

Arabic: [يلاً وين يتسمسلاين تنقليزيت دأ؟]

Latin: [Yella win yettmeslayen tanglizit da?]

Context of the research

Increased and official use of Tamazight was written into Algerian law and educational policy after a long history of struggles against assimilation policies rooted in the Arabization of the country (Morath, 2012). This took place after Algeria became independent and Standard Arabic was used in all domains. In the 1990s, resistance towards this decision grew and tensions between those fighting for their linguistic and cultural rights and the government (who continued to support the official use of Arabic only) ensued. This period lasted around ten years and is known as *the black decade* (Le Roux, 2017), culminating in the Black Amazigh Spring in April 2001. As Benrabah (2004) argues, the radical process of Arabization did not recognize all linguistic and cultural identities and instead, it was seen to prevent people from being who they really were and knowing where they belonged.

After series of protests and riots as well as the continued efforts of Amazigh activists and movements, the Tamazight language became a national language in 2002 (Dersso, 2012). In 2016, it became a national and official language alongside with Arabic. Recently, in 2017 Tamazight was officially implemented in schools in some of the Algerian states, including Oran, the site of the research (Jean, 2019).

Research motives and question

I decided to carry out research looking at the teaching and learning of Tamazight for different reasons:

- Being Algerian and Amazigh, I have been always curious to know how people perceived Tamazight and Imazighen, especially in the city of Oran where I grew up and where the majority language is Algerian Arabic (also called Dardja).
- The implementation of Tamazight in some schools in Oran in recent years is a key turning point in the modern history of the language and, if it is to be successful, we must better understand its development.

This led me to the following main research question:

What are the attitudes of teachers, pupils, and parents towards Tamazight teaching and learning and the maintenance of the language in Algeria?

Key literature

Linguistic attitudinal studies and work on heritage/minority language education highlights three key factors in the successful maintenance of heritage language(s) within the education system:

- How much institutional support is dedicated to developing the situation of the language teaching and learning process (Weekly, 2020).
- The attitudes of teachers towards the teaching and learning of the heritage language (Giles and Bourhis, 1977).
- The linguistic attitudes of family members, and particularly parents (Li, 2006).

There are many examples of complex linguistic contexts like Algeria, including Scottish Gaelic and Welsh in the UK. One of the key studies about heritage languages in the UK is from O'Hanlon (2015). In this, it was found that pupils in heritage language medium schools and their parents responded positively towards the learning of Scottish Gaelic and Welsh for the following reasons:

- Obtaining job opportunities.
- Raising awareness about bilingualism in the UK.
- Learning about Scottish and Welsh culture(s) and traditions.
- The good teaching and learning conditions in Scottish Gaelic and Welsh classrooms such as the small class size.

Such positive attitudes are not always found, however. For example, Erihani's (2008) investigation of Moroccans' attitudes towards Tamazight language teaching and learning in Morocco showed that people perceived Tamazight language teaching negatively, seeing it as insufficient and of no use. They were, however, supportive of its use by speakers in their home and family contexts.

The theoretical framework

To help classify the attitudes found in the current study, Ruiz's (1984) theory of the three orientations of language planning were used.

Language as a problem

A heritage/minority language can be seen as a problem in a society where monolingual or assimilationist policies support the dominant language only (Hornberger, 2005). Minority languages are considered less useful because they are limited in terms of use and do not function as a language of instruction in the main domains such as education and employment (Harrison, 2007).

Language as a resource

This view posits that the existence of many languages in a society is an advantage (Hornberger and Vaish, 2009). Multilingualism is embraced over assimilation. It encourages the minority and the majority communities to come together and build positive social, economic and political relations and contributes effectively to the maintenance of the heritage language (Harrison, 2007).

Language as a right

This examines the use of languages in light of unfairness or injustices and how language rights lead to equity and stability (Hult, Hornberger, 2016). Language rights can range on a spectrum of prohibition, to toleration, to permission and, finally, to promotion (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). For instance, a minority language would be prohibited in case assimilationist policies were established, or it would be promoted if policies to maintain and use the language continuously were implemented.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed methods and ethnographic case study approach to investigate the attitudes of the following stakeholders: teachers of Tamazight (including head teachers), pupils (both who learn Tamazight and not) and parents (both whose children attend Tamazight language classes and not) in two public schools in the city of Oran.

Three methods were used to achieve triangulation of findings:

- Semi-structured interviews with head teachers and teachers.
- Focus groups with the pupils.
- Questionnaires with parents.

Data collection

After piloting the instruments, the researcher revised the questions and carried out the following data collection steps:

- 4 semi-structured interviews with 2 head teachers and 2 teachers of Tamazight.
- 4 focus groups with the pupils who attended Tamazight language classes (another 4 focus groups with the pupils who did not learn Tamazight were planned to be done, unfortunately, the schools closed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic current at the time).
- 105 questionnaires were collected from parent participants (55 responses from parents whose children did not attend Tamazight language classes, and 50 responses from parents whose children learnt Tamazight language).

Data analysis

There were three stages of analysis according to the research question and the three data collection methods.

Preliminary results

The data revealed different attitudes held by participants, some seeing Tamazight language (henceforth TL) teaching and learning positively, others viewing it negatively. Using Ruiz's (1984) theory as a framework, examples of attitudes that emerged from within the data are presented as follows.

Tamazight as a problem

Some participants' responses positioned TL as a *problem*. Firstly, they identified some academic rationales including their learning preferences. They prioritized learning other languages, as they described, that are more important and relevant than Tamazight, such as Arabic, French, English, Spanish and Chinese. Some also favoured learning STEM subjects. Another rationale was a fear of achieving low grades. Both parents and children showed concern that failing in Tamazight language classes would affect academic marks.

Secondly, pedagogical rationales were identified particularly by head teachers and teachers of Tamazight. They discussed the lack of the teaching and learning materials, mainly, books. Furthermore, they mentioned that the curriculum and the time whereby Tamazight language classes are given are not well structured and poorly managed.

Parents highlighted that their choice not to let their children to join TL classes was dependent on their ethnic background. On the one hand, there was a group of parents from Arab backgrounds who mentioned that it was not important for their children to learn Tamazight and that Imazighen would and should be more concerned with learning their own 'mother tongue'. On the other hand, the parents whose background was Amazigh felt there was no need to have their children attending TL classes if they had already learnt it in the home.

Tamazight as a resource

Some respondents saw TL learning as an asset and identified different rationales for including it in the education sector. Firstly, considering languages as a political resource, some parents felt TL learning in schools would contribute to the unity of the country and improve Arab and Amazigh relations. Secondly, as a cognitive resource, some respondents felt it would help children develop their linguistic skills, particularly in terms of verbal communication. It was also considered an opportunity for Arabic speakers (whether from an Arab background or from an Amazigh background, who did not acquire Tamazight) to learn the language. The inclusion of a new language in

the curriculum was also seen to encourage or promote multilingual approaches to teaching and learning. Other rationales were sociolinguistic and sociocultural in nature. For instance, participants emphasized the fact that having Tamazight in schools would contribute to maintaining and recognizing the TL, preserving the Amazigh heritage and culture as well as developing communication among family members.

Tamazight as a right

Some respondents saw Tamazight language teaching and learning as a right. They saw TL learning as a way to protect, firstly, the individual's right, and secondly, the view that there is a collective right and freedom to choose the language used for communication both within the private and the public spheres was expressed. It was perceived that TL learning would protect the right of the TL to be maintained, recognised, and to have a status in Algerian society.

In terms of key factors affecting the maintenance of Tamazight language teaching and learning (TLT/L), the participants highlighted important key elements that affect the teaching and learning of the TL and its maintenance including, firstly, the role of parents in encouraging their children to learn the language. Secondly, the role of the teachers of Tamazight in school to provide a suitable teaching and learning environment in the classroom and foster motivation and curiosity for and about the language. Thirdly, that it is critical that the TL gains attention from governmental institutions who have a significant responsibility in maintaining the use of the language in Algeria and particularly in an official capacity.

Conclusions

The rationales and the factors affecting attitudes towards heritage or minority language teaching and learning are the subject of many studies in various disciplines. However, there is little research, thus far, about the Tamazight language, particularly in Algeria.

The preliminary findings of this study show that the inclusion of Tamazight in schools has been received by Algerians differently. According to Ruiz 's three orientations of language planning, the participants' views split into seeing Tamazight as a *problem*, a *resource* and a *right*. That is, some saw the teaching and learning of Tamazight as playing a vital role in maintaining the language and the Amazigh identity and exercising a linguistic *right*. It was also seen as a *resource* to strengthen the unity of the country and its political stability and reduce racism. Opponents to its inclusion in schools saw the *problem* of Tamazight as it not being regarded as prestigious as other languages (e.g. Arabic, French and English) and its inability to provide children with a professional career. Furthermore, it was concluded that the crucial role of both parents in the home context and teachers in the school context, as well as the significant interventions by the institutional authorities, could considerably contribute to the maintenance of the language.

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