teach MA to foreigners and even to Moroccans. For instance, Peace Corps, which spreads all over Morocco. This organization has published many textbooks in MA, such as: The Darija Technical Booklet for environment volunteers, The Darija Technical Booklet for health volunteers, A Basic Course in Moroccan Arabic, edited by: El Haloui Abdennebi & Steve Bowman copyright November 2011 by Artisanal Treasures – Printed in the United States of America. Thus, learning of MA has a great importance among foreigners than it has among Moroccans who support it. Though there are some organizations in Morocco that hail the officialization of MA in Morocco. The supporters of SA argue that ignorance of SA leads many francophone to defend MA that they know (Nini 2010). Recently, a national conference has taken place in the faculty of Letters in Rabat on May 17, 2012. It tackles the future of Arabic language. The majority of the participants concern the situation of SA and emphasize on presenting solutions to improve its situation and regard MA as a corrupt version of SA.

The third stand is a middle way between the above. It holds the idea of using middle Arabic which is a mixture of SA and MA. For instance, Nichan magazine mixes between MA and SA. His secretary, Alhadif (2010) argues that his magazine tries to put an end to the linguistic contradiction in Morocco. He suggests that Morocco should have a reduced Arabic. Furthermore, Many definitions of codification involve official choices being made about the corpus of a language; but the way different vernaculars are developed in parallel with SA/or CA would incite us to think of other kinds of decision-making. Following Youssi (ms), “Moroccan as well as the Arab communities have been confronted with the obligation to open up to the modern world. Consequently, there have been pressing needs to communicate the innumerable foreign concepts, processes, the names of objects or principles of contemporary living in settings where the use of French would be inappropriate, and where any attempt to speak CA or SA would be ludicrous or out of the reach of the ordinary speakers of DA”. As a universal phenomenon of the ASCs, Youssi adds: “the setting up of what is referred to as educated spoken Arabic has consisted in mixing the structures of CA and DA to bring them closer to each other in an attempt to bridge the gap between the two varieties or instate a kind of middle road principle, Middle Arabic. The dynamics have consisted mainly in the extensive borrowing of CA vocabulary, which is slightly adapted to the pronunciation and the morphology of the vernacular”. Researchers may increasingly use MA as references for the vocabulary content of literacy materials, as has been the case, for example, in Tunisian adult literacy programs (Maamouri 1983). Thus; this stand is regarded as a middle way between the first two stands. It tries to reduce the differences between the two in calling for a combination of SA with MA.

The review of the literature demonstrates the controversy of the issue and the grounds on which the different attitudes are based which seem to be ideological, mainly the first and the second stands, in contrast, the last stand that represents the middle way is likely to represent the objective path that seeks the targeted people. It aims at making students able to understand their courses using easy SA. In general, the three stands lack the empirical research to support their claims. This paper fills this gap and evaluates these different stands.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used observation and questionnaires for data collection.

3.1.The Observation

My personal experience as a student and a teacher for years in Moroccan public and private schools allows me to construct views about the language of instruction used by teachers and students. Furthermore, as a university student who is a specialist in two different fields, namely English studies and religious studies, a holder of a B.A. and an M.A. in both Islamic Studies from Dar Elhadith El Hassania Institute, Rabat and English Studies from Mohammed V University, Rabat. This experience allows me to be aware of the different attitudes towards Moroccan Arabic from the point of view of Islamic studies department students (ISSs) as well as English department students (ESs). The two are used as a sample that provides us with a clear overview of the different attitudes towards the two varieties.

3.2.Questionnaire

Thanks to the fact that I am familiar with students from English departments and Islamic departments, which facilitate data analysis, I chose the respondents from these departments. The language used in the questionnaire is Arabic because it is the subject of investigation. Furthermore, all respondents understand it. Unlike English or French, which some of them may not understand.

As for the sample, I have chosen randomly 40 students in the English department and 40 students in the Islamic Studies department. The questionnaire contains 20 questions. The first five questions concern the frequency of language instruction language use during the class sessions. The second five questions cast light on the effect of the language use of instruction on the understanding of the course. The third five questions investigate the students' attitudes towards the supporters of MA or SA as a language of instruction. The fourth five questions tackle the issue of the attitudes towards the use of MA and or SA in the classroom.

4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1.Analysis of the Observation Results

Since I have been a student of Islamic studies at Dar Elhadith Elhassania Institute for six years, from 2006 to 2012, I have much to say about the issue of language of instruction. Officially, the latter is standard Arabic but many professors violate this internal law of the institute. I might distinguish between three categories. The first category uses only a pure SA in the instruction. Many professors in this category have a long experience in the field of teaching. Furthermore, they are ranked as eminent professors in the Moroccan and Islamic religious fields. They have many contributions to the field of Islamic studies. For the sake of objectivity, I avoid mentioning their names. Students highly appreciate this kind of professor and admire their courses. The second category lies in the type of professors who code switch from SA to MA with the dominance of the latter. These professors sway between having a

short period of teaching, between 2 and 10 years. The attitudes of students towards them vary from one student to another. Nevertheless, they have lower prestige in comparison with the first category. The third category manifests itself in the kind of professors who use only MA or middle Arabic as a language of instruction. However, this category is too rare, with only one case. The attitudes of students towards this it very negative. They consider MA as a language of the street.

As for my observation in English departments, I used to have a course in Arabic during my BA. Studies. The professors vary between using MA and code-switching from SA to MA. They take into account that English students have weaknesses in SA; as a result, they have preferred to use MA. However, professors themselves find difficulties in using SA because the department does not pay much attention to the proficiency of the professor's language as a requirement.

4.2. Analysis of The Questionnaire results

The analysis consists of four categories depending on the nature of the four questions' sets.

a. The frequency of language of instruction used during the class session.

Table 1 : Frequency of language of instruction used during the class session

Participants	MA as the Language of instruction used by professors	S A as a Language of Instruction used by professors	Code-switching from MA to S A as a Language of Instruction used by professors
English department students	40%	0%	60%
for Islamic studies students	20%	70%	5%

40% of English department students notice that the majority of professors use only MA in their teaching while the other 60% opt for code-switching from MA to SA with the dominance of the latter. As for Islamic studies students, 70% consider professors using SA; while 20% regard them using code-switching and only 5% using MA.

The difference between the English department and Islamic studies may be due to many reasons. On the one hand, English department students do not have classical references to consult and they have accessible and updated courses, for instance: the methodology of research, and writing formal letters. On the other hand, Islamic studies students have to consult classical sources written in highly codified Arabic; as a result, the dominance of SA in the classroom facilitates the task for the students of IS.

b. The effect of the language use of instruction on the understanding of the course.

Table 2: The Effect of the language of instruction on the understanding of the course

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Participants	MA is the most effective for understanding courses	SA is the most effective in understanding courses	Code-switching from MA to S A is the most effective on understanding courses.
English department students	70%	0%	30%
Islamic studies students	0 %	95%	5%

70% of English department students consider the use of MA as a way to facilitate the understanding of the course; in contrast, 95% of Islamic studies students consider MA use as a barrier of understanding of the course.

The major difference between the two groups goes back to many factors. First, language requirement of SA is demanding in IS. While this is not required in ES. Second, SA has a religious prestige in Morocco; consequently; the student should have a good performance of SA to get a job. Third, SA is the language of religious traditions and the holy Quran. Hence, the mastery of SA is an exacting requirement to understand and interpret them.

c. Students' attitudes towards the supporters of MA or SA as a language of instruction.

Table 3: Students' attitudes towards the supporters of MA or SA as a language of instruction.

Participants	Supporters of MA as a Language of instruction are for ideological reasons	Supporters of S A as a Language of Instruction are for ideological reasons	Supporters of Code-switching from MA to S A as a Language of Instruction for ideological reasons
English department students	60 %	30 %	10 %
for Islamic studies students	80 %	15%	5%

The majority of participants regard the support of MA as going back to ideological motivation. There is a slight difference concerning this point. This reveals that even ESSs do not have a high proficiency of SA but they still support it as a language of instruction even though it does not facilitate the understanding of the course as MA does. Nevertheless, the ISSs attitudes are predictable because they have already opted for SA in the previous answers.

d. The Attitudes towards the use of MA and or SA in the classroom.

Table 4: The attitudes towards the use of MA and or SA in the classroom.

Participants	MA as the Language of instruction used by professors	S A as a Language of Instruction used by professors	Code-switching from MA to S A as a Language of Instruction used by professors
English department students	5 %	35 %	60%
for Islamic studies students	0 %	90%	10%

60% of ESSs are strongly agree with the code switching as a way of instruction; while 35% strongly agree with the use of SA and only 5% favored the use of MA . These results show the positive attitudes towards SA as a language of instruction though they support its combination with MA. However, very few who support the unique use of MA. This implies the prestige that SA has at ESSs level. These attitudes may probably explained by the high codification of SA, its literary power and its religious prestige which still represents a central motivation for SA positive attitudes. In this respect, Sharaf Eddin (1976) argues that “religion stands up immune dike against the support of Arabic dialects over SA ” (P 133).

90 % of ISSs strongly agree with the use of SA as a language of instruction. Only 10% of them agree with the combination of MA and MA and the dominance of the first. This huge support of SA might be explained by the financial and economic needs that SA proficiency opens and fulfils.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.

The observation and the questionnaire show the extent to which the attitudes of the literature review reflect the students’ attitudes that represent the target language of instruction. The comparison between the two confirms the necessity of empirical research to evaluate the theoretical framework. As far as MA is concerned, the majority of students have negative attitudes toward this variety. This shows students’ awareness of the distinction between everyday life use of MA and its inadequacy with academic and intellectual use. This might go back to the huge written scientific and literary heritage of SA. Their stickiness to their identity leads them to assert their means of maintaining their historical and religious identity lie in SA. Though the majority of ESSs confirm the superiority of MA in contributing to more understanding of the course, the majority of them have a negative attitude toward officializing it as a language of instruction. This is another sign of Moroccan pride in their identity that was constructed for centuries by Moroccan and Islamic scholars. They realize that the maintenance of SA is automatically the maintenance of the rooted identity.

The empirical research shows the asymmetries between theoretical framework findings and the empirical fieldwork results. Thus, the use of SA or /and MA as a language of instruction depends on the nature of the course. If the course is Islamic studies the only suitable language would be SA. While if the course concerns current issues, such as: business finance, art, I think the most suitable language is a reduced Arabic. The MA has no place of use because very limited percentage chooses it as a language of instruction. The issue of language use should not be treated from ideological and activist background that marginalizes the targeted people, mainly students.

This paper targets higher education, namely the university level; as a result, its findings might be representative only of this level and the literary category within society. The reformulation of the language of instruction should be investigated and empirically studied by specialists in the field and has to be put away from activists and non-scientific views that seek only to achieve very limited interests. The limitations of this study open further research doors for deepening the investigation on the language of instruction I, different education levels in Morocco.

6. CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on different attitudes toward language of instruction in the Moroccan educational system. It fosters empirical research using observation and questionnaires to evaluate the theoretical framework, which used to be in almost devoid of empirical research. The present study's main findings lie in the gap between theoretical and empirical research, the necessity of SA use as a language of instruction in many fields, such as Islamic studies, and the possibility of using reduced Arabic in other domains. For instance: for the sake of teaching current issues, such as research methodology, business, finance, and so on. Thus, the use of SA or SA and MA depends on the nature of the course. This paper represents the university level; consequently, more studies are required to work on other levels.

The language of instruction is still in need of more investigation to represent the overall Moroccan society. This research contributes as much as possible to this issue, initiates the empirical research and reveals the remaining gaps where more investigation is required to improve the situation of the Moroccan educational system.

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Appendix

The questionnaire is as follows:

Gender: female ☐ male ☐

1- What is the most used language in the classroom, MA or SA?

2- How is the value of the language of instruction used by the professor?

High ☐ medium ☐ low ☐ none ☐

3- What is the most used language that students use inside the classroom MA or SA?

4- How do you see your performance in SA?

High

medium

low

5- Justify your previous answer?

6- According to your experience, what is the most beneficial language in understanding the course?

Item number	Questionnaire items	I agree	I strongly Agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
7	SA should be completely used in the classroom to understand the course?				
8	MA has bearing on deep understanding of the course.				
9	The mixture between SA and MA inside the classroom is the best way to teach.				
10	The use of SA by the instructor makes the understanding of the textbooks easier.				
11	The support of MA as a language of instruction is a scientific claim.				
12	The support of MA as a language of instruction is an ideological claim.				
13	The support of SA as a language of instruction is a scientific claim.				
14	The support of SA as a language of instruction is an ideological claim.				
15	The officialization of SA as a language of instruction is a good policy to promote its use.				
16	SA should be used as a language of instruction and MA to provide examples.				
17	SA should be used as the dominant language of instruction.				
18	SA should be used completely as a language of instruction.				
19	MA should be used completely as a language of instruction.				
20	SA should be used as the dominant language of instruction with MA.				