

29 The standardisation and dissemination of Amazigh terminology in Morocco

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ABSTRACT

Among the complex assortment of changes that have recently been observed in Morocco due to the interplay of many factors foremost among which is presumably the Arab spring, one may speak of the change in the Moroccan linguistic policies observed over the last 13 years. Of paramount importance within such alterations, there is the officialization of Amazigh (Berber), which has, for long, been considered as an autochthonous minority language by the system in Morocco.

The revitalization of Amazigh got translated into a number of steps, most important of which is the creation of an Institute called The Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) whose central thrust is to promote the Amazigh language and Culture. One of the first goals meant to be achieved by the Institute is to standardize and plan the Amazigh language and help its passing from orality to writing. The standardization of the Amazigh language means the unification of the different Amazigh varieties that pervade Morocco along a number of linguistic facets, i.e. the graphic, phonetic, morphological, syntactic and lexical facets.

From a lexical standpoint, not only assembling and unifying the lexicon but also undertaking terminological work has become essentially necessitated. The linguists in the Language Planning Centre in IRCAM have carried out a number of technical glossaries and specialized vocabularies in a whole range of scientific fields with a patent prioritization of the education, media and administration fields (as the language is meant to be taught at school and used in the media and the different administrations in Morocco). The experience, though promising, faced a number of problems, of most concern here the problems of disseminating and implanting the newly created terms.

The paper is meant to offer a brief retrospective of the experience and an evaluation of the Amazigh terminological standardization and dissemination in Morocco.

0 Introduction

Amazigh, a language spoken in Morocco, has been subject to progressive attrition for a variety of reasons. The position of the language has been demoted over centuries because it was and still is rivaled by other stronger languages. Well aware of this precarious condition, the Moroccan government has tried to get around this situation by trying to revitalize the Amazigh language, through the creation of a language agency under the name of IRCAM as well as by declaring Amazigh an official language in 2011. This paper tries to

provide a brief retrospective on the experience of planning and standardizing the Amazigh language in Morocco, an operation which has, in large part, been broached by IRCAM researchers. The central thrust of the work meant to be achieved by the researchers is to unify the different Amazigh varieties that hold in Morocco, i.e. Tarifiyt, Tamazight and Tashlhiyt. The most salient problems have been addressed, of most concern here the planning of Amazigh terminology and the problems besetting this operation. A special focus falls on the phenomena of dissemination and acceptability of Amazigh terminology. Some lines of thinking with regard to contending with these problems are addressed at the end of the article.

1 Amazigh: from attrition to revitalization

Since time immemorial, Amazigh, which also goes by the name Berber, has been used as a language of communication in North Africa. Yet, owing to its contact with a whole range of languages such as Roman, Greek, Phoenician, Arabic, Spanish and French (see Julien (1994)), among others, Amazigh has been subject to a complex assortment of effects, drastic of which is presumably its tendency, nowadays, to undergo progressive attrition and etiolation.

In the Moroccan context, the lot of Amazigh is no different from its lot in all North African countries¹. In Morocco, Amazigh, which was used by the Amazigh people in the pre-Islamic era, started to know influential changes ever since the arrival of Arabs. The most notable change is the arabization process which was first observed in urban areas and then gradually pervaded many rural zones (see Chafik (1989)). Many Amazigh zones were converted into Arabic-speaking areas. The fact that Arabic gained more ground to the detriment of Amazigh was ascribed to a variety of reasons, foremost among which is the political and military supremacy of Arabs along with the conversion of the Amazigh people into Islam.

The occupation of Morocco by the French and Spanish colonizers, which took place early in the twentieth century, brought about no important changes for Amazigh. Conversely, a close scrutiny of the Amazigh macro-sociolinguistic vista evinces further exacerbation of the status of Amazigh after independence. This is, in large measure, reminiscent of two factors. For one thing, there is the emergence of Spanish and most influentially French, which have notable weight in the linguistic market, due to the logistical force they enjoy in the political,

¹ Amazigh used to be spoken in North Africa in the following countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and The Canary Islands.

economic, industrial and scientific grounds (see Boukous (2009, 2012)). For another, there is the institutionalization of administrative life and the schooling of Moroccans, both of which have patently contributed to the promotion of Arabic, the only official language in Morocco since the date of independence in 1956 till 2011². Another reason may also be viewed to have contributed to the degradation of Amazigh. It has to do with the massive migration of the Amazigh people to larger cities, driven in good part by the existence of abundant job opportunities in urban areas in comparison with the poor, usually mountainous, pre-desert areas where they live. This exodus was amortized over a whole range of consequences, most notable of which is the linguistic and cultural assimilation of Amazigh people to Arabic-speaking city dwellers.

A sociolinguistic analysis of the status of Amazigh shows that the language has always suffered from precarious conditions. This precariousness is evinced in institutional marginalization as well as in the systematic promotion of Arabic and European languages concomitantly with the weakening of Amazigh and the reduction of the number of its speakers. Since the sixties, a group of Amazigh associations and activists, feeling the necessity to contend with this continuously exacerbating situation, put their hands to initiate a number of extra-institutional development strategies through individual actions as well as actions within associations. These actions were meant to increase Amazigh identity awareness, by claiming Amazigh cultural and linguistic rights as well as by organizing cultural, artistic and literary events and facilitating access to other forms of expression such as written and audio-visual media. Yet, Because of the inhospitable political context, the accomplishment of such actions was often hampered by a whole range of ideological, political and financial obstacles. Hence, although extra-institutional efforts managed to achieve some success, the success remains modest given the limited resources available to the associative fabric.

Over the last three decades, the Moroccan policy has known influential changes. Of paramount importance among these changes, there is the increasingly observed culture of human rights which can in no way go unnoticed in the current Moroccan government policy. Defending cultural and linguistic identity was and is still having a great vogue both nationally and internationally. Within this environment, the government policy towards Amazigh has considerably changed. This change was translated into action by the creation of an institute

² In 2011, Amazigh was declared an official language in Morocco.

under the name of IRCAM³ whose goal is to promote the Amazigh language and culture. In his royal speech in Ajdir 2001, King Mohammed the Sixth set the principles for a new cultural and linguistic policy where Amazigh culture is recognized as an important constituent in Moroccan culture, whose revalorization is a responsibility of all Moroccans.

The efforts invested jointly by IRCAM and some government authority agencies, especially the Ministry of Education, have amounted to the insertion of Amazigh in the educational system in 2003. The position of Amazigh in the Media was also endorsed, and an Amazigh channel was launched in 2011. Another event which took place in 2011 and was going to be a turning point in the history of Amazigh is the fact of enshrining Amazigh with official status.

2 Amazigh and language planning

Although the government has been engaged in the overall project of revitalizing Amazigh, its real contribution in terms of providing the logistical means for the promotion of the Amazigh language and culture was very meager. Conversely, the efforts invested by the language agency may well be considered as important. The language Planning Centre researchers have considered it of prime importance and utility to get around the precariousness of the Amazigh language which is patently apparent in its status, corpus, and functions as well as in its position in the media, education, advertising, film production and publishing. Epilinguistically, the value of Amazigh in the linguistic market is not satisfactory either, nor are people's attitudes and perceptions of it, as the language is considered to be a rural, popular, folklore language (see Boukous (2012, 1979, 200b) and Gravel (1976).

From the foregoing, it emerges that planning Amazigh has become sorely needed. IRCAM researchers have come to the conclusion that the approach that should be adopted for the planning of the status and corpus of Amazigh should be, in large measure, consistent with the approach made avail of in planning the status and corpus of undeveloped indigenous languages. Of course, applying the approach to Amazigh should take into consideration its structural and sociolinguistic specificities. While the approach looks to be a likely key to accommodate the planning of Amazigh, following in that the experiences that have already been broached for African languages such as Swahili and Hausa, the translation of the approach into action was fraught with many problems and obstacles, some of which will be laid out later.

³ L'Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe (The Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture) was created in 2001.

2.1 Status planning

The planning of status, mostly political in nature, is of prime importance and utility in language planning. A number of decisions have to be made with regard to the policy to be followed and the functions to associate to the language. The project should by right be carried out by political actors, different authority agencies and language academies if any. Haugen (1966) contends that the policy of language planning consists of four steps which can be set out as follows: the formulation, codification, elaboration and implementation of the policy. Each of the aforementioned steps consists of a complex assortment of strategic stages to be followed if a policy is to succeed. A number of successors, such as Garvin (1973), Gorman (1973), and others, have provided other versions of language planning which, sometimes, exhibit some mismatches with Haugen's approach.

In the span between the creation of IRCAM and 2011, the Moroccan government did not fully engage in setting a fully-fledged status policy for Amazigh. The contribution of the political system was very modest and may sometimes be qualified to follow the "leave language alone" approach (see Fishman (2006)). The State did not project into the future or engage in a long term action plan concerning Amazigh planning. Replete are the facets that exhibit this lack of a concrete policy; some of which are laid out below:

- Although there was common consensus that a standard form of Amazigh is the goal meant to be achieved, there was no clear consensus as to how this is to be achieved. The dominating viewpoint in unifying the three main Amazigh dialects is the polynomic approach (see Marcellesi (1983)), albeit not always agreed by all scholars.
- There was no clear idea what the functions of the Amazigh language were going to be. Whether Amazigh is to be a national language, a territorial language, a regional language, an official language, a media language, a Work language, a medium of instruction language or a subject language is not clear. These problems were confirmed by the annual report of the Higher Counsel of Teaching (see Boumalk (2009)).
- In education terms, the governmental framework which regulates the teaching of Amazigh took the form of ministerial circulars only, which was not enough to generalize the teaching of Amazigh all over Morocco. Many problems remained without clear-cut solutions, i.e. problems associated with the quality and duration of training allotted to teachers as well as the number of hours allocated to the teaching of Amazigh. There were also serious problems portrayed in the scarcity of qualified human resources. Most

of these problems ensued from lack of a legal framework that organizes the teaching of Amazigh in Morocco.

- There was no harmonious collaboration between the State and the language agency. The decisions of the state were sometimes hasty and not in fine accord with the nature of the work and efforts undertaken in IRCAM.

In 2011, the State enshrined Amazigh with official status, an important move that is expected to bring about important results. The institutionalization of Amazigh means the satisfaction of all the legal conditions that any language needs so as to be planned, standardized and promoted. While Amazigh officialization may be construed as an unprecedented achievement, Moroccans are still waiting for the operationalization of this officialization through the creation of organic laws which will explicit its implementation in real life.

2.2 Corpus planning

For language planning to be successful, corpus planning is essentially necessitated. The need for corpus planning derives much of its appeal and utility from the need to update, cultivate and modernize the language. While status planning was not accommodated properly by the State, especially between the period of 2001 and 2011, Corpus planning has been addressed more seriously by IRCAM researchers. Two dispositions hold in planning corpus. First, there is the unification of different language varieties along the putative linguistic facets, commonly covering the graphic, phonetic, morphological and syntactic levels. Secondly, there is the compiling of existing lexicon and its modernization by undertaking terminological work.

Under Amazigh Corpus planning, the researchers of the Language Planning Centre in IRCAM have assigned lots of importance to variation accommodation, especially as the variation observed in Amazigh pervades a whole range of linguistic facets. The task of getting around this variation has been so daunting, partly due to the dialectal mismatches and disparities attested between some lects⁴, and partly owing to the epistemological fogginess of the notion of the norm. Importantly, within the composite of putative norms to be adopted, the decision was in favor of a national norm, a single standard Amazigh language to be progressively developed from the standardization of the three main Amazigh

⁴ This diversity has driven some linguists like Galand (2002) to consider Amazigh as a set of different dialectalized languages, especially as some speakers from different Amazigh lects fail to attain mutual intelligibility.

varieties in Morocco, i.e. Tarifiyt, Tamazight and Tashlhiyt. The possibility of choosing regional standard languages or pan-Amazigh standard languages has been foreclosed and abandoned entirely for political and feasibility reasons (see Boukous (2012)).

▪ *unity in variation*

The efforts invested in the standardization of the different linguistic facets of Amazigh happen to be very interesting. Notwithstanding the shortness of the period in which IRCAM has started the workshop of Amazigh planning, the results achieved seem to be promising. The valiant attempts made to unify the graphic, phonetic, morphological and syntactic levels have achieved some success. One may say that the basic standard linguistic rules have been reached.

With regard to the Amazigh writing system, a norm of writing, dubbed Tifinagh⁵, has been developed (see Ameur et.al. (2006)). The norm is meant to offer a single writing system to enable the users to read and write in a uniform fashion. A number of criteria have been respected in the choice of the phonetic content and graphic form of the alphabet, such as historicity, univocity, coherence and economy (see Ameur et. al. (2006)).

The linguistic facet that exhibits the least variation is presumably the morpho-syntactic level. Yet, a comprehensive analysis of the morpho-syntax of Amazigh yields compelling evidence of the existence of some morphological and syntactic phenomena that patently resist a unifying account. Foremost among such phenomena, there is the Construct State, verb morphology and determinants, among others. The valiant efforts undertaken to standardize the morpho-syntactic level have resulted into a number of interesting works such as Boukhris et. al. (2008). Further work is sorely needed to circumvent the problematic morpho-syntactic phenomena that remain.

▪ *Compiling and modernizing the lexicon*

Lexical planning is of prime importance in corpus planning. The activity of lexical planning conflates two prominent activities. The first consists of compiling attested lexical items from existing dictionaries, field work research and linguistic atlases. The second consists of updating, modernizing and enriching the lexical repertoire by resorting to word creation or borrowing. While the first activity, though time-consuming, does not look so daunting to the

⁵ Tifinagh is the Amazigh writing system. In areas other than the Touareg regions (Southern Algeria, North of Mali, North of Niger and Southern Libya), Tifinagh ceased to be used at least 14 centuries ago.

trained linguist as it requires nothing more than the collection of the repertoire of lexical items observed in Amazigh dictionaries as well as in everyday life spoken Amazigh, the second activity looks more problematic, as it requires terminological creative work. The creative work carried out by the linguist necessitates lots of talent not only with regard to the grammatical and semantic structure of the language, but also with regard to the representations, perceptions, knowledge structure, attitudes, beliefs, ethnology, sociology and anthropology of the users in a speech community

With regard to compiling existing lexical material, the CAL researchers have benefited from the existence of a number of variety-based dictionaries⁶. As regards terminological work, although some amateurish terminological work had already existed before the creation of IRCAM, most of it was improvised and its creation was devoid of a recognized scientific methodology. Given the sore need in terms of terminological work, IRCAM researchers have carried out a number of technical glossaries and special vocabularies especially in the domains of education, administration and the media⁷.

3 Terminology planning and the problems of acceptability and dissemination

Planning the lexicon, as contended by many scholars, conflates the planning of two types of lexicons: a general lexicon and a specialized lexicon. The creation of general and specialized lexicons both fall under the rubric of terminology planning, an activity which is couched under elaboration in Haugen's approach (1966), intellectualization in Garvin's scheme (1973) and part of modernization in Ferguson's model (1968).

Corpus planning and, most influentially terminology planning, should be undertaken while taking into consideration the socio-cultural structure of the language community. This idea is largely defended by Fishman (1983:2) who explains:

The tendency to view 'corpus planning' as nothing special, as just one more technical skill that a linguist should be able to pull out of his bag of tricks, is triply mistaken. It reveals a misunderstanding of lexicons per se, of corpus planning as a whole, and of the societal nexus of language planning more generally.

Fishman explains that lexicons "are not endless laundry lists, without rhyme and reason,

⁶ Some of the most prominent dictionaries are: Taifi (1991) Serhoual (2002) and Oussikoum (1995).

⁷ Some of the terminological works undertaken by the Language Planning Centre researchers in IRCAM are as follows: Ameur et. al. (2009a), *Vocabulaire des medias*; Ameur et. al. (2009b), *Vocabulaire grammatical*; Ameur et. al. (in preparation), *Lexique d'administration*.

without order or pattern, without systematic links to each other and to all other facets of language” and that they are directly related to “socio-cultural and political sensitivities”. Fishman explains:

Most serious of all, however, is the lack of recognition revealed by the ‘merely lexicon’ view of (a) the delicate and complex social context that commonly surrounds corpus planning and of (b) the need for professional expertise with respect to that context if corpus planning is to succeed. It is a devastating mistake to assume that corpus planning merely requires the interplay and coordination of linguistic expertise and technological expertise, devastating certainly if one’s goal is not merely to do corpus planning (i.e. not merely to create a nomenclature in chemistry, or in some other modern technological area) but to have it accepted (i.e. to have it liked, learned and used). If the latter is our goal (and anything less strikes me as a travesty), then cultural expertise in all its ramifications is called for as well (Fishman (1983: 3))

Societal (non) acceptability of planned terminology, thereby, falls out from the socio-cultural expertise of the planner and the knowledge of the complex structure of lexicon.

The observation reached, thus far, is of prime importance to the case of Amazigh, as the terminological work undertaken in the Language Planning Centre in IRCAM looks to face the same problems raised by Fishman. The problem of acceptability is one of the most prominent problems besetting the diffusion of the terminological work undertaken in IRCAM. The resistance to use IRCAM words is observed in the media, in associations, and for many Amazigh speakers. Some Amazigh speakers consider the terms created by IRCAM to be in conflict with the lexical items they use in their everyday life. The Amazigh terms issuing from IRCAM, they argue, do not represent Amazigh people. With this observation as background, some of the questions concerning this issue deserve mention. What representations do users have, for example, of sociologically validated borrowed words from other languages like Arabic and French? And how can this representation invalidate newly created words? What conditions decision-making for a language community, such as the Amazigh language community, particularly in text production?

Before addressing the question raised above, it is important to say that the problem of acceptability is not an oddity of Amazigh terminology but pervades the terminology of many other languages. Studies carried out by Alloni-Fainberg (1974), Rubin (1977), Kummer (1983) evince that very few writers use Academy proposed terms. In the domain of chemistry, Rubin (1977) contends that within a number of 24 writers, only 8 know of the terminology proposed by the language academy, and only 5 use the terminology. Antia

(2000) tries to provide an answer to why the display holds as such. One of the hypotheses that he suggests, along with sociology, is the way terms are integrated in discourse.

An important work undertaken by Antia discloses the degree to which terms are acceptable. Acceptability is evaluated on the basis of the discourse conveyed in written terminological material. On the basis of written terminological material, Antia explains that a terminology planner is able to spot where the weakness of the terms lurks and, thereby, understand why the terms are resisted by the users. His theoretical framework recognizes a whole range of criteria along which the written material discourse is to be assessed. The criteria are set out as follows: a linguistic approach (strategies used), a terminological systems approach (how groups of terms reflect the relationship in the corresponding sets of concepts), knowledge approach (the effectiveness and efficiency of the terminology project as a means of imparting knowledge), and a sociological approach (societal validation of the terminology planning effort as evidenced by knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the terms).

It is my belief that an answer to the questions I have already asked may only be provided if an analysis along Antia's line of thinking is undertaken to the Amazigh terminological literature. An analysis along this line of thinking will enable us to see the reasons underlying the problem of acceptability and use of the terms adopted by the IRCAM Language Planning Centre.

4 Conclusion

This paper has tried to give a handle on the experience of Amazigh planning in Morocco. The efforts undertaken by the language agency, called IRCAM, coupled with the efforts invested by the government authority agencies have been evaluated. The different steps of language planning have been fleshed out and some problems besetting Amazigh planning have been foregrounded. The last section of the article has centered on the problem of terminology dissemination and acceptability and a line of thinking as to how these problems are to be circumvented.

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