

THE ISSUE OF ARABISATION IN THE ALGERIAN EDUCATION SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant dilemmas that Algeria has had to challenge since 1962, relates to language. It is considered as the only Arab community which swallowed the most substantial colonial French impact for more than a century. In order to restore and recover a previously oppressed identity and personality, the newly free nation urged to implement a language policy called Arabisation as a massive system, especially in the educational sphere which remains up to now highly problematic. Therefore, This paper presents the language policy (arabisation) pursued in Algeria since independence. The first parts of the paper emphasize on defining the concepts of language planning and arabisation. The next section provides an overview on the arabisation process and its effects on the educational system throughout distinct periods. The following part explores the problems resulting from arabisation. Finally, the paper argues that the process has failed as a result of miscellaneous factors.

KEYWORDS: Algeria, Education, Arabisation, Policy, Makers, Language Policy/Language Planning

INTRODUCTION

Just after independence, the Algerian authority implemented a language reform known as 'Arabization'. The term refers to the pervasive use of Arabic in domains such as politics, culture and education where probably the most significant measures have been taken. Indeed, the Arabisation policy is stimulated by three essential features: Firstly, Arabic denotes the cultural side of independence, as French was imposed by the settler. Secondly, Arabic is the language of Islam. Finally, Arabic is used by the Arab nation. However, Arabization whose aim was to turn Arabic as a chief tool of thought and work in order to reach the stipulations of time and to overcome the bias of language, literature and poetry, was disapproved and accused to have no scientific basis as a result of its connection with the Islamist movement.

LANGUAGE PLANNING DEFINED

Generally speaking, 'language planning' (LP for short) refers to the official, government-level activity aiming at establishing which language varieties are used in a particular community and at directing which language varieties are to be used for which purposes in that particular community. Others view it as a dynamic process aiming at changing language functions, language patterns, and language status in a given society. In education, the most important LP decisions are about the choice of the variety or varieties to be used as the medium of instruction.

Cooper (1989:45) offers a narrower definition of LP where he mentions that: "LP refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes", i.e. as an intervention aiming at influencing language or language use, and the term 'efforts' refers to the decisions taken by policy makers to evolve a language and to implement it for specific functions. These actions are referred to as, status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning. The latter which is also called 'Language-in-education planning'

(Kaplan & Bardauf,1997), is another type of LP in which a national state or local government system aims at influencing aspects of language, such as language status, distribution, and literacy through education.

ARABISATION

By 1962, the newly free country was confronted to the critical issue related to the reality that French was imposed during the period of occupation as the only official language. For returning to the Arab-Islamic cultural identity and the national personality, the new Algerian political leaders launched a simple and rapid language policy that attempted to reinforce MSA as an official language of the state especially in the field of education through the process of 'acquisition planning'. Such policy was called "Arabisation policy". 'Arabisation', in the light of Kh. T. Ibrahim's (1997:138) views point, is one of our fundamental options. It is not a matter of refusing the dialogue with other people and other civilizations; it is however, a matter of becoming ourselves, in order to root in our soil and our identity, for better assimilating after, what the others can bring of enrichment (translation is mine).

Arabization was meant to erase all the colonizer's remnants and to unify Algerians both politically and linguistically, and as previously mentioned; the Algerian leaders had a substantial will to regain their Arab and Muslim identity which could be attained only through Arabic.

THE ARABISATION PROCESS AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION

The process of Arabisation did not only consist in altering French by Arabic, but also in establishing the requisite alternatives while taking into consideration the recent functional transformations that the foreign language has exhibited in the whole country. Therefore, the procedure has gone through various stages that can be mirrored through distinct periods:

- From 1962 to 1965: On October 5th, 1962, the first president of Algeria Ahmed Ben Bella proclaimed his adherence to al 'Umma l 'Arabiyya, the Arab nation stating: "Nous sommes des Arabes" (we are Arabs). The Algerian constitution endorsed such ideological orientation: while Article 2 indicates that "Islam is the religion of the state", Article 3 states that "Arabic is the national and official language". Ben Bella also claimed that at early schooling (1963), the selected official language (MSA) would be taught in parallel with French in primary school. Then, in accordance with the recommendation of the F.L.N. (Front of National Liberation) which focused on the urgent need to speed up Arabisation, MSA gained an important status since it became the variety used in the medium of education for the first years in the primary level at the beginning of the school years 1964-1965. However, the French language continued to be used in many other spheres such as government, law, administration, education, science, technology, etc. In this context, and on May 5th, 1965, Benbella announced to 'Alger Républicain'¹ that Arabisation was a necessity, but it did not mean to eradicate completely French as for him, the French language was an essential means to acquire and comprehend modern techniques.
- From 1965 to 1978: During this period, Houari Boumediène (1974), the second president of Algeria initiated the most radical processes and decided upon complete Arabisation as a national aim. According to him, the change of the Algerian citizen and the restoration of his identity should be done by an active continuation of the Arabisation programme, previously started by other political leaders and which is regarded as an essential instrument to bring back the national personality of the Algerian population which must emerge from the use of Arabic in all domains

¹'Alger Républicain ' was a daily newspaper in that period.

of economic, social and cultural life. . By the end of 1968, the third, fourth and fifth years of primary schools were partially arabised. Since 1971, MSA has replaced French as the medium of instruction in primary schools (Benmoussat, 2003), but the use of MSA as a language of instruction in schooling was not welcomed by the French elite. By late 1977 and early 1978, pedagogical and psychological sciences were taught in French. Mr. Lacheraf, minister of universities and scientific research, at that time, agreed on an urgent and total Arabisation, but not at random and in a fierce way.

- From 1979 to 1998: By the 1980's, MSA began to be introduced as the language of education in the entire primary school in some grades and some subjects at the secondary level. The 'Fundamental School' was introduced in 1984. Such system gives pupils three years of middle education before entering secondary school. "This has resulted in low-quality education and a high drop-out rate". (Benmoussat 2003: 114). By the mid1980s, Arabisation had begun to produce some measurable results. In the primary school, instruction was in MSA; however, French is still introduced as a compulsory foreign language starting from the third year of primary school. In secondary schools, Arabisation was conducted on a gradual basis. At the university level, Arabic was also integrated gradually in social sciences, law and economics, but scientific fields like biology, medicine, physics and mathematics were all, and still is, taught in French.
- From 2001 to 2002: On April 20th, 2001, the 'Cultural Berber Movement' was created as an opposition to the Arabisation of the education system and in response to the actual president Abdel Aziz Bouteflika's refusal to recognize officially the Tamazight language. In fact, the Berbers demanded the recognition of the Kabyle dialect as a primary national language; respect for Berber culture, and greater attention to the economic development of Kabylia and other Berber homelands. Hence, at the beginning of October 2001, president Bouteflika declared that Tamazight would be a national language of Algeria.
- From 2002 until now: In February, 2006, president Bouteflika ordered 40 French-language schools to be closed for causes of 'linguistic deviation' and 'anti-nationalism'. A few days later, the Algerian government granted the schools an exceptional additional time until the end of June 2006 to conform the law which makes them obliged to teach the same programmes as the public schools. The law remains partially applied and most directors of the French private schools posit that the purpose of their schools was to form Arabic-French bilinguals, so that they can follow normally their studies at the university where several streams are conducted in French. Therefore, parents who can afford educating their children in private French schools prefer to enroll them in these schools in order to ensure a bilingual education for them. Paradoxically, MSA is assigned a higher status in Arabisation over the remaining linguistic varieties present in Algeria, mainly, dialectal Arabic, the different Berber varieties and French.

ISSUES OF ARABISATION

In Algeria, the fundamental aim of the Arabisation process was to move away French as the language of education and instruction and to substitute it by the Arabic language as Derni (2009:285) puts it:

The selection of Arabic in language planning in Algeria has always been considered as an anti-colonial act against French, which was solely taught at primary, middle, secondary and university levels from 1830 to 1962.

The programme of Arabisation declared by the first president Ben Bella and his successors has encountered many obstacles. These various obstacles do not merely come out on the political and socio-cultural levels, but also on the linguistic level. In an analysis of the language policy in Algeria, Granguillaume (1998: 69) affirms that it has to face two conflicts: the first one lies between the literary language and French and the other is between Arabic and the indigenous varieties.

La mise en œuvre de la politique linguistique recelait deux conflits: l'un entre la langue arabe (littérale) et la langue française : l'autre masque entre cette langue arabe et les langues de la quotidienneté.²

The Algerian political leaders attempted to resolve the problem by establishing gradually the project of Arabisation policy that would have to pass through a relatively long period of AA/French bilingualism as far as some important establishments were concerned, especially administration and education. For instance, in education, full Arabisation of elementary school was not attained until 1978 with the implementation of the 'Fundamental School'. Ten years later, secondary schools were also arabised and in higher levels, MSA was implemented step by step in spheres like social sciences, law and economics, but French was not cut off from scientific, medical and technological sections.

The shift to Arabic as the only medium of instruction in primary, middle and secondary education has led to serious problems. In fact, teachers at that period were not prepared to this sudden transition. They were known as 'Francophones' because of the French education they had received during the colonial era. The poor linguistic proficiency in Arabic made the task of explaining new concepts in Arabic very hard, mainly in content subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences and physics.

The Arabisation of the administration was also facing serious obstacles, as the institutions were run by a large number of Algerian employees who mastered French both in its written and spoken forms. In 1971³, Arabisation was made compulsory for all grades in the administration. As a result, many functionaries switched to other professions due to their lack of proficiency in Arabic.

FAILURE OF ARABISATION

In spite of the efforts spent by decision-makers for the implementation of MSA in the Algerian educational and administrative system, the Arabisation process had been subject to criticism and was accused to have no scientific basis, and as responsible for the decline in pupils' educational achievements in general.

The educational system entered a phase of a steep decline from 1986 with the decrease of the country's financial resources: lack of means of documentation and total arabisation contributed to the breakdown of the arabised education (Grandguillaume, 2002). Entellis (1981:197) shared this opinion when he writes that: "Too many young people may be emerging from secondary schools with an incomplete command of both literary Arabic and functional French".

Taleb-Ibrahimi K. (1997: 50) shares the same viewpoint when she declares that: "The Algerian school does not produce bilinguals but semi-linguals without a good command of either language" (translation is mine).

The reality is that Algerian policy makers themselves have witnessed shortcomings and weaknesses of the

² The implementation of the linguistic policy contained two conflicts: the one between the Arabic language (Literary Arabic) and the French language: the other, hides between this Arabic language and daily languages. (Translation is mine).

³ The decision of January 20th 1971 stated that the knowledge of the national language would be compulsory.

Arabisation procedure. Indeed, as Dendane (2007: 91) argues, one of the important reasons for the malfunction of Arabisation in Algeria [...], is that the process has always been decided by the authorities not on a linguistic basis, but on political and ideological grounds.

Concerning the issue of the linguistic aspect of Arabisation, it is noteworthy that the tardy progress is mainly due to the bad organization of the 'Arabising' structures namely, the feeble pedagogical drilling and the lack of the necessary proficiency from the part of teachers for such a task. Another reason that engendered more difficulties in the implementation of the Arabisation process lies in the discrepancy between everyday speech of the Algerian population and MSA which was imposed by policy makers for Arabisation policy. In addition, the profound influence of French on many Algerians' everyday linguistic practices has led the French language to receive high prestige evaluations until recently. What is more, is that the Arabisation policy implemented by the Algerian government which major aim was to remove French thoroughly failed? From a quantitative viewpoint, today's Algeria is the second largest French-speaking community in the world (Benrabah, 2007: 194). The co-existence of two varieties of Arabic clearly incarnates the phenomenon called 'diglossia' and the pervasive use of French has created a state of bilingualism.

CONCLUSIONS

To bring this paper to a close, I would say that arabisation was a policy imposed by a government that was vulnerable to pluralism presumably in the most essential sectors, be it cultural, political or linguistic. In fact, French was so deeply rooted in Algeria -in the most significant domains especially in education and administration- that the implementation of Arabic as the sole and unique language needed and still needs to move to the direction of reforms from the part of Algerian policy-makers for, Arabisation was and still is considered as a 'real failure'. Undeniably, Algeria seems to need more than one cultural language which seeks to impose the predilections of one subgroup onto anybody. Such reform would have a positive impact on the redefinition of the Algerian personality and identity.

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