DISCUSSING PLURILINGUALISM IN ALGERIA: THE STATUS OF FRENCH AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES THROUGH THE EDUCATIONAL POLICY

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This paper presents the linguistic situation of Algeria since its independence in 1962. The first part explores the linguistic landscape of this country and locates on a large scale the debate on the public school reform. The second part of the paper gives a historical overview of the language policies of Algeria. The third part addresses the status of the French and English languages. Competition of these languages is linked to the French and North American’s efforts to promote them. Finally, this paper highlights that the new language policy in Algeria tries to reconcile arabophones and francophones through several measures.

Keywords: Algeria, Language educational policy, Language attitudes, Multilingualism, Plurilingualism.

INTRODUCTION

This research draws on data and theoretical results of a bilingual questionnaire to a sample of Algerian students. Our investigation was conducted on the fourth grade students from the 2008/2009 academic year of a public school. The sample consists of fifty student volunteers, made of twenty-eight girls and twenty-two boys. Their average age was sixteen, which is representative of the Algerian population in general, where less than thirty years represents 62.7% (Riols, 2004:50-51).

These students are from the middle class in the Algerian society. They speak Algerian Arabic and Tamazight. Their schooling was done in Literary Arabic. French and English languages were incorporated in their learning respectively during the third year of primary school and first year of their middle school. This choice is not pointless, since it is motivated by the fact that education is a vital area where the language issue remains the most important. The middle school offered us the opportunity to gather the views of a younger generation about its identity and its language practices when educational policies (French and English languages) are trying to substitute their native languages (White, 2002: 17).

1. LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF ALGERIA

The terms of plurilingualism or multilingualism are currently used to refer to pupils who live in two languages or need to use two or more languages at home and at school. It does not mean that they are competent and literate in both languages (Hall, 2001). Thus, the linguistic landscape of Algeria is plurilingual because there are four spoken languages: literary Arabic, Algerian Arabic, Tamazight and French.
1.1 Literary Arabic

Arabic is a Central Semitic and an Afro-asiatic language. More than 280 million people speak it as a first language, most of whom live in the Middle East and Northern Africa. The roots of the Arabic language are linked with the revelation of the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad:

\textit{And We sent not only a Messenger but with the language of his people, in order to enlighten them. Then Allah misleads whom He wants and guides whom He wants. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.} (The Holy Qur’an, S.14, V.4).

Therefore, there cannot be Arabic without Islam and vice versa (Ouameur, 1985). Muslims attribute the Arabic language to a special position and total respect for conveying theological debates and secular sciences during the period known as the Golden Age of Islam (Motassime, 1996: 71). Modern Standard Arabic (Literary Arabic) is widely taught in schools, universities, and used in workplaces, government and the media. Actually, it is the official language of Algeria since 1962.

1.2 Algerian Arabic and Tamazight

The phenomenon of diglossia present in Algeria is linked to the various transformations the original language of the Qur’an went through during the history of the Maghreb (in Arabic: what exists in the west). We stress that the split between the Literary Arabic and the Algerian Arabic began with the Spanish settlement (1509-1555) by the phenomenon of borrowings (Bensafi 2002, 831). This cut has been increased during the French colonization of Algeria (1830-1962) when the Literary Arabic was far from the various social and administrative domains for the benefit of French language.

Algerian Arabic is the main language of Algeria. It is used by 70% - 80% of the population as their mother tongue. Tamazight on the other hand, is practiced orally by 20% - 30% of the population. Tamazight is the oldest language of Maghreb (Montagnon, 1998: 21). However, it is facing major challenges. Technical problems related to its mode of writing are not resolved (Benmayouf, 2010: 38). Initially taught in sixteen wilayas (There are 48 Wilayas or Departments in Algeria), Tamazight is no longer in ten wilayas (Amir, 2002: 2). To identify the daily use of languages, we asked the college students to classify them in terms of frequency. Table 1 summarizes the results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Daily linguistic practices.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Very frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Casual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Very rare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68% of the Students surveyed who use the Algerian Arabic very often confirm this view against 13.8% for the Literary Arabic. This difference in results shows that the Algerian student has difficulties in learning Literary Arabic. In January 2006, the Minister of Education publicly...
regretted that young Algerians do not master the Arabic language (Amir, 2006: 4). Then comes the French language, with a score of 55.9%. Thirdly, is the English language which is used occasionally and its results equivalent to 42.8%. Finally, is Tamazight which is barely used at 38%.

We specify that the languages in Algeria are in constant interaction. This phenomenon is known by linguists as “codeswitching” and defined as a mixture of languages. This change of language occurs in a single sentence or from a sentence to another (Calvet, 1993: 29). To understand the code-switching, we demanded the students some explanation about this issue. Table 2 summarizes their answers.

Table 2. Attitudes towards code-switching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code-switching</th>
<th>M. %</th>
<th>F. %</th>
<th>T. %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Explaining a thing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Language Diversity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Habit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vocabulary weakness</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Empathy towards a person</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Stress and abbreviation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A proportion of 37.7% think that code-switching assists to clarify a thought. This desire to explain an idea is linked to the vocabulary weakness (26.7%) and habit (16.9%). Moreover, other factors come justify this linguistic phenomenon as the languages diversity in Algeria (7.5%), the abbreviation of words (7.5%), stress and even the empathy with interlocutors (3.7). Thus, the code-switching of Algerian Arabic, Tamazight, French and sometimes English is almost instinctive for young students in Maghreb (Sultana, 1999: 32).

2. LANGUAGE POLICIES OF ALGERIA

We distinguish two main language policies in Algeria. The first one is the policy of Arabisation between 1962 and 1999. The second policy concerns the educational reform since 2000.

2.1 Arabisation policy

By 1962, the Algerian government implemented a language reform which aims to reintroduce Literary Arabic in education and public administration. This Arabisation policy is motivated by three elements. First, the Arabic language represents the cultural side of independence: the French is the language imposed by the colonizer. Secondly, the Arabic is the language of Islam: Islam was a shelter during colonization when Algeria had not an identity. Finally, Arabic is the language of the Arab nation. (McDougall, 2006: 338).

The Arabisation policy has been weakened by its link with the Islamist movement. The majority of the Egyptian and Syrian teachers recruited since 1964 by Algeria to ensure the teaching of Arabic language were members of the Muslim Brotherhood who were more interested in the ideological indoctrination of the students than the teachings (Saad, 1992: 60).
These teachers proved to be major channels for importing Islamist ideology into the Algerian public life (Abu-Haidar, 2000: 161; Mostari, 2004: 38; Roberts, 2003: 12; Thomas, 1999: 27).

However, we cannot only understand this policy in negative terms but the main purpose of Arabisation was to turn the Arabic language as a true instrument of thought and work to reach the requirements of time and to overcome the prejudice of language literature and poetry (Benmayouf, 2010: 56-57).

2.2 Educational reform policy

The main themes of the reform policy in Algeria since the year 2000 concerns the low level of teachers and improving their socio-economic development, revision of curriculum content and the status of foreign languages. In this perspective, the National Commission for the Reform of Education System was created in March 2000 (CNRSE). This scientific panel consists of 153 teachers and scholars. The aim is to diagnose the components of the educational system, vocational training and modernize the entire education sector. Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the Algerian authorities decided to include the educational reform policy as part of the global war on terror (Karmani, 2005: 262). The president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika stressed that the school reform is a challenge for the Algeria.

3. STATUS OF MODERN LANGUAGES IN ALGERIA

The status of French and English languages in Algeria does not depend only on cultural preferences and educational options. The country's modern history and political alliances are also taken into consideration.

3.1 Historical status of French

Algeria has a special link with the French language. Historically, Algeria was proclaimed in 1870 as part of the metropolitan territory of the 3rd Republic (Loyal, 2009: 407). This vast country of 2.3 million km2 is inhabited by 36 million people. Despite its ideological refusal to integrate the Francophonie, Algeria remains the second French-speaking country in the world with nearly eighteen million speakers (Algerian attended the Beirut summit for the first time in October 17th, 2002).

Today, the French language is taught from the second year of elementary school. French has its place in secondary education, as a second language and in higher education, especially in science fields. This language is used in many private schools. French is considered necessary to pursue higher education, especially abroad, or to find a job. Its knowledge is related to young Algerians hope to immigrate into Europe and Canada (Lacoste, 2006: 231). For the economic sector, it only works in French or in English (Kateb, 2005: 89). Thus, Table 3 emphasizes the positive relationship of college students to the French language.

We noted that only 12% of college students surveyed do not like the French language. Contrary to the latter, a majority like to write and speak French. Several factors are cited to justify this opinion. First, the easy acquisition of language stands at 29.7% of the positive response to the French language. 19.1% have a preference towards the French language as against the English. Then the desire to learn (21.2%), the prestige, the status (14.8%) and the
feeling of pleasure (10.6%) remain crucial to any process of acquiring a second language. Finally, the influence of family mentioned had only 4.2% response.

Table 3. Attitudes towards the French language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French language</th>
<th>M.</th>
<th>F.</th>
<th>T.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Easy acquisition Of language</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preference towards Other languages</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Prestigious and status</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pleasure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Desire to learn</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Family influence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results of table 3 highlights a paradox because the French language in Algeria is doing well despite the strict language policies against it (Benrabah, 2007: 240). The French is perceived as a language of seduction (Benmesbah, 2003: 13). Thus, the taboos that cannot be communicated in a first language are transgressed by the French language brand impersonation. (Benrabah, 2001; Caubet, 2004: 16).

3.2 Promising status of English

The role of English in the world has become a controversial issue which leaves little space to mention the positive aspects of a common international language democratically. Technically, speaking English is apprehended as a second foreign language in Algeria. Its teaching is in competition with the French language since the year 2000 at the first grade level of middle school. However, in Universities, 95% of undergraduate and post-graduate courses in sciences or in medicine are taught in French language (Miliani, 2000: 20).

In short, the desire to promote English in Algeria is due to a high cooperation with the United States of America and Canada who are committed to freely support this educational reform policy in Algeria. This aid concerns the making of textbooks, the training of teachers of English and the introduction of new technologies. Table 4 summarizes the suggestions made by Algerian school children to improve their English language.

College students surveyed have an emotional maturity in their suggestions and this is interpreted below in brackets: the diversification of activities of writing and reading seems to be a way to improve their level in English language (69%). Similarly, providing modern documentation (2.9%), let the students choose their subjects of study (3.7%) and evaluating through serious examinations (22.5%) are among the recurrent proposals. The pairing of their college with a foreign schools is also desirable.
Table 4. Improving the English language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions</th>
<th>M.</th>
<th>F.</th>
<th>T.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide more meaningful review</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Diversify writing activities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Encourage reading</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Choose free study subjects</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Enrich the school library</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Affiliating local college with foreign schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

The recognition of Tamazight as a national language reflects a desire to reconcile the arabophones and the francophones in Algeria. This legitimacy should not rely on a permanent opposition to the Literary Arabic which needs scientific renewal. Thus, the process of building a national identity must go beyond the official language. Despite its refusal to integrate the Francophonie, Algeria is the second French-speaking country in the world when the craze for English language is expressed by a large segment of the Algerian society (Abid-Houcine, 2007: 152). In fact many Algerians are aware that the Arabic-French bilingualism and the mastery of English are appropriate ways to acquire formal knowledge.

The analysis of the sociolinguistic situation of Algeria shows an offset between the major languages (Algerian Arabic and Tamazight) with low status and the enrollment languages with high status (Literary Arabic, French and English). This separation is related to the dichotomy spoken language/written language. The Diglossia between the Algerian Arabic and the Literary Arabic is being added to this complex reality.

In conclusion, Algeria seems to need more than one cultural language for complementary objectives. So the best solution would be that, Algeria puts in place a plurilingual policy beyond the opposition which reserves French and English languages for modernity and literary Arabic for tradition. This new solidarity would have a democratic impact on the redefinition of the Algerian identity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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REFERENCES