

Linguistic Insecurity: A Source of Negative Attitudes that Must be Urgently Addressed in Moroccan Public Schools

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ABSTRACT : *It is true that the hegemony of Arabic over other languages in the Moroccan educational system has decreased with the inclusion of Amazigh as the kingdom's second official language in the 2011 constitution. However, increasing efforts to make Amazigh the official language in all schools remains an urgent priority. Many Amazigh-speaking pupils are victims of acculturation achieved through symbolic violence, as well as depreciatory representations and stigmatizing reactions.*

This article provides an opportunity to question the linguistic insecurity felt by these Amazigh-speaking learners when the language accepted for teaching/learning is not the one used by the Amazigh child; here the problem becomes acute. What is clear is that the educational message must be conveyed in a language already acquired by the target audience in order to guarantee its transmission, and in this situation the child is faced with the necessity to duplicate his or her learning effort: he or she has to learn the language of the transmitter (the teacher), while at the same time deciphering the educational message being conveyed (the knowledge being transmitted). This double operation has negative consequences for the development of child's intelligence and overall personality, and subsequently for the development of their language.

KEYWORDS: *Language insecurity, diglossia, learning, language management, sociodidactic.*

I. Introduction

In a diglossic context, one idiom is the law, depending on the language policy adopted by the State of the territory concerned. Morocco is no exception. For a long time after independence, the Moroccan State opted for "an assimilationist linguistic policy favoring a single language while seeking to marginalize competing languages"¹, thus ignoring the linguistic diversity of the Moroccan cultural landscape. Then came the long-awaited moment when King Mohamed VI delivered an official royal speech on October 17, 2001 in Ajdir where he recognized the Amazigh language, as an indispensable component of the Moroccan cultural landscape. Ten years on, the co-officiality of the Amazigh language alongside Arabic and its introduction into the Moroccan education system have made a dream reality. A new page has been turned, especially with the creation of the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture, whose mission is to safeguard and promote the Amazigh language and culture in all its forms and expressions. No one can deny the commendable efforts made by this institute, especially in terms of developing the Amazigh language, training teachers, producing books for pupils at all six levels of primary education, including teachers' guides, not to mention digital teaching tools and games for pupils.

Admittedly, Morocco has experienced a historic moment in which the two official languages are highlighted in the Moroccan educational system, but with the failure to mainstream the Amazigh language vertically and horizontally within public educational institutions, the negative representations of this language:

¹ Rachid Sebaa, *Langue imposée, apprentissage décomposé*, dans *FAIRE DES RECHERCHES EN SCIENCES DU LANGAGE*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2022, p. 56.

its lack of weight in the "linguistic market", to use the Bourdieu's expression, and the lamentable lack of human resources at this level. All these factors combine to make the teaching of the Amazigh language a shortcoming that urgently needs to be addressed. Indeed, a giant step has been taken since the introduction of this language to Moroccan schools, but it is potential sustainability that will make the difference.

The aim of this work is to point out a feeling that most Amazigh-speaking pupils whose only language is Amazigh suffer from. At school, Amazigh learners experience bitter experiences such as isolation, incomprehension and inferiority. These are mainly due to the fact that Arabic is the dominant language in the educational system and the widespread inclusion of the Amazigh language in all Moroccan schools remains unattainable for an undetermined period of time.

This idea will be further structured as follows:

First of all, we will define the concept of linguistic insecurity and its impact on the learner's school career, and then we will look at the various conditions that encourage the isolation of Amazigh-speaking pupils in schools and the consequences of this isolation. Finally, we will analyze the survey carried out by means of a focus group and a questionnaire targeting primary school teachers, and whose results will open the way to better management of this diglossic situation.

II. Linguistic insecurity

One of the main causes of linguistic insecurity is the "sacralization" of standardized idioms, especially for learners who use other languages. This linguistic insecurity is a major factor in school failure, which highlights the need for a new approach to teaching that takes into account the linguistic and cultural practices of pupils. This observation could encourage academic success among learners who communicate via other varieties, or idioms, by adopting a plurinormative? didactic approach, focusing on the linguistic differences between pupils, especially within the school.

It is generally accepted that the first linguist to have developed the concept of linguistic insecurity was W. Labov. However, it should be noted that researchers avoid giving a precise definition on this subject, and it is Michel Francard's privilege to have done some serious work on the conceptualization of linguistic insecurity as follows:

"Speakers in a situation of linguistic insecurity measure the distance between the norm they have inherited and the norm dominating the linguistic market"², according to Francard (quoted by Yan Xiaodong 2016, 172).

And it is he who has highlighted the relationship between schooling and linguistic insecurity as well as normative awareness: "[...] the awareness, by speakers, of a distance between their idiolect and a language they recognize as legitimate because it is in the dominant class (...), or that of the fictitious speakers holding the norm conveyed by the school institution."³

In the same vein, Marielle Rispaïl confirms that a school must guarantee all learners the assurance of not separating the child from the pupil, and no such division between the mother tongue and the language of schooling, if only for the first few years of the school trajectory. This transitional stage between life in the family nest and life at school must be gradual. This linguistic insecurity at such a young age is unacceptable. Learning has never been effective

without personal development, without that feeling of security, especially that it is linguistic security which facilitates communication, understanding, interaction and commitment to the teaching/learning process.

It is always the linguistic norm of a community that is the law, and the more a speaker is unaware of it, the more he or she becomes aware of this linguistic insecurity by noticing the discrepancy between the way he

² Yan Xiaodong, *La notion de l'insécurité linguistique chez Pierre Bourdieu*, [En ligne]. Disponible sur <https://arlap.hypotheses.org/6750> (consultée le 15/08/2019).

³ Ibid. 180.

or she speaks and the form legitimized by the society to which he or she belongs; and this intensifies as the years of schooling go by:

"[...] it would be the school institution that would generate linguistic insecurity by developing both the perception of linguistic varieties and their depreciation in favor of a mythical and inaccessible model. »⁴.

Linguistic insecurity can represent a significant challenge for learners in the school context, particularly for those who are learning a new language or who use a minority or regional language that is not widely spoken in their learning environment. This insecurity can take various forms, such as the fear of expressing oneself in public, or of taking part in oral discussions, the fear of being misunderstood, or of being mocked by peers or teachers, lack of confidence in one's linguistic abilities, or the feeling of exclusion or marginalization from the dominant linguistic group in one's school environment.

To further clarify this reality, we have conducted a survey with the aim of taking a closer look at the isolation suffered by Amazigh children in a school context where their mother tongue is not used as a language of communication and instruction. Along with Fabe's expression "to speak is to exist"⁵, as Fabe pleasantly puts it. This monolingual domination, which has characterized the one may say that the Moroccan educational system has for decades, has wreaked havoc on several psychological and societal levels. This linguistic discrimination has been the cause of hundreds of pupils dropping out of school, deprived of a legitimate right: to express themselves in their first language and to be understood at school.

Two schools were the focus of our study: one in an urban area, the other in a rural area. Matching these two areas will give us more reliable results that are, better compatible with the scientific standards.

There are still schools in Amazigh-speaking areas where learners are unable to communicate with their teachers because of the monolingualism that characterizes some of these regions. This problem is shared by both the teacher and the learner. In such cases, it is advisable that the

decision-makers who appoint teachers to various areas must take these conditions into account. Many Arabic-speaking teachers are appointed to Amazigh-speaking areas where they find themselves unable to communicate with their learners even in what concerns the simplest everyday matters. This often results in dropping out of school and poor teaching practices in the classroom. Such conditions create serious problems. These pupils do not leave school because of a lack of intelligence, but because of a feeling of linguistic insecurity, a feeling of isolation, a lack of understanding, all of which normally seen as sources of security and hope and a guarantee of a better future.

Our choice of a qualitative research approach is in line with our epistemological positioning in a 'linguistics field' with a vocation to make sense of the facts observed, and not just to explain them. To this end, we have used an empirical-deductive and qualitative approach to gain a better understanding of how the power of one standardized language can banish and discriminate against another, and how the monolingualism of an Amazigh pupil becomes a source of linguistic insecurity in a so-called democratic school.

III. Survey of primary school teachers

We conducted our survey in French using the Google Forms survey platform, which was distributed to a circle of primary school teachers working in schools. This distribution was carried out by sending an access link, which was shared via the WhatsApp application. (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1YAbrxElqZWav7X7yru9lkqJ3ivRHZqPICdX5km0ZU4w/closedform?pli=1#start=publishanalytics>)

To carry out this questionnaire and ensure that it was representative of the population, the panel was diversified to illustrate the reality of the situation, by highlighting the different opinions. It was divided

⁴ Ibid. p 187.

⁵ Ibid. p 190.

according to gender (male/female), area of work (rural/urban), languages mastered, level covered and, above all, whether the Amazigh language module was included in the primary teacher training scheme.

This questionnaire was administered to a panel of 41 primary school teachers and the results were as follows:

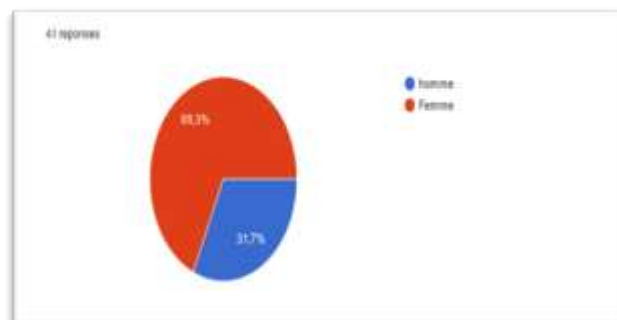


Figure N°1. Target population by gender:

Forty-one male and female teachers took part in this Google Forms questionnaire. It should be noted that the data collected yielded a total of forty-one responses, the majority of which from female teachers and a smaller number from their male counterparts. This numerical predominance of female teachers could be explained by the choice of subject and gender, at this stage, is very significant in the sense that women have this penchant for children. The few men who opted for this specialty did so for family reasons, for socio-economic reasons and above all their respective need to achieve financial independence. This does not rule out this need in women, but the presence of soft-skills such as patience, listening and understanding, etc., influences the career path. etc. influence a person's career path even before they become part of it.

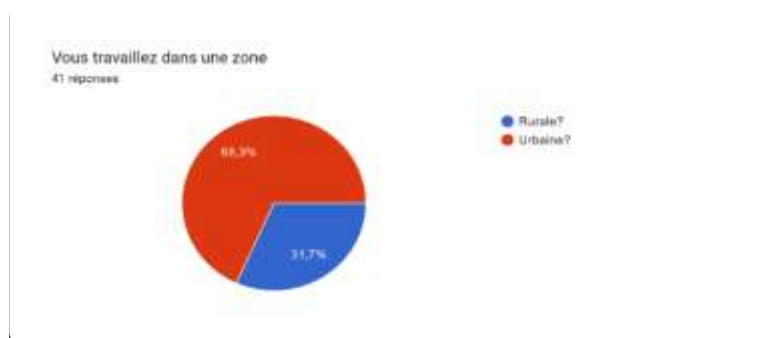


Figure N°2: Target population by area of employment:

- The target sample was unevenly distributed, with a predominance of teachers in urban areas compared to their counterparts in rural areas. This can be explained by problems linked to the Internet connection in these areas; the burden of commuting from school to home (tiredness/lack of time to fill in forms). And so on.

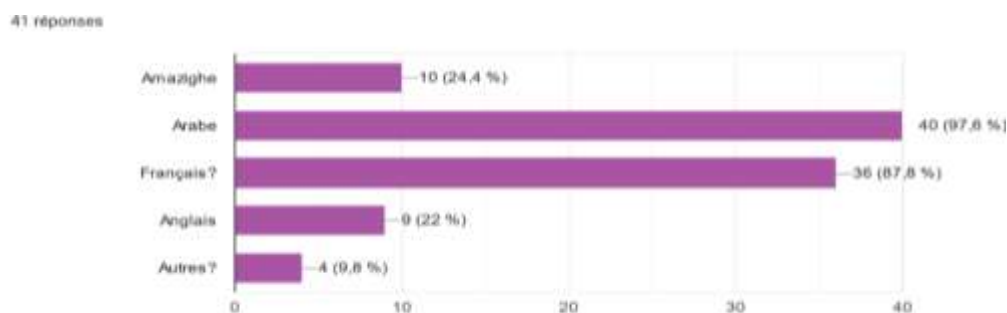


Figure N°3: Target population according to languages mastered:

According to the data collected, most teachers have a 97% command of Arabic, while Amazigh speakers account for no more than 10%. French is the language of choice, with 87% of teachers knowing it. English comes fourth with a low percentage of 22%. As for the other languages that our panel had mastered, 9.8% of them confirmed that they had mastered these idioms. Since the answer to this question was in the multiple-choice section, it is highly likely that the same teachers who know Arabic can also know French, and vice versa for the other languages.

A 10% reduction in Amazigh language skills is emerging as a gap that needs to be filled urgently in our schools. Amazigh is an official national language, the language of all Moroccans, as King Mohamed IV stated in his royal speech in Ajdir. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that many pupils who attend Moroccan state schools have no knowledge of Arabic, and constitute part of the rural exodus. If the ultimate aim of any education system is to enable learners to achieve their full potential within the school, how can Amazigh children be left in a situation of linguistic insecurity that hinders them, and makes them feel ashamed and indifferent in a society that belongs to them? How can Amazigh Moroccan citizens be “constructed” in a society where teachers are sometimes guided by negative perceptions of a language that has long been banned from Moroccan schools and see it as a waste of time, or even a waste of energy, the pretext being its low weight in the linguistic and professional markets. This neglects the fact that language, whatever its origin, is identity, history, being in all its facets, memories, residence, security, etc. It is more than an idiom, whatever its weight in the linguistic market; it is everything to the speaker, its past, present and future. For an Amazigh speaker, speaking Amazigh simply means existing, regardless of what others think. It's the same thing for a Frenchman when it comes to the French language, or an Arab when it comes to the Arabic language.

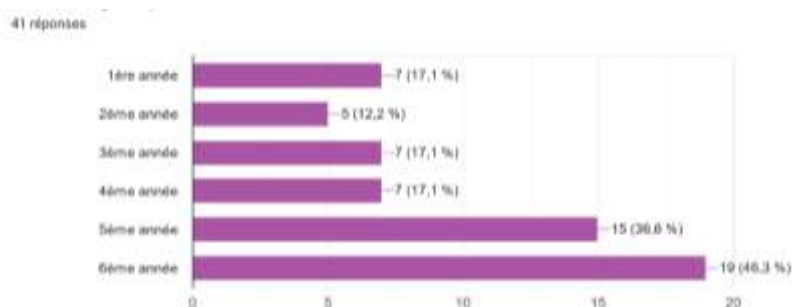


Figure N° 4: Target population according to school level:

We took care to interview teachers responsible for different school levels, in order to identify the different classes in primary education and obtain more information in order to better understand the context and make sense of the situation under study. This diversity of levels gives us a clearer picture of the rate of pupils with linguistic anomalies.

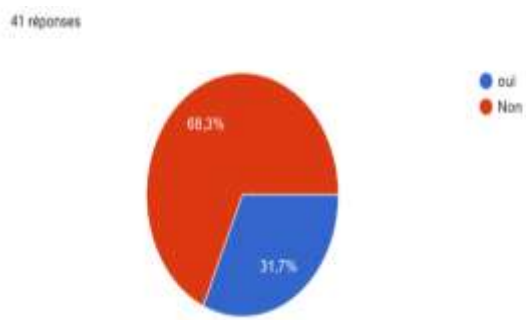


Figure N°5: Target population according to attendance at vocational training with basic knowledge of the Amazigh language:

31% of teachers said that during their professional training they had been taught the Amazigh language, especially the basics. Essentially, the target audience is a mix of Amazigh-speakers and Arabic-speakers. As for the 68% who say they don't have it as a module on their timetable. This raises several questions, especially in areas where monolingualism is predominant.

IV. Interpretation of the questionnaire results

According to the results of the questionnaire, one shortcoming emerges as a priority to be managed from the outset: the primacy of the introduction of the Amazigh language module in the initial professional training of all future teachers in Morocco, even if only for basic notions of the Amazigh language. Future teachers must be able to teach in an Arabic-speaking area or an Amazigh-speaking area, whatever their target group is. We live in an area where the official languages are Arabic and Amazigh, and the educational policy must respond to this and find the right way to manage this linguistic and cultural plurality, which is a symbol of the richness of Morocco's heritage.

According to Blanchet, dropping out of school, loss of self-esteem and feelings of injustice and rebellion are all consequences of the stigmatization of the mother tongue of the newcomer. This is confirmed by the statements of the pupils interviewed during the focus group. There were 12 pupils belonging to the two different primary cycles. 6 belonged to the first cycle; the second year of primary school and the others belonged to the third cycle; the fifth year of primary school. We tried to balance the number of girls with the number of boys, taking into account the diversity of the two geographical areas: urban and rural. We chose two schools. It should be noted that Amazigh is not taught as a subject in either institution. The following questions were asked:

- Do you enjoy going to school?
- Do you speak only Amazigh, or do you know other languages?
- Do your teachers speak Amazigh?
- If not, would you have the same reaction? The same pleasure you feel today?
- How would you feel?
- Do you still come to class every day?
- Is staying at home the right solution?
- What would you suggest as a solution?
- Which language do you prefer more - Arabic or Amazigh?

The answers obtained vary according to gender, geographical area, and family financial situation. For the first question, all pupils enjoy coming to school for the sole reason that there is no gap between the language

spoken at home and that spoken at school. Pupils have the tools they need to interact and integrate daily with the knowledge passed on to them by their teacher.

Most of the pupils are allophones, speaking only the Amazigh language; those who speak Arabic have the privilege of belonging to a more or less well-off family, giving them the opportunity to travel to the city and have contact with those who speak it and to learn as much as possible, unlike those who do not have the means to travel and who remain in this monolingual environment, unable to learn it quickly.

All of them said that if they had teachers who didn't speak their mother tongue, nothing would work and dropping out of school would be the most obvious outcome. If the linguistic idiom used is not the one adopted by the linguistic context of the children's families, the feeling is one of unease, linguistic insecurity, not belonging, isolation, fear, etc. All of these are unfavorable feelings for teaching/learning that is worthy of being transmitted and shared. Without security, without fulfilment, this operation is bound to fail, and the emotional atmosphere of learning changes everything. Either it motivates the learner, or it banishes and marginalizes him or her.

The solutions were as follows:

In Amazigh-speaking areas, only teachers who speak the mother tongue of the inhabitants where the school is located should be assigned.

Understand the difficulties experienced by these Amazighophone pupils when faced with a language that they do not know, and they are obliged to learn it to learn other subjects via this language that is foreign to them.

The first group preferred Arabic because they felt good when they spoke it, they were just like the others, no inferiority was experienced, "we were on an equal footing", one of them said. On the other hand, the second group sees Amazigh as their identity, their existence, their family, their first nest, nothing can equal it.

V. Conclusion

Addressing linguistic insecurity within schools remains an urgent matter that needs to be managed conscientiously, as the victims have had enough. Despite the introduction of the Amazigh language into the Moroccan educational system, this problem is still with us, due to the lack of widespread teaching of this language at either vertical or horizontal level, and the lack of human resources in this key area. Educational policy must take fact this into consideration, while ensuring that it adopts a socio-didactic approach capable of analyzing the problems encountered and trying to correct them within the framework of what is possible. As proposed by Blanchet, it is time to think about the didactics of linguistic plurality with the ultimate aim of opening up to the plural and intercultural linguistic practices of pupils' daily lives, while combating discrimination and the stigmatization of idioms other than the language legitimized by the dominant law. Creating a school where the development of pupils is the motto, regardless of their first language, is a right before being a hastily hoped-for dream.

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