LANGUAGE POLICY, PRESTIGE, AND STIGMA: A CASE STUDY OF MOROCCAN AMAZIGH LANGUAGE VARIETIES

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By
Shane Dante Quinn, B.A.

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Language is a major part of identity in any context, but especially in situations of disenfranchisement and marginalization, in which heritage languages are often subject to repression and resultant shift and loss. One such case of potential loss of linguistic and cultural identity involves the Amazigh language groups in Morocco (and the other Maghreb countries), in the face of past Arabicization efforts in North Africa, the continuing influence of French from the colonial period, and the spread of English as a world language. In this study, I report on the results of a survey that elicited Moroccans’ views regarding the current linguistic landscape of their country, and their predictions for the future. The survey was conducted with two groups, teachers of English in Morocco and members of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture or Institut royale de la culture amazighe (IRCAM), a product of the recent and controversial government support for Amazigh identity and issues. Qualitative analysis of the survey open-ended response questions suggests that both of these groups believe the linguistic landscape of Morocco will remain largely the same, but with a stronger presence of English. While the scale of positive change in Amazigh’s revitalization is slower than hoped for, I conclude tentatively that the issue is entering public consciousness on a broad scale, paving the way for larger scale societal change in favor of Amazigh.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The various indigenous peoples of North Africa have inhabited the region since before the arrival of the Arabs in the 7th century BC during the period known as the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb, and they have survived the much later arrival of European colonizers in the 19th century. Throughout these historical periods, they have preserved distinct identities and languages, which are collectively known as “Imazighen” (singular: “Amazigh”). Their cultures are distinct and the languages that they speak are Afro-Asiatic, though not from the same Semitic branch as Arabic. To this date, Amazigh communities have faced marginalization and assimilation efforts in the face of Arab nationalism, which envisions countries such as Morocco as Arab states and Arab alone (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012).

Morocco was a French Protectorate from 1912 to 1956, during which the French colonial administration made attempts to divide the population along ethnic and regional lines to facilitate governance. The Berber Dahir is perhaps the most famous of these measures. Hoisington (1978) chronicles the events and their significance. On the surface, the Berber Dahir was a minor document that sought to clarify legal questions about courts in Amazigh majority areas. But beyond this, many Moroccans saw it as driving a wedge between fellow Moroccan Muslims. It was met with fierce resistance and was never able to be fully implemented. The predominant European understanding at the time of clear divisions between ethnic groups was not compatible with reality in Morocco. Instead, Hoisington notes that emphasis was placed on religious identity and thus the creation of courts for Imazighen outside of Shari’a law was taken as both an insult and warning about possible French conversion efforts in the future.

Following independence in 1956, a program of Arabization took place, primarily motivated by a desire to displace French as the prestige language of the country. However, it not
only failed in its primary mission, leaving many elite Moroccans unconvinced that Arabic should displace French, but it also saw the explicit marginalization of Amazigh language varieties. This topic will be further discussed later. Fast-forwarding to the modern day, Morocco made Amazigh an official language, alongside Standard Arabic, in 2011. This occurred in the context of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Uprisings, otherwise known as the Arab Spring, events that began during the early 2010s, and brought protests all around Morocco and much of the MENA region, demanding social and political changes. This connection will also be described more thoroughly later in the present study. In Morocco, unlike many other countries, the vast majority of these protests called for reform rather than revolution (Mustaoui Srhir, 2016). Nonetheless, the Moroccan state showed reluctance to implement many of these reforms, but still followed through on some of them as a sign of good will to the population. One of the less consequential demands was to make Amazigh an official language, as the official status does not require any specific systematic changes. The state complied and made it a formal, official language together with Standard Arabic. Here is where the focus of the present study lies: How much sociolinguistic change has actually been brought about by this political appeasement since the elevation of Amazigh to an official language in 2011, in the minds of well-educated Moroccans? How is Amazigh viewed next to English and the other widespread languages of Morocco: Darija, Standard Arabic, and French?

Throughout this study, the collection of languages indigenous to North Africa, spoken by Imazighen, will be referred to as “Amazigh.” As Ech-charfi (2020) explains, neither the language nor the ethnicity of the various indigenous peoples of North Africa prior to the Arab arrival in the 7th century were monolithic, and the grouping into a single language and ethnicity was a convenient way for the Arab conquerors and later the French colonizers to divide Moroccans into
a single Arab and a single indigenous group and thus isolate them into two “distinct blocks” (p. 19). Thus, there are different languages and dialects in the Amazigh family, as “each group of dialects constituted a distinct language, e.g. Tashlhyt, Tamazight, Tarifit, Takbaylite, etc.” (p. 19). However, for the sake of this study, they have largely been grouped together. Also, in English and other Western languages, the term “Berber” is in common circulation. However, this term is considered by many, albeit not all, Imazighen to be offensive and thus will be avoided in the present study.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Amazigh: Attitudes and Vitality Since the 2000s

The existing research into language attitudes in Morocco suggests that Amazigh is often associated by Moroccans as backwards, archaic, and closed-minded, whereas French and, to a lesser degree, English are associated with progress and the future. This is what Chakrani (2013) found when he administered a Matched Guise Test to 454 university students from four institutions of higher education from two major Moroccan cities. Chakrani explained the findings by positing an ideology of modernity that is driven by elites and is followed by the broader society, as suggested by the fact that within his sample, middle-class students agreed with upper-class students and lower-class students trended in the same direction. He concluded that the linguistic hierarchies that developed in Morocco during the colonial era have continued on into the present day, both overtly and covertly, and that the elites are influencers that place French and English at the center of emulating the modernity of the West. Naturally, such negative societal attitudes towards Amazigh hold formidable weight in terms of language learning and teaching of the various languages in the country, and they create further challenges to the vitality of the Amazigh language.

In a study that sought to document the impact of reforms to the education system in the year 2000, Marley (2004) surveyed the attitudes held by students (n=159) and their teachers (exact number unknown), towards these reforms, which had eased the policy of Arabization and acknowledged the importance of other languages in Moroccan education. The results generally showed students’ favorability towards bilingualism, a lukewarm attitude towards Modern Standard Arabic, pride in Darija, and contempt for Amazigh. Marley’s study shares many of the goals of the present research, though her approach was more quantitative than qualitative, thus
reaching a larger number of respondents but without open-ended response questions. A potential concern with her findings, despite its large respondent pool, is that only residents of a single town in central Morocco, Khouribga, were sampled. It is also vital to note that Khouribga is not in an Amazighophone area, and the primary language of respondents was Darija. With these caveats in mind, the study does give a good overview of various groups of people in the town. But it would be inaccurate to say the findings represent Morocco as a whole.

Errihani (2008) reported on ethnographic university classroom observations, as well as interviews with members of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture or Institut royale de la culture amazighe (IRCAM) and the Ministry of Education. Participants were asked about the implementation of Amazigh language programs, the general promotion of Amazigh language and culture, and attitudes relating to the aforementioned topic areas. The same university students who were observed were also given a survey with attitude questions about languages and about identity, as an individual and as Morocco as a nation. Among Errihani’s findings are that Moroccans identify along religious lines more strongly than ethnic or linguistic ones. Moreover, students predominantly identified French, then Standard Arabic, as the most prestigious language in Morocco, whereas Amazigh was only visible in advertising Moroccan cultural heritage to attract tourists and not in education, government, or any other areas. Essentially, it is as if Amazigh were only assigned value insofar as it can be commercialized and exploited for economic gain, specifically for consumption by a foreign audience, particularly western tourists, who are presumably fascinated by indigenous issues (Heller, Pujolar, & Duchêne, 2014). Errihani discussed also that many speakers of Amazigh languages who move to cities quickly assimilate linguistically (Baker, 2006). Despite activism for more Amazigh representation, many do not speak their languages to their own children (Baker, 2006). This is,
according to Errihani, and resonating with Marley’s (2004) conclusions and Chakrani’s (2013) more recent findings, because many people feel speaking Amazigh aligns oneself with rural areas and the poverty found there.

None of the policy changes or post Arab Spring reform concessions seem to have altered the decline in linguistic vitality of Amazigh, at least judging from the results of a recent study by Idhssaine and El Kirat (2019). Asking how policy changes may have affected Amazigh revitalization and use in the public sphere, these researchers focused on the domains of use in the Rabat-Salé region, comprising of the country’s capital and the surrounding urban areas. Thus, for the first time it seems, evidence was made available about actual (reported) usage, unlike many of the other existing studies, which centered themselves on attitudes and ideologies. Based on a questionnaire and interview distributed to participants in the Rabat-Salé region through personal connections to the researchers, it was found that participants rarely use Amazigh when speaking to their children, spouse, classmates, or friends, as well as in public spaces such as supermarkets or souks. On the contrary, the largest domain of use was speaking with grandparents. These usage findings thus spell trouble for the language’s vitality. Moreover, the interviews largely showed that participants did not believe that policy changes and education reforms have made much of a difference for Amazigh or its speakers. Idhssaine and El Kirat therefore concluded that the status change is substantially symbolic, rather than truly contributing to revitalization.

2.2 Institut Royale de la Culture Amazighe: Role and Impact

The generally negative attitudes and decline in the actual vitality of the Amazigh language fly in the face of explicit official policies supporting the minority language, particularly since 2001. Specifically, IRCAM was established in 2001 by royal decree for the purpose of promoting and developing the Amazigh language. This institution is therefore, quite directly,
charged by the King with the growth and promotion of the Amazigh language in Morocco. As mentioned in the Introduction, there is a deep-rooted connection between the progressive pro-Amazigh language policies and the February 20 Movement during the Arab Spring / MENA Uprisings. In his article, Moustaoui Srhir (2016) makes it clear that the wave of protests that challenged the Moroccan regime, rather than calling for drastic regime changes, demanded a number of reforms to Moroccan government and society. As of 2016, few of these demands had been satisfied. Among them were increased rights for Amazigh language, including two already mentioned: the creation of IRCAM in 2001 and the designation of Amazigh as official language of Morocco, alongside Standard Arabic, in 2011. These concessions indeed challenged the status-quo of post-independence Morocco, which has emphasized the state’s Arabness and attempted to institute Arabization.

Nevertheless, gestures such as the creation in 2001 of IRCAM serve as official recognition of and commitment to the Amazigh language and many scholars hope it might fulfill the potential to bring about true cultural change in Morocco and help to lessen stigma and marginalization. Morocco is a monarchy in which the monarch continues to hold considerable power in government and control of society (Boukhars, 2011). Criticism of the monarch and monarchy is not tolerated by authorities and major changes require royal approval, as was the case with IRCAM. The tradeoffs and paradoxes are not small, as Crawford (2007) astutely recognizes. With IRCAM, the state gets a foot in the door and now has a much stronger basis to offer a counter-narrative to the concerns and demands of Amazigh activists. Because IRCAM claims to represent Amazigh people and has the backing of the state, Crawford reasons, it has the potential to drown out concerns and opposing opinions from activists much more closely connected to the issues at hand, and with a longer history of advocacy. However, while
acknowledging that having an official institution adds a top-down component to what traditionally was a bottom-up, popular movement, Crawford details how IRCAM, in his opinion, has made real progress in bettering the situation for Amazigh people in Morocco, in addition to being an extension of royal control.

2.3 Standardization, Orthography, and Symbolism

When considering the impact that IRCAM can have in supporting better attitudes and greater vitality for Amazigh, the caveat of standardization must be raised: This institution does not seek to strengthen Amazigh linguistic diversity, but instead to create a single, standardized, Amazigh language which can be implemented on a national scale. As has been shown to be the case in many other contexts where language standardization has been used as a means to intergenerational revitalization (e.g., Jones, 1995), this would necessitate the further marginalization of numerous Amazigh language varieties in favor of a single, artificial, unified variety. Needless to say, IRCAM comes with its complications. The choice of a writing system, a necessary step for standardization, is a good case in point.

The question of orthography for Amazigh, as is true with many languages and contexts (e.g., Hatcher, 2008; Trix, 1997), is rife with controversy and political and ideological opposition. The choice of IRCAM was Tifinagh. This writing system was traditionally an abjad script (i.e., where each symbol or glyph stands for a consonant, and the reader must supply the appropriate vowel) used in antiquity by speakers of Libyc languages throughout North Africa and on the Canary Islands. It has been reimagined as Neo-Tifinagh, an alphabet. Henceforth, it will simply be referred to as “Tifinagh” (Blanco, 2014). Pouessel (2008) explains that IRCAM’s choice of Tifinagh was a compromise between Latin script, the preference of Amazigh activists but despised by the Islamists, and Arabic script, the preference of the Islamists but strongly
opposed by Amazigh activists. Many have claimed that the adoption of Tifinagh has isolated the language and its speakers, as no other contemporary language uses this writing system. For others, however, the Tifinagh script represents Amazigh identity and independence from other languages, similar to Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics, created to make the indigenous languages of Canada not reliant on the Latin script introduced through English and French colonization and cultural assimilation efforts (Pouessel, 2008). The key difference between Tifinagh and Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics, according to Pouessel, is agency: First Nations people in Canada can choose to use Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics or Latin; in Morocco, Tifinagh was chosen by the king and implemented by the government in a top-down manner through IRCAM.

Nevertheless, from an ancient writing system which may have been used for writing numerous Amazigh varieties throughout history, to its reintroduction in Morocco for writing Moroccan Standard Amazigh in the 21st century, the symbolic power of IRCAM’s chosen Tifinagh script seems to have been imbued with political and everyday meanings. This is shown in the fact that the Tifinagh letter ⵢ (z) is a very widespread symbol, used in every context from anti-government protests to keychains for tourists to represent Amazigh identity and often ethnic nationalism. It is the symbol used on the Amazigh flag, which has been appearing in public displays of discontent with the government. In fact, these flags are not only widely used by Amazigh activists and at protests related to Amazigh rights and issues, but also often at any anti-government rallies, as the existence and visibility of Amazigh people has often been treated by North African states as a threat to national unity and security. Figures 1 and 2 show Amazigh flags in a rally in Morocco and in events associated with the recent unrest in Algeria in 2019, respectively.
Figure 1: Amazigh flags held by Amazigh activists in Morocco

Figure 2: Amazigh flags shown in an anti-government rally in Algeria in 2019
2.4 Amazigh in the 2020 News: Political Dimensions of the Language

The question of Amazigh presence and salience of symbols has grown in recent years in Morocco as activist movements make ground and Amazigh language policy continues to be active. A good illustration is the attention that Amazigh issues attract in the public media.

A good illustration is Hespress (هسبريس), a Moroccan online news source, with its own webpage, YouTube channel, and Facebook page, that reaches millions of Moroccans (http://www.websitetrafficvalue.com/website/hespress.com), providing both national and international news. It is the preferred news source for my colleagues in Morocco and their recommendation for Arabic-language news, from a Moroccan perspective. Hespress reports on politically charged issues as well as small matters of daily life.

Two illustrations of politically charged news can be given here. Hespress reported on widespread protests sparked by an Arab Nationalist Conference in Tangier, largely attended by leftists and Amazigh activists. This controversy produced a number of news reports and was widely discussed in Moroccan society, as it stoked at a core, critical question of Moroccan identity: is Morocco an Arab country, or an Arab-Amazigh country? The former is traditionally associated with social conservativism and the later with liberalism (https://www.hespress.com/societe/447318.html, from 16 October 2019). Additionally, the debate over the inclusion of Amazigh language text on Moroccan currency, the dirham, caused a notable political stir in the country. This question was thoroughly covered by Hespress, which reported that a majority of the government supported the inclusion which was vehemently opposed by Islamist political associations, particularly the Salafists (see for example: https://www.hespress.com/tamazight/433737.html, dated on 29 May 2019, and https://www.hespress.com/tamazight/432848.html, dated on 21 May 2019). It is important to
keep in mind that Hespress was not the only news source reporting on the controversy; others also did, such as Yalbiladi, a Moroccan news source which also appeals to Moroccans living abroad (https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/78520/tifinagh-dirhams-l-idee-fait-deja.html, posted on 20 May 2019).

Smaller matters related to Amazigh representation are often also included in news coverage by Hespress and other outlets. For example, there are stories such as this one, published on 3 December 2019, which describes how a bank has begun to print checkbooks in Amazigh, using the Tifinagh script. (https://www.hespress.com/societe/452202.html). And in January 2020, Hespress produced multiple headline stories about the Amazigh New Year, to be celebrated on January 21 in 2020. These stories and their frequency, with each triggering a news report notification, generated a larger sense of the salience of the holiday. It appeared to have reflected interest in the event which, in the past, had largely remained exclusive to Amazigh communities. Readers are referred, for example, to https://www.hespress.com/tamazight/456215.html, or https://www.hespress.com/tamazight/456121.html, both reported on 12 January 2020.

In sum, the frequent appearances of Amazigh in the press show that the significance of Amazigh goes well beyond the linguistic in contemporary Morocco. It is important to also consider its political dimensions. More subtly, it also suggests that the Amazigh movement has succeeded in making Amazigh issues, whether mundane or controversial, much more broadly known and recognized in Morocco than it was perhaps the case just ten or certainly twenty years ago.
2.5 Institut Royale de la Culture Amazighe as a Physical and Symbolic Space

The data collection for present study took place in spring of 2018, while I spent a semester abroad in Rabat, which is not only the capital of Morocco but also the city where IRCAM is located. I arrived in Morocco with good knowledge of Arabic, a keen interest in minority language revitalization in general, and some knowledge of the sociopolitical and educational struggles of Amazigh. Before presenting the methodology for my survey, I would like to provide some more context for IRCAM as a place where the study, support, and revitalization of Amazigh is the main mission.

While in Rabat, I visited the physical location of IRCAM’s offices three or so times, sometimes in a group, sometimes alone. These visits helped to get a better understanding of the physical space and environment in which those charged with Amazigh standardization worked. Power because of its already-existing status as a symbol.

Figure 3: The IRCAM building (left) and a fibula traditionally worn by Amazigh women (right)

The shape of the building itself is triangular, which is meant to represent the fibulas traditionally worn by Amazigh women that have come be a symbol of Amazigh identity and
pride. This shows the care that went into the architecture of the space itself and makes reference to symbols used by activists who have been fighting for increased Amazigh recognition and acceptance as the indigenous people of Morocco. I am reminded of Keane (2018) and his discussion on semiotic ideology. The shape of the building is recognizable and marked because of how that symbol is already widely known and understood in Morocco. People already know that triangular objects like that equate fibulas, which in turn equate Amazigh identity. It only has power because of its already-existing status as a symbol. For a point of reference, Figure 3 is an image of the IRCAM building (left) alongside an example of one of these fibulas (right). While I personally do not see a strong connection between the building’s shape and a fibula, that only goes to further prove the point that, in the general Moroccan understanding of symbols, the sloped roof of the IRCAM building is marked enough to invoke the fibula, and thus invoke Amazigh identity.

The usage of the fibula as a symbol for Amazigh people and language appears to be quite prominent, which I gather from people mentioning it with some frequency, its prevalence in museums, and its use on language learning materials to represent the Amazigh language. For example, there is a language-learning book series in Morocco called Speaking Phonetically (المحادثة بالفونتيك) which selects images to represent the given language to be learned in each book such that the image is strongly connected to the popular, or perhaps more accurately tourist, perceptions of that culture and/or one of the major countries which uses that language. Their French book is represented by the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and the Arc de Triomphe; the English by Big Ben, London skyline, and a Queen’s Guard soldier. In the Amazigh iteration of these books, Amazigh is represented by two images: a fibula as well as the Tifinagh letter ⵜ (z). For reference, Figure 4 shows, from left to right, examples from another book for learning
Moroccan Standard Amazigh that uses the fibula symbol (circled), the front cover of *Speaking Phonetically* for Amazigh, and the back of the same *Speaking Phonetically* book with advertisements for their Spanish, English, and French editions.

Figure 4: French-medium Amazigh learning material

Figure 5: *Speaking Phonetically* for Amazigh (front), *Speaking Phonetically* for Amazigh (back)
In addition to the shape of the IRCAM building itself, its location is quite salient, in my opinion. First of all, it is located in Rabat, a city which is deep in natively Arabic-speaking Morocco, far from any of the Amazigh population centers. This point should be forgiven, however, because it does make sense that a national institution would be located in the capital and any other location, though closer to Amazigh communities, could show favoritism to one group over another, a theme which I bring up again later in this thesis (many believe that IRCAM favors southern Amazigh language, Tashelhit, and its speakers to others). Secondly, its actual location within Rabat is quite distant from downtown, away from the most densely populated neighborhoods, as well as from the commercial and government centers, although relatively close to Mohammed V University, one of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the country. The neighborhood where IRCAM is located has very little housing and is dominated by large buildings and compounds on separated lots. Walking around, the distance between each of these buildings gives a sense of emptiness and separation from the normal, urban landscape of Rabat. Some examples of buildings in this area are a UAE-sponsored hospital, the National Institute of Oncology, university buildings, etc.

While visiting, I also had the opportunity to speak with a few of the members of IRCAM. These conversations were generally informal and none of them were recorded. They just served to give me personally a better understanding of how IRCAM members conceived of their roles and the institution’s work with anecdotal evidence, particularly because I was able to interact with IRCAM members in their place of work. Two of these visits were with a class and so the person who came to speak with us covered what IRCAM does, the history of its establishment, and broader explanations of what language standardization is, since most of the students did not have a linguistics background. We were allowed to ask questions, but they never went much
further than re-explaining the basics of IRCAM’s operation and projects. Controversial
questions, such as those regarding the consequences of standardization on non-standard varieties,
were asked by us visitors but more or less dismissed by our hosts.
3.1 Purpose for the Present Study

As I hope to have shown in my review of the relevant literature and issues, presented in this chapter, language is a major part of identity in any context, but especially in situations of disenfranchisement, marginalization, and/or oppression. Unfortunately, there are many examples of this scenario, one of which is the Amazigh groups in Morocco (and the other Maghreb countries). Coming into my semester abroad in Rabat, I had planned on conducting research on the Amazigh language, social perceptions of it, and what people thought its role in the future will be, as well as the role of the other languages present in Morocco. How much sociolinguistic change has actually been brought about since the creation of IRCAM in 2001 and later the elevation of Amazigh to an official language in 2011, in the minds of well-educated Moroccans who work on language issues at Moroccan centers of linguistic knowledge? And how is Amazigh positioned vis-à-vis the other main languages of multilingual Morocco: Darija, Standard Arabic, French, and English?

3.2 The Two Samples

This study targeted two separate groups and part of its raison d’être is to compare where the similarities and differences lie in their responses. I chose to draw the first group of informants from scholars working at IRCAM and the second group of informants from teachers of English in various Moroccan institutions. English was specifically chosen because it serves as an international lingua franca and is very widespread in pop-culture, seeming to only become more popular and widespread as time progresses. Hence, it could be expected that teachers of
such a language may have a radically different ideology of multilingualism and, consequently, opinion of a local, indigenous language from the ideologies and attitudes of scholars in IRCAM.

3.3 The Questionnaire

I developed an anonymous open-ended response survey. There were two versions, one for each of the groups, in order to ensure I addressed the issues that were relevant for each group. There were 18 questions for IRCAM members and 22 for teachers of English. The extra 4 questions for the English teachers concerned IRCAM. I wanted to find out what an outsider’s perspective of it was, in an attempt to gauge the effect the organization has had in society. The questions can be grouped into the following categories: demographics, linguistic repertoire, use of Amazigh, thoughts on IRCAM (for the English teacher respondents only), thoughts about Amazigh use and its future, and how other languages fit into the linguistic landscape of Morocco. All of the questions were written in both French and Standard Arabic. Given the small sample size and desire to retain anonymity, information on age and gender was not taken.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

I administered the questionnaire to my participants through Google Forms. While the survey itself was through the internet, this does not mean that I never interacted with participants, or at least potential participants. Since the survey was anonymous, I have no way of knowing which people completed it and whether I had interacted with any of them in person during my semester of study abroad.

I was able to collect seven responses from members of IRCAM and seventeen from teachers of English. As expected, these numbers are considerably small and call for a qualitative, rather than quantitative, analysis of the responses. The findings of this study are thus not
intended to be a reflection of Morocco as a whole, but rather a snapshot of what might be suggestive of attitudes and ideologies found in two very particular slices of Moroccan society, both of whom are deeply invested in the linguistic landscape of the country, albeit with a stake in Amazigh (for IRCAM respondents) versus English (for the English teacher respondents).
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

4.1 Overall Similarities and Differences in Responses by Sample

All members of IRCAM reported being able to speak Darija, “Amazigh,” and French. Interestingly, one respondent marked being able to speak Tarifit (“Rifain”) whereas all the others referred to the language by its non-regionally-specific name, Amazigh. As far as frequency of usage, all seven IRCAM respondents reported speaking Amazigh every day. On the other hand, the 17 English teachers had very similar answers among themselves in that almost all of them reported speaking English, of course, French, and Arabic, some making the distinction between Darija and standard and some not. A fair number of these respondents, however, also claimed knowledge of Amazigh, and again one of them specified Tarifit but the others did not make the distinction. The reported frequency of Amazigh usage, for those English teachers that speak it, varied greatly. Most said that they rarely speak it, one specifying that the reason for this is that they live in Rabat. Only one said that they speak it frequently.

A major difference can be seen between the two respondent groups when looking at the question about what they think when someone speaks to them in Amazigh. The IRCAM respondents said that they do not think anything in particular of someone who begins a conversation with them in Amazigh. But for the English teachers, many said that someone speaking Amazigh represented someone who is proud of their heritage and/or identity. One also said that they would view the Amazigh-speaking person as down-to-earth and another simply answered with “originalité.” A somewhat more judgmental respondent said that they would think of this person as “an Amazigh trying to prove himself.”
4.2 The Future of Amazigh

One of the more direct questions asked: “does the Amazigh language have a future?”

This question predictably produced a number of interesting responses. The IRCAM responses were all positive, confident that the language has a future and will become more widespread over time. From among the English teachers, on the other hand, one somewhat disappointingly said (in Arabic): “the future of the Amazigh language remains limited outside of the borders,” suggesting that Amazigh could have a future and a place in Morocco, but that it will not have any international presence. Many replied positively, some referring to the strength of the Amazigh communities and their progress in civil rights. But many also said that they were not sure, and that the language may have a future, or it may not. One of the respondents answered this question by asking if Amazigh is a language or a dialect, seemingly not viewing it as a distinct language. Interestingly, one respondent said that the Amazigh language does have a future, but only on the condition that they revisit the question of orthography.

When asked about the roles and futures of each of the big languages in Morocco, Amazigh, Darija, Standard Arabic, French, and English, answers varied greatly within the two groups. This was perhaps the most key point of this study, as the goal was to look into people’s thoughts on the future. It is interesting to ponder on how much agreement or disagreement there is among the two samples of respondents when individuals comment on the current position of these five major languages in the Moroccan linguistic landscape.

From IRCAM responses on the future of the speakers of Amazigh, there were two very different answers by two strongly opinionated respondents. One answer said that they are the future of Morocco and another, quite chillingly, reads simply “disparition” (disappearance).
Asking more about what this future would look like, some responses were very positive, saying that they foresee Amazigh being used as widely as Darija and in academic situations, whereas others said they do not see it being used in schools or as a language of instruction. Even within the institution charged with implementing the Amazigh language in all facets of Moroccan society, on equal basis with Standard Arabic as the two official languages, there is no agreement among its members about the feasibility of raising Amazigh’s prestige to that level.

From the English teachers, the majority of the responses predicted no change in the future for Amazigh speakers. One said that they predicted it becoming spoken less, due to increasing intermarriage of Amazigh individuals with Arabs. A number of responses said that the future is based on the actions of the speakers and how motivated they are to promote and pass down their language. Comparing languages, one response stated that Amazigh speakers are in the same situation as Darija speakers, vis-à-vis being a mainly oral, informal language without much institutional usage, opting instead for Standard Arabic or French whenever more formal contexts of communication are called for.

4.3 The Other Languages of Morocco: Modern Standard Arabic and Darija

In both respondent groups, a number of responses about Standard Arabic described it as aesthetically pleasing, in general a beautiful language. Many also referred to its role as a lingua franca with Arab countries and how that gives it a strong practical function. In addition to this, there were also some mentions of the fact that Standard Arabic is based on the Classical Arabic of the Qur’an, making it central to Islam, the religion of the vast majority of Morocco. This is not to say that all respondents in the two samples were in total agreement on this language. Among these diverging responses, one of the English teachers said it is overly complicated and needs to have a simplified grammar in order to be more functional. Another response, from an IRCAM
member, claimed that Standard Arabic would have less and less importance in the future. This would appear to suggest that the diglossic situation, with Standard Arabic and Darija, will decline as Standard Arabic falls into daily disuse.

The position of Darija was very stable in the eyes of both groups: a very common language of daily communication and the mother tongue of non-Amazighophones. Neither of the two populations had anything particular to comment about the current position of Darija in the Moroccan linguistic landscape and they did not see it going anywhere different in the future from what it is in the present: a language with a strong vitality in Morocco.

4.4 French and English

As far as French, the former colonial language, goes, the IRCAM members all say generally the same thing: It is a wide-spread foreign language used in business, science, and literature. While there was very little variation in the IRCAM responses about the position of French in Moroccan society, there was a greater diversity of opinion among the English teachers. Many of them described French as a widely used language, including two of this group who called it the second language of Morocco, despite not being official. It seems French is seen as useful, if not required, for success in higher education and the job market. On the other hand, other teacher respondents referred to French as a leftover of colonization that will disappear in the future, as the years since the end of the protectorate grow more and more numerous, 64 years at the time of this writing in 2020.

Both respondent groups view the role of English in Morocco in essentially the same light: an international language of growing importance, especially for the youth. A number of responses from both groups referred to it simply as the future, clearly placing a strong
connotation of modernity on this language. This role traditionally has been held in Morocco by French. But the time since colonization, as well as the rise of global English following World War II (Crystal, 2012), has begun to stir these roles in Morocco. One language would appear to be tied to the legacy of colonialism, while the other is connected with globalization and a shift experienced the world over. Some of the English teachers, however, point out that English is still limited in Morocco to academia, business, and tourism; and indeed, it is not used very often outside of those fields (Sadiqi, 1991).

4.5 Amazigh in the Language Ecology of Morocco

The final question asked the future of all of these languages as well as how they relate to Amazigh. For IRCAM respondents, all but one referred to the coexistence of languages, each with their own roles and one spoke of the possibility of productive exchange between the languages. One, however, went the other direction, saying that every gain for one language is a loss for another. Among the English teachers, a large number said either that there isn’t any specific relationship between all these languages and Amazigh, or that they don’t know. A few said that they predicted Amazigh losing ground in the future to other languages, declining due to its limited usage in education, media, business, etc. Another opinion shared amongst a few of the English teachers was that there will be no change and that Darija and Amazigh will continue to be the native languages of Morocco and all other languages will exist only as L2s.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Main Findings and Limitations

The present evidence finds that there is a lot of common ground in how the seven IRCAM members and the 17 English teachers think of Amazigh and of other languages in Morocco. In the majority of cases, there was not a clear break between the two groups and the primary differences came from individual outliers on either side. Nevertheless, there were certain aspects that featured a clear break between the two groups. One instance was the question about how they react to someone beginning a conversation with them in Amazigh. For IRCAM members this is a normal occurrence and they do not think anything special of it; for a number of English teachers, there is the impression that the Amazigh speaker is proud of their identity and/or trying to prove themselves through language use. Another of these was the central question: What is the future of the Amazigh language? Predictably, members of IRCAM had more to say about this, as they are the ones who are supposed to be guaranteeing a better future for the language. To summarize, and perhaps simplify a bit, the findings of this study, both IRCAM members and English teachers in Morocco tend to believe that not much will change in the linguistic landscape of Morocco in the foreseeable future, except for that English will continue to rise in importance and usage.

As already mentioned in Chapter 3 (Methods), the sample size of the present study was very small and thus only a qualitative analysis of the responses was undertaken. Moreover, while both of the groups sampled were arguably deeply invested in the linguistic landscape of the country, the stakes were very different: Amazigh for the IRCAM respondents and English for the language teacher respondents. Thus, the results should thus not be taken as a reflection of Morocco as a whole. Instead, the present findings represent a small yet suggestive snapshot of
attitudes and ideologies that might be found in two very particular slices of Moroccan society, IRCAM loyalists and college-level English teachers.

5.2 Resonances with Previous Language Attitudinal Results

In comparison to previous studies, the present open-ended survey found generally more optimistic and positive results when it comes to the future of Amazigh. The most obvious reason for this would be the respondent selection, which includes members of IRCAM as a sizeable proportion. Additionally, some of the aforementioned studies took place before the adoption of Amazigh as an official language and in a different political climate for Morocco. The Amazigh movement has succeeded in making Amazigh traditions and culture much more broadly known and recognized in Morocco, and with that, the language and people’s right to speak it.

A response that I would like to give particular attention to is the one which says that every gain for one language is a loss for another. This reflects a zero-sum ideology of multilingualism, as articulated in Ruiz (1984). As previous research illuminates, this ideology is quite common in the Global North, where monolingualism has often been the assumed norm, and in such contexts it can form a major barrier to equitable language policies. Minority languages typically suffer in such conditions. Surprisingly perhaps in a context as multilingual as Morocco, it seems such an ideology is possible, and it can harm the odds of revitalization, in this case, for Amazigh. On the other hand, the claim that the future of Amazigh is in the hands of its speakers is a fair one, as no outsider can really make people speak a language. Considerations for agency and how to respect it is key no matter what the situation. This is only more critical in cases of marginalization, where agency is so frequently taken away.
5.3 Not So Fast: Some Reason for Optimism

Taking the present discussion of the findings back to the afore-mentioned prevalence of the various Amazigh-related questions in the media and taking the broader Moroccan society into consideration, it seems that the opinions expressed in the study may be shifting soon. These opinions generally predict little changing in the near future, which I do not believe still holds in light of newer information and developments.

Previous studies, such as Chakrani (2013) and Marley (2004), support the opinions of the present respondents and give them evidence. Amazigh is shown to have a low amount of prestige among Moroccans and language policies did not support them. On the contrary, however, more recent studies together with Moroccan political discourse show far broader acknowledgement of Amazigh rights, as well as more salient advocacy. The dialogue has shifted and, in this case, has progressed. The more recent collective discourses, for example, in the news covered by the press during late 2019 and early 2020 (discussed earlier), would suggest that the opinions found in this study reflect an earlier snapshot of the linguistic situation in Morocco, where similar language policy was in place, but the public conscious had not yet caught up. The current linguistic hierarchies and ideologies in Morocco are being actively challenged by new societal signs, and so it is quite likely that, though little may soon change at the revitalization level, public perceptions may evolve. My study appears to have caught a snapshot of the shift in progress, showing opinions more favorable to Amazigh and its speakers than in previous studies.

5.4 Concluding Thoughts

Many questions motivated my interest in doing the present study: Will the apparent empowerment of the Amazigh languages and Amazigh identity via government support raise its
status and increase domains of use in Morocco, or will the languages continue to be marginalized? Does the global rise of English challenge French’s historic role as the language of prestige and international interconnectedness? Will Standard Arabic, with its connection to religious and pan-national identity, and Moroccan Arabic, a symbol of national identity, come to serve new roles?

The present results suggest an uncertain future for the Amazigh language varieties and Amazigh identity, despite the apparent empowerment via government support. It is unclear the degree to which the governmental efforts underway may be able to raise the status of Amazigh, but the data makes it clear that it will continue to be marginalized unless there is an increase of domains of use for Amazigh in Morocco. In addition, some evidence was also found that the global rise of English is challenging French’s historic role as the language of prestige and international interconnectedness, and that perhaps Standard Arabic, with its connection to religious and pan-national identity, and Moroccan Arabic, a symbol of national identity, may gradually come to serve new roles that pose hurdles for activists’ desire for societal prestige and functional need for Amazigh. I have also suggested that the scale of positive change in Amazigh’s revitalization is slower than hoped for, considering how official status was granted in 2011. Nonetheless, I have also argued that this issue is entering public consciousness on a broad scale, paving the way for larger scale societal change on this front. Public opinion, especially when it interacts with deeply ingrained ideologies, is difficult to move. It is therefore understandable that a more penetrating societal change would require a greater amount of time in the public dialogue in order to take hold. The most important takeaway from this study, at least for me, is therefore that the future of the Amazigh language lies with its speakers, no matter what others think or say.
REFERENCES


