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Moroccan Arabic: The Battlefield of Language Ideologies

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A B S T R A C T

The debate on the use of Moroccan Arabic (also known as Moroccan *darja*) dates back to the medieval period when literary critics have discussed the effectiveness of writing in Moroccan Arabic lyrics of Muslim Spain, *muwashshahat and zajal*. This debate was later sharpened in the protectorate era (1912-1955) by the French colonial administration in its attempt to use MA in education as a tool to divide Morocco into Arabs and Amazigh, separate the country from the Arab world and pave the way for French to flourish in society. Nowadays, the use of MA in education came to the fore front of the interests of Moroccan intelligentsia. A new current of Francophone academics called for the legitimacy of using MA in education and media to fight illiteracy and maximize access to education in the country. They held many conferences for the sake of discussing the utility of MA as an alternative for SA in education and designed dictionaries and books to ease its instruction. Such attempts raised the hostility of Arabists and Amazigh activists. They regarded the defense of MA use in education as an ideology of language to eradicate Moroccan official languages in favour of French and the Francophone culture. The present empirical research examines the status of MA in education and the different ideologies backing its use by Moroccan teachers and students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Morocco is a multilingual country in which citizens use Standard Arabic, Amazigh, Moroccan Arabic, Hassaniya, French, Spanish and English. Standard Arabic (SA) is the official language of education, administration, and media. It was introduced to the country in the 7th century A.D. by Arabs of Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula. The use

of SA in society increased in Morocco after independence from the French by the adoption of the Arabization project. However, this project was criticized by several groups within Moroccan society as an abject failure. The linguistic gap which the incomplete Arabization project created between secondary education and university is still a source of many problems for students,

particularly in science disciplines (Gharib, 1996).

Amazigh, an official language which gained recognition in the constitution of 2011, is said to be the original language of Moroccans. There are no official statistics on language speakers in Morocco but researchers indicate that about 15 million Moroccans use Amazigh in their daily communication (Ennaji 2014, p. 93). The instruction of Amazigh is still impeded by the shortage of trained teachers who master it as well as the lack of a political will to implement it in all Moroccan schools.

MA is the *lingua franca* in Morocco. It is used by most Moroccans, be they Arabs or Amazigh, in their daily communication. Heath (2015) argues that “MA took shape in the 7th–8th centuries AD in Roman cities in which Late Latin (LL) was spoken” (p. 1). It was later impacted by contact with SA, French, Amazigh and Spanish. MA has different variations depending on regions, social class, and gender. The variety used within the city of Fes, for example, is said to be more elegant than the one used in Marrakech or in Doukkala (Ennaji, 2005). Sometimes, the specific manifestation of MA may distinguish the speaker as ‘*aroubi*’ (peasant) or ‘*mdeni*’ (urban). However, all MA variations are understood by Moroccans regardless of their regions. While MA is mutually comprehensible by most Moroccans, it is often difficult to understand by other Arabs of the Middle East. It is considered by many as a ‘low variety’ which is suitable only for informal communicative practices.

Currently, some activists, politicians and teachers call for the recognition of MA as an official language to replace SA, whose implementation is considered as a source of failure of the Moroccan education system and literacy programs. A new dictionary (2016), titled *The Dictionary of Moroccan darija*, is

designed to ease MA use in education. However, this dictionary is rejected by opponents of MA in education, including intellectuals who see it as a linguistic conspiracy to pave the way for French to spread at the expense of SA. Bouali (2016), the head of the Moroccan Association for the Protection of Standard Arabic regards Ayouch’s plan to standardize MA as an old colonial plot which is used by the French administration to eradicate SA, destabilize the country and divide the Arab world. Advocates of MA, on the other hand, see it as a right for all Moroccans to study in their mother tongue, following the declaration of the UNESCO¹ (1996) on language rights. Lately, the beginning of the school year 2018/2019 has survived the first concrete attempt to introduce MA to the Moroccan public school. New books of Arabic with MA words were published to familiarize children of primary levels with education. This attempt received a harsh criticism from all Moroccans, as various demonstrations were held in front of academies and delegations of education all around Morocco. It also provoked a heated debate in social media and electronic journals.

Some examples of MA words such as ‘*baghriraturun*’ and ‘*batbutaturun*’ (bread) were sarcastically used by youtubers and publishers in Facebook and Twitter to criticize the entire idea of MA in education. Such social reaction pushed the Minister of education, Saaïd Amzazi, in September 2018 to ensure Moroccans that no word of MA will be used in published books of primary schools or any level. However, as its adherents battle for linguistic supremacy, MA is gaining popularity in different sectors in the country, including commerce and audiovisual media. For example, New Turkish and Mexican television series are broadcast with MA dubbing. Also, an increasing number of electronic journals are publishing research in MA in an effort to make scientific discoveries accessible to a wider audience. MA is

¹ All language communities are entitled to an education which will enable their members to acquire a thorough knowledge of their cultural heritage (history,

geography, literature, and other manifestations of their own culture), as well as the most extensive possible knowledge of any other culture they may wish to know.

currently being used more often for commerce, as evidenced by the proliferation of new advertisements written in the language. This new role of MA is seen by many as a significant shift in the status of languages in Morocco, which may necessitate a revision of the entire language policy in the future.

Hassaniya is widely-used by Moroccans of the south for informal communicative purposes. It is different from the other variants of SA due to its contact with bordering sub-Saharan languages. This Bedouins variety is distinguished by its phonetic and morphological features which differ from one region to another. The constitution of 2011 openly declared that Hassaniya should be preserved as an integral component of the Moroccan cultural identity.

Before the French colonization, the Moroccan education system was traditional and monolingual. SA (also called classical Arabic at the time) was the sole language of the three tier education system despite the existence of Amazigh in society. In Koranic schools (msi:d), students were taught SA and the Koran through memorization and reciting. In the Koranic secondary school (ImedraSa), students were introduced to rules of SA and Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy. In the third education level, students used to enroll in the unique University of Karaouine (founded in 859 AD), where they received advanced courses of Islamic jurisprudence, philosophy, sciences, logic and medicine through SA (Bentahila 1983, 5-6).

With the coming of the French protectorate, new schools were built to replace the Islamic traditional education system. Grandguillaume (1983) argued that the French administration set up the Franco-Islamic schools, which were reserved for the children of Moroccan notables, European schools for French children, French-Jewish schools for children of the Jewish community in Morocco, and the French-Berber schools for children of the Amazigh to teach them French, Amazigh and

Christianity. French was given priority in all these schools to the detriment of SA and Islamic traditional education system. Students who were graduated from these schools were encouraged to join French universities in France. These schools were used as a vehicle to spread French culture and civilization among the new generation to ease their integration into the French administration. They played an important role in segregating ethnic groups in society and paving the way for French to flourish in education.

In 1965, Morocco gained its independence, and nationalists took several measures to free the national education system from French dominance. They launched an Arabization project to spread SA in society, unify the education system and strengthen the link with the Arab nations under what was known at the time as *al-Qawmiya al'arabiya* (Arab nationalism). The system of education in public schools was unified, and French schools were organized under the Mission Universitaire Culturelle Française (MCUF) (Bentahila 1983, 10). Primary schools increased the number of years to five years and, then, to six years, plus three years of middle school and three years of high school. These three levels were totally Arabized as all science subjects were and are still taught in SA. University was comprised of three levels in a system which later developed into LMD (Licence-Mster-Docorate). Universities up to the present day provide courses of pure sciences in French, while other subjects of Humanities and Law are Arabized. Yet, despite the attempts to substitute French by SA, its strong position in society and the economic relationship with France, gave it priority over all languages existing in the country. The role of French nowadays is increasing, particularly with the failure of the implementation of a complete Arabization project and the decrease of students' achievements of sciences in high schools.

This study is grounded in Language ideology. The term first appeared in the fields of sociolinguistics and anthropology to denote

“sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein, 1979, p.193). This terminology is frequently used in language studies to define a force shaping peoples’ understanding of their verbal practices (Calame-Giaule, 1986; Heath, 1989). The present study considers ideology as an internal driving-force for students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards MA in education. Based on social constructivism (Oxford, 1977), the study assumes that the informants’ ideology of language status and use is constructed through education, society, politics and culture (Philips, 1995; Zakhir & O’Brien, 2016). Furthermore, this theoretical underpinning assumes that Moroccans’ language practices are backed by internal and external ideologies that promote some languages and undermine others.

II. METHODS

A major aim of the present research is to show how ideology affects language use and status in Moroccan society. It presumes that many Moroccan students and teachers have a negative view of MA and consider it an ‘informal language’ which is not suited for academic and scholarly communication. This perception of MA is exacerbated by inherent beliefs regarding the superiority of French and SA as languages of modernity and literacy. For purpose of this study, quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data. Using questionnaires, the study aims to identify some of the central reasons for the rejection of MA in education and its confinement to informal instances of communication. Given the exploratory nature of the study, a descriptive analysis was adopted to present the data. Responses to the questionnaires are presented in percentages with discussions.

The present research examined responses from students (n=172) and teachers (n=28) chosen from public schools and universities in two major cities in Morocco. A group of students were randomly selected from science disciplines in high school (n=104) and

another group (n=68) were chosen from two science universities. Of the participants, almost half (n=104) were completing their final year of their Baccalaureate studies while twenty eight attended BA programs and an additional forty were pursuing a graduate education. There were 95 male students and 77 females. It was by no means an accident that the number of male students in this study doubles the number of females, for studies revealed that the ration of boys in Moroccan schools is slightly higher despite the efforts done to increase the enrollment of girls. According to the UNESCO (2018), out of the total number of students (79.67%) enrolled in secondary education in 2017, (83.98%) are males and (75.15%) are females. One hundred and nine (63.37%) of the students were aged 16-21, and a slightly smaller percentage (36.62%; n= 63) were between 22-25 years of age. The majority of students from both education levels belonged to the middle social class. Except for several students (18.02%; n=31) whose parents occupied high official posts, the majority of students’ parents worked in public administration or in the private sector. Of all students, 56 identified as Amazigh, and 116 considered their identities to be Arab.

Teachers who participated in the study taught in a variety of instructional levels. Four were chosen from Kindergarten, eight from primary and middle schools (grades 1-8), ten were high school teachers, and six taught science courses at the university level. There were 9 female teachers and 19 males. The age of (10) ranged between 23-35 years while the age of (18) ranged between 36-54. Fourteen teachers had 9-17 education experience; six had 18-23 while eight spent 24-33 years. Teachers were chosen from different disciplines. Twelve taught Arabic, (10) taught Maths and (6) instructed sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Geology). Seven teachers were Amazigh while (21) were Arabs.

III. RESULT

Students' attitudes

This section provides the results of the questionnaires completed by the 172 students either in high school or studying at university. Specifically, students' attitudes towards the use of MA in education and the role of media in MA dissemination will be discussed.

Attitudes Towards MA in Education

To examine the status of local languages (MA and Amz) in students' early years of education, high school and university students were asked to choose languages they were exposed to in kindergarten and primary schools. The majority of students (81.39%; n=140) reported that their early language of acquisition was SA in kindergarten and primary school, while a much smaller percentage (18.60%; n=32) reported that the language of instruction in their early education was French and SA. Results from the survey indicate that Moroccan teachers delivered less instruction using local languages in the elementary grades. Only 22 and 10 students reported that they were educated in preschool via MA and Amz, respectively. They claimed that they studied SA through MA/Amz in *Jama*² and that teachers addressed them all the time in their home languages. Students themselves were not concerned about the role of their mother tongues in learning, in that they all agreed that they need French and, to a less degree, SA in their early education. Several research studies have shown that children benefit more from mother tongues in early education and that the introduction of foreign languages which are not used at home may delay their acquisition of knowledge by creating a gap between what they hear and see at home and what they learn at school (UNESCO, 1996; Bensoukas, 2010).

When students were asked "what is your current language of learning?" they provided

different responses. A majority of high school students (78.84%; n=82) indicated that they were instructed in SA, while a smaller percentage (14.42%; n=15) indicated that their language of instruction was French. These results were unsurprising, as other researchers (Zakhir & O'Brien, 2016) have found that most science students in public and private high schools learn their subjects in SA and then are expected to use French as their sole medium of communication while at universities of sciences. This 'linguistic disconnect' is the result of an incomplete project of Arabization which students are forced to go through during their education career. Such reality, of course, has various negative consequences on students' learning. Each year students have difficulties dealing with this change, and thus change their field of study from sciences to other subjects of humanities, where SA is the medium of education (Gharib, 1996).

Correspondingly, a number of students who decide to follow their science studies at university either struggle with academic content in French or give up in the first years. The results from this survey indicate that MA is infrequently used as the language of instruction in high schools. Only (6.73%; n=07) indicated that it was the primary language of instruction in high school while no students chose it as the primary language used at university. Respondent 11 from high school stated, "We sometimes use MA in informal scenes of communication, or to let teachers explain more."

It is worth nothing that English was mentioned by 23.52% (n=16) of the university students who listed it as the primary medium of learning. Students claimed that under current education reform, English has begun to be used at universities of sciences as a fundamental component of the curricula. Respondent 7 pointed out, "We attend 2 hours of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes per week. It is not enough to master it.

² Jama' is a traditional Koranic preschool where students get Arabic courses and Koran.

We are forced to use English in the day of defense and to publish at least an article before we defend our doctoral dissertations.” He added, “French is dominating; we have to extend the number of hours of ESP in the curriculum.” The student here makes reference to a ministerial decree launched by the previous minister of higher education (Daoudi, 2015) who declared that students should give more priority to English due to its prominent use in scientific literature and research. However, implementation of this policy has been weak, as students are only required to use English in one semester during Master’s studies.

When asked about their language of communication with teachers in the classroom, 57.69% (n=60) chose SA and 42.30% (n=44) chose MA in high schools while 75% (n=51) chose French and 25% (N=17) selected MA at university. Though SA is the official medium of learning in high school, it should be noted that MA is widely used in oral communication between students and teachers. Participant two wrote, “I prefer to discuss scientific theories in MA with my teacher,” when offering a justification for its use. This, however, is not the experience of many university students who report that they are not allowed to use any language other than French in the classroom even in informal contexts. Such behavior questions the tolerance that teachers treat their students with when they transgress the rules by using MA at the expense of SA in high school and not at university where French should be kept as the fundamental language of communication. It shows that university teachers and students are more positive towards French language than high school students and teachers are with SA.

Concerning students’ medium of oral communication at home and with friends outside of the classroom, the results of the study indicate that MA was used by 66.86% (n=115) of respondents and Amz was used by 29.65%(n=51) at home. Similarly, MA is highly used by respondents (69.18; 119) in

their communication with friends while Amz is used by (21.51; n=37). French is also used in students’ communication with each other (9.30%; n=16) and to a less degree at home (3.48%; n=6). The dominance of MA and Amz here is quite normal as one student (respondent 17) pointed out. “In our daily communication, we use MA or Amz. We sometimes use French while discussing intellectual subjects or sitting with intellectuals.” This result aligns with the findings of several researchers who argue that Moroccan students perceive French as a prestigious language and MA as a language of informal communication (Bentahila, 1983; Marely, 2002; Zakhir & O’Brien, 2016).

This reality manifests in students’ preferences for French as the preferred language of instruction. When queried, a majority (44.18%; n=76) of both high school and university students preferred to learn sciences in French, followed by SA (27.90%; n=48), an additional 32 (18.60%) chose English, while a smaller percentage 9.30% (n=16) opted for MA. Students’ choice of French is logical because they all complete their university studies in French. Respondent 20 from high school stated, “I prefer to learn sciences in English and French. These are two powerful languages which offer good sources of information.” Another student (3) from university argued, “I think English is the best to bandwagon with the developed West in scientific research. French can be useful too, but English is the first language in the world. It helps us get open to many Western countries.” Concerning the majority of students who preferred SA and MA, they all agreed that it is better and easier for students to learn in their own national languages. Respondent 11 argued, “We should rather give priority to MA and SA in learning; this will not only ease our acquisition of sciences but also improve our mastery of our national languages.”

Similar attitudes were discovered when students were asked to choose which language they think can be more effective for

learning sciences. Participants responded that French is more popular (39.53%; n=68) as a language of instruction in both high school and university; SA was the second most effective (23.25%; n= 40); English was third (20.93% n=36) and MA finished last with (16.27%; n=28) participants choosing it as the most effective. The results seem to indicate that students are attached to French and SA as two effective media of learning, although French is rated higher. French exerts a strong influence on students' attitudes due to its dominance in higher education and the job market. A student (respondent 21) from university said, "The Moroccan job market needs French. We are obliged to learn it otherwise we will have problems in the future." In her interpretation of the dominance of French on MA in Morocco, Bullock (2014) argues that "the relationship between the school system and the labor market has been perhaps the largest driving force in marginalizing dialects and normalizing a particularly-backed language hierarchy, that 'invisible, silent violence' (Bourdieu 1991, p. 52)." (Bullock 2014, p. 29).

It is worthy of notice that English is becoming popular in Moroccan classrooms. Students who responded to the questionnaires shared positive attitudes towards it as a promising language in the future. Respondent five from university wrote, "The world now uses English. It is effective in our education." This attitude aligns with many researchers (Zouhir 2013; Bentahila 1983) who argue that factors such as globalization, media, and Moroccans' relationship with Europe open the gate for English to spread in society, education and business.

On the other hand, MA is still perceived by many Moroccans as not as effective as French for the purposes of instruction and learning. Sixty-seven students (98.52%) from university saw no role of MA in learning sciences while 90 students (86.53%) from high school agreed that it may play an

important role in education. Of these 90 high school respondents, some felt that MA can be used effectively to facilitate the learning of science content in their courses. These students stated that MA can play a decisive role in understanding scientific theories which seem difficult in SA. Student 2 claimed "All developed countries use mother tongues to learn sciences, why not Morocco? It is easier and practical to learn in MA." Another student from high school argued that the majority of high school science teachers use MA to teach sciences. "What is wrong with this?" he asked. These attitudes were not accepted by the majority of university students who regarded MA as a barrier to learning science effectively. On this topic, respondent five said, "MA is a mixture of Spanish, French and SA vocabulary. It differs from one region to another. So which one shall we use, huh?" Another student sarcastically added, "MA in science classes is funny and useless. How can a teacher explain a course of labor in MA?" The speaker here makes reference to some scientific terminology of labor such as sexual organs, which are considered as a taboo if uttered in MA, but normal in SA and French. This is clear from the attitude of a high school student who pointed out, "MA is a vulgar language and uses street vocabulary. This vocabulary cannot be used in classroom. It is *hchuma*³."

It is worthy of notice that the majority of students from both high school and university levels (88.37%; n=152) perceived MA as an oral dialect, (7.55%; n=13) saw it as a vulgar language, while only (4.06%; n=7) viewed it as a modern language. This shows that students relate oral speech to dialects and situate MA in a lower position than SA. There is a shared belief among many of these students that MA should be confined to informal scenes of oral communication. Perhaps, they are not aware that even a language is a dialect with a navy and army of its own as stated by Weinreich (1945). Concerning students who perceived MA as a

³ *hchuma* in MA means a taboo or a source of embarrassment.

vulgar language, they argue that it is full of taboos which may spoil the classroom atmosphere if used by students and teachers. In fact, this attitude is criticized by advocators of MA, such as Ayouch and his colleagues, who believed that it is the responsibility of linguists and teachers to encourage its appropriate use in classrooms by omitting slang or inappropriate words. Ayouch (2012) claimed, "It is indispensable to proceed in simplifying MA and adapting it to the needs of modern life" (p. 4).

To uncover students' views on both MA and SA, they were asked whether MA can take the place of SA in education. The majority of students (80.23%; n=138) from both high school and university responded negatively to this post, while a minority (19.76%; n=34) were positive. Those who argued for its use stated that SA has a rich history and that it is not easy for MA to take its place in education. A respondent from high school (79) stated that "there is a conspiracy to eradicate SA by the use of MA. We will not accept this. We will defend the language of our ancestors, the language of the Quran." It is significant that students perceive SA as the sole language of Islam and the Quran. In response to these notions, Bullock (2014) argues that religious communities conflate "the holy message with the medium through which it was expressed." She added that these communities believe that "language and its ideographs were not representations; they were reality." (p. 12)

It should be noted that a majority of students rejected the idea of replacing SA with MA in education, even though most use it with teachers in classrooms and they feel more at ease when teachers explain concepts using it as a medium of communication. One of the respondents (student, 10) who is a proponent of MA argued that "it is flourishing in education because Moroccans are familiar with it. If things remain the same, one day we will have full MA classes."

Similar responses were recorded when students were asked the question: "is there

any role of MA in learning SA?" Students were split equally between the affirmative (n=85) and negative (n=87) choices. Student nine reported, "There are many common characteristics between the two languages. This makes MA an impetus for learning SA which is foreign for all of us." Conversely, another student stated, "MA is oral, irregular and easy because it is changing over time while SA is formal and rule-based. I don't see any role of MA in learning SA; it is indeed a distortion of it." It seems from these contradicting responses that students are inclined to MA as an instrumental language which increases their chances of learning, but at the same time they defend SA as part of their identity and refuse any language which threatens its use in education. Similar results were recorded by Zakhir and O'Brien (2016) in their research on Arabization and French in Morocco. They argued that although many students like French, they defend SA as "part of their identity and sacred religion" (p. 7). Bullock (2014) pointed out that Moroccans see that "...the beauty of *Fusha* (SA) is upheld by its status as the language of Islam, as well as by a certain nostalgia for the Islamic golden age" (p. 12).

Attitudes Towards MA in Media

To understand the role of MA in media use, respondents were first asked about the language they use when accessing the internet. Of all the responses from high school and university students (n= 172), seventy (40.69 %) reported preferring to use MA, 15.11% (n=26) chose French, 5.81% (n=10) chose SA and 38.37% (n=66) selected English. Students reported that using MA with Latin alphabets was easier and more practical for communicating and writing emails to each other. They also reported using a combination of MA, French and English "to show a high level of education," as written by Respondent 13 (university student). However, when utilizing search engines or writing formal emails, all students stated that they use French or English because MA is not standardized.

Students' preference for writing in MA was apparent from several of their responses to the question regarding what languages they used for text-messaging on mobile phones. A majority of students who responded (79.06%; n=136) indicated that they commonly use MA in texting each other while 16.27% (n=28) answered negatively and 8 were neutral. One of the students (respondent 11) claimed, "Using SA or French in text messaging is a bit formal. I prefer MA instead. It is easier in typing and all Moroccans understand it." Another respondent wrote, "I use MA in text messaging unconsciously and I sometimes mix it with French." Other students who responded negatively argue that they use French instead, particularly when writing to each other or to well-educated people. One of them pointed out, "It's a shame to type a message in MA. It sounds childish and shows that the sender is illiterate" (Respondent 65, student). The responses to these two questions reveal that the principles of practicality and ease of use again are the driving force for students' motivation to use MA particularly in personal and/or intimate communication. It is important to note that more media is being produced in Morocco using MA as a medium of communication. By seeing advertisements and official notifications in 'mother tongues,' it has the potential to elevate MA to a status equal to SA or French. McIntosh (2010) argues that, "The very use of the vernacular with this technology (mobiles) militates against its marginalization, asserting the right of a marginalized people to invoke their ethnic identity ever in a technologically-mediated space dominated by dreams of assimilation" (Hall, 2015, p.114).

When asked if they watch TV programs in MA, respondents' answers were very evenly split. Those who responded positively argue that they favour dubbed Mexican and Turkish series. Such series are famous in Morocco among a diverse group of people (including the poor and uneducated), and as such these programs have a palpable influence on the young people in Morocco. In general, these series center around social issues such as love

stories and family problems. Students also mention that they watch other programs in MA such as political debates, cooking programs, Football matches, and movies.

However, when asked whether satisfied or not with the language of these TV programs, the majority of students (91.27%; n=157), unexpectedly, responded negatively. They argue that the language is artificial and has nothing to do with MA they use in daily communication. Respondent nine commented "Except in some entertaining programs, I feel that the language is funny. It is neither SA nor MA." Another respondent (78) expressed his dissatisfaction with the whole idea of MA in TV and argued that "it's not professional and reduces the quality of TV programs." This attitude was not accepted by several of his colleagues who pointed out that what matters is the message. "Since the language reaches the maximum of Moroccan audience, it's good," said respondent 4. It should be noted that these TV programs use a modern form of MA which sounds somewhat like SA used by the elite. It is referred to by Youssi (1995) as the middle variety, which is a bit half-way between SA and MA. This variety is clean from expressions or words which are considered taboo or vulgar to societal norms in Morocco. It is also worth mentioning that the majority of TV ads in Morocco are broadcast in MA. Hall (2015) posed a reason for this when he posited that the use of MA for advertising purposes creates "a direct and immediate link between the viewer and the content because it indexes a sense of intimacy" (p. 200).

Another area in which MA has become more pervasive in the past decade is in print media (e.g., newspapers and magazines). Periodicals such as *Nichan* (direct), *akhbar souk* (market news) and *hab wtban* (corn and hay) started to become more widely-circulated although not as quickly as the publishers would have liked. When queried, 77.32% of the respondents (n=133) mentioned that they read these publications 'rarely', another 20.93% (n=36) stated that they read the publications 'from

time to time' and three respondents (1.74%) mentioned that they had never read them.

When asked to explain their indifference to these publications, several mentioned objections based on the poor quality of language and the sarcastic manner in which the information was presented. Respondent 77 stated, "These MA newspapers are trivial and shocking. They are full of taboos which cannot be accepted in our conservative society." The speaker here makes reference to some magazines, journals and newspapers, such as *Nichan*, which address issues shocking to Moroccans such as sexuality, prostitution, and political corruption. The publication *Nichan*, for example, was accused of betrayal of the Moroccan state and was shut down in 2010. Respondent 6 had very strong viewpoints regarding such publications when he stated, "The aim of such media is to indoctrinate the maximum of Moroccans and destabilize their Islamic values. I have read just one or two volumes and since then I boycotted them all," he added. It should be noted that these MA media outlets use SA alphabets and not Latin like in messages or emails. Perhaps, this choice of MA with SA alphabets is a strategy used by editors to reach all Moroccans, be they literates or illiterates.

Last, students were asked their opinions on whether the use of MA is proliferating in education and in media, and the majority (93.60%; n=161) answered in the affirmative. A student from university (7) stated, "MA started to spread in education and media because in this age of globalization people have become pragmatic. They do their best to avoid complexities in communication and use the easiest and most profitable way to exchange messages." Another student (53) explained, "MA is spreading due to its wide use by teachers in classrooms and also by companies to advertise their products." Some students criticized the government's indifference to the increased use of MA. A common sentiment shared by respondents is that MA is used as a way to eradicate SA in an attempt to increase the use of the French

language in Morocco. Beliefs such as these echo the sentiments of some conspiracy theorists in Morocco (see: Fassi Fehri, 2013; Laroui, 2013) who argue that advocating for the use of MA is part of a concerted effort to reconstruct the linguistic and cultural landscape of Morocco. However, the fact that MA has no script or grammar books to regulate its use makes it less prestigious and formalized than SA, which could lead to people using it for informal purposes rather than in school and in business.

In short, the findings of the questionnaire completed by students reveal that there exists a wide variety of opinions regarding the use and proliferation of MA. Though a majority of students see it as an easy and practical medium of communication, they still perceive it as a primarily oral dialect which threatens SA, the language of religion and identity in Morocco. These deeply-held beliefs that students bring to the classroom seem to decrease the effectiveness of MA as a medium of communication in Moroccan schools and universities.

Teachers' attitudes

This section presents the findings of the questionnaire completed by a total of 28 teachers from kindergarten (n=4), primary school (n=8), high school (n=10) and university (n=6). The instrument was used to uncover teachers' attitudes towards MA, as well as attitudes regarding the use of MA in education and its increased usage in print, broadcast, and electronic media.

Attitudes towards MA in education: discussion

Teachers were first asked about the medium of teaching they use in classroom. Out of twelve respondents in kindergarten and primary schools, (n=4) stated that they teach utilizing MA, (n=6) others reported using SA for instruction, and (n=2) teachers chose to use French. Of the ten respondents in high school, (n=7) teachers reported preferring SA, while (n=3) opted for French. In university,

(n=5) stated that they use French, while only (n=1) purposefully uses MA for instruction. Teachers were also asked whether they resort to MA when explaining concepts to students. Here, the majority (n=20) from elementary (n=4), primary (n=7) and high schools (n=9) responded positively, while (n=2) in high school and (n=6) in university provided a negative answer. These responses indicate that teachers in elementary, primary and high schools find it appropriate to use MA as a medium of communication in the classroom while university professors try to respect the official languages of education (SA and French). Of the majority who responded positively, 55% (n=11) said that they 'sometimes' use it and 25% (n=5) reported using MA 'a lot,' while 20% (n=4) teachers said that they 'rarely' rely on it. Teachers who supported the use of MA argue that it facilitates communication and understanding for students who are more comfortable speaking it. Respondent 3 (high school teacher) pointed out, "MA offers a good opportunity to target weak students by explaining theories in a language they are familiar with." Another teacher (9) from primary school added, "MA helps me overcome language problems and focus more on the subject matter." By mentioning language problems, the teacher here meant the difficulties he faces using SA terminology in science instruction. This, however, was not accepted by the opponents of MA who claimed that because it does not have rules or a script, its use reduces the quality of classroom communication. Respondent 11 from primary level stated, "What's the use of schools if we teach in MA? It is the language of homes, not schools." It is ironic that teachers criticize the role of MA as a distortion of education standards while they commonly use it in their teaching of sciences. For instance, one of the teachers who declared that they 'sometimes' use MA (respondent 7) argued, "MA should not be used in classroom; it affects students' expressive ability in SA, the language in which they will be examined." These attitudes and practices are criticized by many scholars who value the use of mother

tongues in early childhood education (Benson 2004; Pinnock 2009; Gacheche 2010). Gacheche (2010), for example, argues that "learners who understand the language they are instructed in are more likely to engage meaningfully with content, question what they do not understand and even enjoy the challenge of new things" (p. 3).

Many teachers also reported that they do not allow students' use of MA in the classroom, particularly while discussing the subject matter. Eighteen out of twenty-eight teachers held the belief that MA should not be used because its use violates official policy, namely that it contradicts the goals of the National Charter for Education and of the official languages adopted by the Ministry of Education. Respondent 13 (a teacher of Math in high school) argued, "I don't accept the use of MA in my classroom. It is one of the main reasons for the decrease of education standards. If we tolerate students' use of MA, they will get used to it and forget SA, the language of their religion and identity." It is worth noting that respondents used religion and identity to defend SA whenever they feel that MA threatens its use in official capacities (e.g., media and education). What is odd is that MA is the first language the majority of Arab students and teachers are introduced to at home and the most used in their daily communication. It is also widely used in the religious sector, as even some *Imams* use it with SA in their religious discourse in Friday prayers. This perhaps should give MA more privilege as a language of identity and religion.

It is also important to understand that the majority of teachers 85.71% (n=24) believe that MA is not 'effective' in teaching sciences. "I can't teach physics in MA. The classroom discourse will be like Esperanto, with French, MA and SA," said respondent 20 from high school. Some of these teachers even deny the role of SA as an effective language and state that sciences should be taught in French or English because most scientific research findings are presented in

English and French. This sentiment was articulated in the response of an SVT teacher (respondent 21) in high school who pointed out, “SA linguistic system is weak; no science terminology, and only weak references. We should think again about its use in teaching sciences.”

Yet, the majority of teachers (71.42%; n=20) believed that MA can be useful in kindergarten while a smaller percentage (14.2%; n=4) prefer to use it in the first years of primary school. Respondent 3 from university argued, “The child in kindergarten needs just elementary knowledge to compare what he hears at home with what he sees in the world. There is no harm if teachers use MA or even Amz.” This sentiment aligns with the findings of researchers who study the impacts of early childhood education on children’s development (Daniel, 2003; Ball, 2010; Tariq, 2014). These researchers found a positive impact of the use of home languages in the classroom such as improved abstract thinking as well as the benefits of being able to communicate in multiple languages. Unfortunately, teachers rarely value home languages in the classroom and many are reticent to use MA in their instruction. In practice, many teachers give priority to SA and French in kindergarten, thinking that this will improve children’s educational experiences and help with their transition to secondary and university studies. Some teachers like respondents 4 and 1 from private schools argued that “parents always complain about the level of their children in French and SA. They find it weird when they hear that the teacher uses MA.” Another teacher (respondent 7) pointed out, “For commercial reasons, we are forced to use French to attract families to our school. Parents like to hear their children speak in French.” It is worthy of notice here that early childhood education in Morocco is private and is not regulated by the Ministry of Education. This gives preschools more autonomy in choosing their curricula and languages of instruction.

Furthermore, teachers saw no necessity in recognizing MA as an official language in education. Twenty-six of the teachers believe that MA has no added value except in elementary education. Respondent 4, a high school teacher said, “Any attempt to recognize MA will have dangerous effects on students’ standards in sciences. It will complicate their learning; needless to say, that it may isolate Morocco from the Arab world.” This teacher sees the adoption of MA as a barrier for communicating with others in the Arab world. This belief of one language and one nation is regarded by some researchers like Bullock (2014) as an exported ideology of Arab nationalism which has no real consequences, “for no country speaks one homogenous language” (p. 25). In the same context, respondent 15 from university criticized MA by stating, “The rejection of MA reveals that teachers have no faith in its ability to compete with other languages in this age of globalization. Instead of working on the standardization of MA, we should modernize our education tools and encourage students to learn English and French to compete with developed countries.”

Similar to students, teachers summarily rejected the idea that MA may replace SA in the future in education, accusing the current attempts of serving a French agenda to destroy the Arabization project. Most believe that the use of MA in high school and university will have a negative impact on students’ education. One respondent (2) claimed, “Even powerful countries which use a local language in education have other low varieties which serve intimate and informal communication. If we standardize MA we will have another sort of diglossia like a high MA and a low variety of the street. Who knows that after few years we will hear other voices calling for the standardization of the weak variety?” Another teacher (respondent 11) in high school stated, “It is idiotic to recognize MA in this time when SA itself needs much work to adapt it to the needs of science education. It’s a waste of time, money and efforts.” These attitudes reveal that

Moroccan teachers feel that the issue of language is problematic in education, and the attempts to recognize MA as an official language, together with SA, French and Amz will only imperil the Moroccan education system. It is clear from these responses that teachers have little or no faith in MA as a medium of instruction and that the ideology of diglossia exerts a strong influence on their opinions. Fassi Fehri (2010) considers MA/SA diglossia as a colonial conception to destabilize the linguistic scene in Morocco (see Miller, 2013). El Harras (2007) and Ayouch (2012), on the other hand, conducted research on students who were exposed to MA in preschool and early years of primary school in *passerelle programmes* and in the private institute of *Zagoura*, and they argue that these students showed higher linguistic competencies than others who had only SA education.

Attitudes towards MA in Media

To elucidate the reason behind teachers' negative views on MA, they were asked about its use in media. The majority (89.28%; n=25) pointed out that they have never read newspapers in MA. Some even doubted the existence of such newspapers. Respondent 7 from a high school stated, "I think there are few electronic journals or small annexes in newspapers. The whole idea doesn't work." "People don't give them any interest due to the low quality of both the language and the news they provide," he added. Another teacher (21), on the other hand, argues that there were some attempts to publish full MA newspapers like the one used by Elena Prentice, an American expatriate in Tangier, or *Nichan* (direct). The same teacher claimed that he is familiar with annexed MA sections in the newspapers of *Al-akhbar* (news) and *Al-masae* (evening). He said, "I like the sarcastic way they criticize famous political figures in MA. It's funny and purposeful." The teacher also mentions some electronic MA journals like *goud* (straight), which is famous among the young generation.

When asked about the reason why MA does not receive any interest from Moroccan officials, teachers argue that the issue is political. "MA in media receives various criticisms from both Arabophones and Imazighen, who see it as a threat to their languages," said respondent 9 from high school. It is worthy of notice that no political party in Morocco has ever expressed a positive attitude towards MA in education. They all defend the use of SA and Amz and relegate the importance of MA. Amina Maa El Ainine from the Justice and Development Party (PJD), for example, argues in a talk show in Medi1 TV in 2016 that MA is not an endangered language to standardize it. She also accused supporters of MA for destabilizing the principles of Moroccan education system. However, the silence of policymakers on MA use in education and media is not neutral for many researchers. Miller (2013), for instance, argues that it reflects the cleverness of authorities to follow social demands and respond to the immediate needs of people. To democratize the public sphere, authorities pave the way for MA to flourish in all sectors of modernity (p. 106).

Unexpectedly, teachers' attitudes towards MA changed when asked about its use in audiovisual media. Twenty-two of them stated that they follow TV programs in MA. "I'm fan of Turkish series in MA. The language is cute. It sounds modern and clean, not like the one we use in street communication," said a primary school teacher (respondent 3). This idea of modernity in the MA used in TV is also mentioned by a university teacher (respondent 5): "actors use some SA words in MA discourse such as 'syyara'(car) 'lhaqiba' (bag) 'laʃamal'(work) to make it sound suitable and prestigious." This, however, was interpreted differently by another teacher (respondent 5) who claimed, "The style used in Moroccan TV programs addresses the upper class viewers who are familiar with it." Perhaps, it is this clean variety of MA which proponents of *Darija* like Ayouch are aiming to implement in education. Further, it is significant that MA

used in TV does not receive serious criticisms from teachers as it was the case with newspapers and journals. This can be interpreted by the control which the Ministry of Communication exerts over audiovisual media.

Teachers also show positive attitudes towards the status of MA in internet communication. Sixteen stated that they use it in writing emails and chatting with friends while 10 claimed that they do not use it. One of the former teachers (respondent 7) pointed out, "I use MA with Latin letters, or sometimes with SA letters in intimate conversations and emails. It is funny but practical." On the other hand, another teacher (4) from university stated, "Oh no! It's childish to write emails in MA. We are teachers; we need to use French." The teacher here meant that the use of French gives him the status of a well-educated person, while MA is a sign of immaturity, ignorance and informality. It is, indeed, interesting to see how the use of one language than another may raise the status of the speaker and promote his social rank. On this issue, Bentahila (1983) argues that Moroccans feel highly educated by using Western languages.

These contradictory attitudes were also recorded in teachers' responses to the question on the common language they use in writing messages in mobile phones. Seventeen stated that they use MA while (11) opted for French. Similar to students, teachers who use MA in text-messaging think that it's a practical and intimate language. "Not all mobile phones have SA keyboards. It is also practical to use MA since the message fulfills its goals easily," pointed out teacher 8 from primary school. Another respondent (3) argued, "I use MA in my intimate communication with my wife and friends. It's effective and immediate." Again, respondents perceive MA as an intimate language which is able to convey their emotions. Hall (2015: 327) claims, "There is a dominant ideology that associates Moroccan Arabic with a sense of directness and intimacy in that Moroccan

Arabic is imagined to reach right to the core of the person hearing or reading it." It seems that the decline of SA as a medium of communication in new technological tools benefits supporters of MA. This, however, is perceived by French proponents as a sign of recklessness and illiteracy; for they all refused MA to take the place of French in new media of communication. "I've never responded to any SMS in MA. It's ridiculous to write MA with Latin letters," stated respondent 15. Furthermore, respondent 7 from university revealed that students' use of MA with French starts to affect their communication skills in French: "Sometimes I find code switching samples in students' essays, which is very disturbing. We need to work on this bad habit and let our children give it up."

In brief, teachers still perceive MA as an oral variety which is not worthy using in education and formal communication. They tolerate its use only in home communication or some private scenes of internet chatting and text messaging. What is odd is that MA is highly used by teachers in classrooms, particularly in high schools. This can be interpreted as the effect of new media of communication on MA spread in Moroccan society, for teachers themselves are influenced by their exposure to it in new domains which were reserved for French and SA.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal the advanced status which MA starts to achieve in the Moroccan linguistic landscape. Factors such as new media of communication, globalization and human rights helped MA to gain more ground in domains which were reserved for SA and French before. This social promotion of MA, however, seems unstructured and ineffective due to the lack of an official recognition and to the conflicting ideologies held by those who promote its use. All attempts to use MA in education, literature, business and media were individual, as they emanated from separate linguists, activists and NGOs. This represents a real challenge for MA supporters to agree on

a fixed script and to convince Moroccans of its use. Such implementation of the MA project serves its opponents who see it as an attempt by the French administration to eradicate SA and pave the way for French to gain elevated status (and increased use) in Morocco. Arabists save no efforts in condemning the standardization of MA and its use in education and media. Some of them such as Fassi Fehri (2010) and Laroui (2013) even doubt the entire idea of diglossia and see it as a language ideology to weaken SA (see Miller, 2013).

The findings of this study identify some of the linguistic tension held by teachers and students in Morocco. Despite the fact that a significant number of respondents stated that they use MA in classroom discourse and despite the increased use of MA in the media, teachers and students overwhelmingly view MA as an oral variety which cannot take the place of SA. Such hesitant attitudes summarize the opposing ideologies which characterize the project of MA. What is quiet odd is that the Moroccan government preserves its neutral position as regards the recognition of MA, for neither the last constitution of 2011 nor the National Charter for Education has clearly defined its role in education.

By choosing the term ‘Arabic’ in all official declarations, stakeholders keep themselves in a distant position from the ideological conflicts characterizing the issue of language hierarchy in society. This intensifies linguistic rivalry and opens the gate for tentative interpretations, which exacerbate the entire language situation. Miller (2013) sees this neutral position of the state as a political move to democratize the public sphere and give MA a chance to flourish covertly in all sectors. Whereas others such as Ayouch and Alami perceive it as a tacit recognition of the failure of the Arabization project which, according to them, caused the country much troubles. This situation raises many questions about the nature of MA, its origin, relationship with SA, and its role in education.

Eckert (1980) argues that “diglossia does not arise; it is imposed from above” (p. 1056). This ideology of language, indeed, is what pushed MA supporters to fight for its recognition and use in education instead of SA. But are the borders of MA and SA clear and easily determined? Studies (Youssi, 1992; Benjelloun, 1990; Chekayri, 2006) have shown that MA is deeply related to SA in vocabulary, morphology and meaning. MA, of course, borrows from different languages, particularly Amazigh, French and Spanish, but still it is a representation of SA in daily communications. Its shape and use can never be static because, like every other language used by humans, it is subject to modifications due to social factors, and other common linguistic instances, such as interference, contacts, and borrowing.

All languages of the world undergo such linguistic adaptation to the needs of individuals who use it in personal discourse for a variety of purposes, and no language exists which does not possess more informal forms which are used between individuals. English, for instance, has a standard form used in schools and other varieties used in informal communication such as African American vernacular (AAVE). Similarly, French has a standard form and non-standard varieties which differ from one region to another.

Laroui in his debate with Ayouch criticized supporters of MA standardization by claiming that what we teach in school is the written form of oral languages. It is, indeed, this written representation which facilitates access to knowledge because it is rule-based and avoids complexities and irregularities which characterize our street communication. If Ayouch’s plan to standardize MA and use it in education is followed, this will not protect the new standard MA from the linguistic changes which languages succumb to in daily contacts and communication. This new version will then have a lower status, and its speakers will presumably clamor in the future for its standardization to preserve cultural

identities and cultural capital. Rather than thinking of MA as a replacement for SA in school settings, perhaps researchers should focus on ways to teach using MA to help students transition to SA as they enter middle school and high school. In this manner, both languages are valued and taught, but secondary students will be instructed in a standardized language which can improve readiness for university studies.

The attitudes of students and teachers in this study are reflective of the larger linguistic tension which exists in Morocco. The question which policy makers should consider is “How can we alter opinions of teachers and students to see MA as a distinct variety that can be beneficial on the continuum to learning SA?” Breuilly (1985) argues that “a nation must be as independent as possible” (p. 3). Without a clear democratic language policy, which gives value to all official Moroccan languages, the divisive nature of the linguistic debate will simply cause other languages to proliferate at the expense of Morocco’s native languages.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results of this study reveal that MA is gaining popularity with several segments of the Moroccan population. Students and teachers have become familiar with its use in classrooms, on social media, and on TV and with mobile phones. Yet, this new role which MA has begun to play as a medium of

communication is still impeded by the prejudices against its formal use, which impacts how it is valued and used. Despite its use in classrooms, TV, emails, and messages, MA is perceived by students and teachers as an oral variety which does not deserve to be recognized as an official language. Commonly-held beliefs such as these reinforce the hegemonic relationship between SA and French over MA and impeded its expanded use in the classroom and the media. What the future holds for the use of MA is unclear, but clearly its survival and use in formal settings depends on the ability of policymakers to encourage its use while simultaneously reducing the barriers to its acceptance in society.

Policymakers should find ways to legitimize the use of MA in elementary levels to ease children’s introduction to formal education. They should encourage teachers in Kindergarten and the first two years of primary schools to modernize their use of MA and the other mother tongues--depending on the origin of learners--to familiarize children with the school life and maximize their benefit from education. Policymakers have also to reduce the linguistic tensions existing in society by giving each language the rights it deserves in education and media. It is only through a democratic management of the linguistic situation of the country that Morocco can develop its education system and increase levels of literacy.

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