



Report

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An Analysis of the Language Use of Algerians Living in Manchester

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1 Introduction

Since French colonisation in 1830, the linguistic situation within Algeria has been a tumultuous journey. Although the official language is Arabic, Algeria faces a complex linguistic situation as French, Berber languages, and dialects of Arabic exist simultaneously. The status of French has fluctuated: from a remnant of a violent past to a language of cosmopolitanism and prestige (Benstead, 2013). In the present day, Algeria faces a unique case of diglossia, where French (as the language of colonisation) is repressed by authorities yet favourable to employers (Benstead, 2013). Despite language policy attempts by Algerian authority, (more specifically in relation to the imposition of Arabic) Wolff (2000) claims that their ideology of linguistic homogeneity as a precursor for cultural homogeneity is far too simplistic when facing the linguistic needs of the Algerian people. Additionally, attempts to control the language use may cause internal conflict in Algerian people regarding linguistic and cultural identity.

With the influx of migrants advancing from Algeria combined with the highly complex instance of multilingualism, Algeria is an under-researched source of interest. Based on this, we decided to focus our research on the attitudes towards and maintenance of the various languages used by Algerians in Manchester.

Our main research question is as follows:

What opinions are held by Algerian immigrants in Manchester about the languages that they speak?

To aid investigation of this, we formulated two sub-questions:

- 1. How do these opinions influence cross-generational language use?*
- 2. What efforts are being made to maintain the languages used by Algerians in Manchester?*

In this report we will introduce our methodology and then discuss our findings comparatively and qualitatively. We will conclude by identifying common themes and relevant starting points for future research.

2 Methodology

Despite our initial aim to interview ten participants, time constraints led us to focus on four. This allowed a more in-depth and detailed analysis. We recruited participants via the Facebook page of a local Algerian-run business, and through personal contacts.

While the views of four individuals are not and cannot be claimed to be representative of the views of all Algerians in Manchester, we ensured the interviews were highly detailed, taking up to ninety minutes after briefing and informed consent was given. The interviews were semi-structured and informal: conducted in coffee shops, a comfortable public environment with minimal background noise.

A potential problem we were aware of was reluctance/discomfort in the discussion of Algerian politics, an issue noted in Benstead (2013) and Benrabah (2007). To combat this, our questions (Appendix 7.1) were devised to evoke responses discussing a range of topics while avoiding direct discussion of politics. Thus, any mention of political issues would only arise from the speaker's own volition and involve no coercion. The semi-structured interview style allowed us to broaden the scope of our study.

Upon completing the interviews, each one was transcribed using ELAN (version 5.4) and annotated with the GAT minimal transcript conventions (Couper-Kuhlen et al., 2011) to find any correlations or significant differences between the claims made by each participant.

The next stage was a qualitative analysis of themes discussed, in relation to our initial questions to assess the perspectives regarding cultural, ethnic and generational recognition.

3 Participant Background Information

Interviewee A is a woman in her thirties. She was born in Algeria and has lived in England for over ten years. Her son (aged 9) was born here. She grew up speaking Darja, French, and Arabic. Her parents lived through the French colonisation, but she lived in Algeria through the Arabisation and therefore grew up learning Arabic in an official domain. Her son is learning Darja, Arabic and French, alongside speaking English.

Interviewee B is a young woman in her twenties, and is native to the UK. Her mother is Algerian and her father is Iraqi. She speaks the Algerian and Iraqi dialects of Arabic fluently, and can understand other dialects. She also speaks French as taught by her family, and was taught Spanish at school.

Interviewees C and D are Kabyle (Berber) men, aged between forty and fifty, who have lived in the UK for over ten years. They have each spent a portion of their lives living in London, but now reside in Manchester. Both speak French, Arabic, English and Kabyle, preferring Kabyle. Interviewee C's children were born in the UK and are now living in France.

4 Findings

4.1.1 Multilingualism

Within Algeria, attitudes towards its linguistic situation vary (Benstead, 2013; Bouhmama and Dendane, 2018), and to some extent these attitudes persist post-migration, affecting language use and opinions towards it.

A prominent theme in all interviews was an appreciation of individual multilingualism; with each participant expressing satisfaction or pride in their linguistic repertoire. The interviews made apparent that the Algerian government are seemingly attempting to create linguistic homogeneity by promoting Arabic as the sole language of Algeria in the hopes that it will lead to cultural homogeneity (Wolff, 2000). The frustration towards the government is clear, especially in Interviewees C & D, who disagree with the compulsory learning of Arabic because those from ethnic minorities are “going to think [they are] Arabic” when they are not (Interviewee C). Despite the government’s insinuated goals, multiple languages live on in Algeria and this multilingualism is celebrated by our participants, potentially as a form of rebellion against a proposed monolingual utopia (McDougall, 2011).

4.1.2 French

France’s occupation of the country has resulted in knowledge of French possessing socio-economic benefits (Aitsiselmi and Marley, 2008). Post-migration, a report by The Department of Communities and Local Governments (2009) in the UK showed that this trend continues; Algerian immigrants educated to secondary level have a good understanding of French, and those working within the business sphere communicate primarily in French.

The responses regarding French varied greatly, which was attributed to its position as a post-colonial language in Algeria (Benstead, 2013). As mentioned by Vince (2016), older generations recall the atrocities of colonisation firsthand and speak passionately against the French State whereas younger generations possess a very different view.

Interviewee A mentioned that growing up with Francophone parents overshadowed any negative associations, claiming “French is like part of my identity”, despite acknowledging that many other Algerians she knows still hold negative views. Interviewee B also believed negative views of French had disappeared with her generation; although young Algerians “all know why [they] speak French as well”, implying a collective awareness of colonial history. She recognised that the feelings of French Algerians may be influenced by their reasons for having moved to France i.e. “to escape the violence”, but went on to say “the Algerians I know in the UK think this way”. In Algeria, she said that in the big cities it is deemed “cooler” to use French, and its use amongst some Algerians is associated with a “prestige” and “better life”. This supports Benstead’s (2013) findings that French is associated with a modern lifestyle (“better life”) and broader world scope (“cooler”) than Arabic.

Interviewee C states explicitly that he “do[es]n’t like speaking French” because it reminds him of the atrocities of colonisation, including the death of his grandfather. Despite it being a “good language” generally, he cannot separate it from these associations. This is inconsistent with the views of Interviewees A and B, and likely because he is the oldest participant, and there are fewer degrees of separation between him and the violent invasion of his country. This concurs with the statements about the French colonisation in Benrabah (2014) in which he theorised that “French remains irredeemably tainted by its colonial history”, contributing to its decline in popularity.

4.1.3 Arabic

Arabic has been listed as the sole official language of Algeria, despite the plethora of other languages spoken (McDougall, 2011). Although we refrained from directly mentioning Algerian politics, the frustration towards the Arabic language was evident from Interviewees C and D, especially regarding the treatment of the Kabyle population. According to them, the government’s attempts to unify the country by enforcing the use of Arabic is at the expense of Berber languages. “Teach[ing] us Arabic” is synonymous with ‘wip[ing] our culture”, and while they “like [Arabic] and things...[they] suffered from it”, and feel as though it is “imposed” on them. While the pair felt positively about individual multilingualism, they showed reluctance towards their children learning Arabic, partially because of these negative connotations, partially for fear of them “los[ing] the Kabyle”. Interviewee C even asserts that he would “like to speak in Kabyle all the time”.

By comparison, Interviewee B felt positively about Arabic, stating “I like how I sound in Arabic (.) I like talking Arabic, I don’t know why ... [when] I don’t speak it for a while ... I start to miss it”. Though she does not have them, in the future she would “love for [her] children to know both [her] Arabic dialects so that they can speak with their family”. Perhaps her Arabic multi-dialectal perspective enforces the Arabic side of her identity. This difference in views is especially pronounced considering that all participants in this study are pro-multilingualism on an individual level, thus Interviewees C and D’s distaste for one language seems incongruous. Although, the fact that both of them lived in Algeria for a large portion of their lives means they have experienced life as an ethnic minority and likely cannot separate the Arabic language from the discrimination that they faced. Despite initial differences regarding the language, both participants express similar enthusiasm for the translation of their language and culture into future generations.

4.2 Language Maintenance

Several studies have investigated the effects of migration on native language use and the adoption of English as a first language (Portes and Schauffler, 1994; Isphording, 2015), and in the main they found that:

1. For children of immigrants in Anglophonic countries, “knowledge of English is near-universal” (Portes and Schauffler, 1994, p.640).

2. Key factors in acquiring English are time spent in the country; consistent exposure to the language; and a positive attitude towards the destination language.

Interviewee A wants her son to speak Darja primarily for ease of communication with their family. For this reason, she has enrolled him into weekend Arabic classes and encourages the use of Darja at home - a clear example of the efforts being made to maintain Algerian languages in the UK.

Immigrant parents usually tend to perceive their children's acquisition of the host country's language positively (Park & Sarkar, 2007; Portes & Schauffler, 1994). In Park and Sarkar's (2007) analysis, they found that this positive approach is founded in the belief that language maintenance will help children stay in touch with their cultural heritage. This positive attitude, however, only holds strong if said acquisition does not equal the complete loss of the parental language. This is confirmed by the appreciation of multilingualism co-existing with the desire for their children to know the parental language in all of our interviewees ("so at home I just use my own dialect and if my boy doesn't understand what I say, I say it in English" [Interviewee A]).

Interviewee B does not have children but theorised she would like her children to speak "as many languages as possible". She mentioned that she would want her children to be able to "dive deeper in their culture" and to learn about their family's past. Being a second-generation immigrant, she said she is thankful to have learned so many languages from her parents because it "helped [her] integrate into the culture" in Algeria when she visits: she appreciates what her parents have given her as something she wants to pass on. This supports the notion that language maintenance helps to stay connected to one's cultural heritage (Park & Sakar, 2007). Interviewee B also mentions the positive and casual environment in which she learned her languages: they were "just naturally brought into [her] life". This aligns very much with Park and Sakar's (2007) findings that a positive attitude of the parents is necessary.

Interviewee C summarises that Kabyle isn't taught in an official setting, but passed along orally by generation. Due to this and the lack of written documentation, it is impossible for his children to learn Kabyle unless he teaches them, or they go to Algeria. He mentioned that it is passed down "from father to son, from mother to kids" and that this "translation" i.e. passing down, is a conscious step against the death of the language. He gave the harsh arabisation policies as the reason for this "fading away" of the language and that old people speaking Kabyle do not actually know Arabic despite the government's efforts to ensure this and eradicate their culture.

Interviewee C provides an excellent example of affirming identity through language use; he has a personal relationship with his language and desperately wants to keep it alive by continuing to speak it around his family. He wants Kabyle to continue to grow and pass from generation to generation ("I want to transmit it [...] it's very, very important"), perhaps as a personal response to the current government's erasure of his culture.

It is extremely important for Interviewee D that his children speak Kabyle, again citing the communication with family in Algeria as the foremost motivation: “when [my son] goes to Algeria and he speaks to my father in English he’s not gonna have a clue what he’s saying”. In his words, “when you speak to someone who doesn’t speak your language, you can’t build things with them”, like “freedom between them” or love. As stated earlier, to maintain his children’s Kabyle, he has refrained from explicitly teaching his children Arabic, fearing it will override their ability to speak his mother tongue. This is an example of *not* teaching a language being utilised in order to maintain another.

4.3 Identity

A framework proposed by Bucholtz & Hall (2005) presents five principles for analysing the portrayal of identity through linguistic expression. The fourth of these, the Relationality Principle, describes identity to be reciprocally constructed through binary relation such as similarity/difference and authority/delegitimacy. This means that identity cannot be formed independently but rather is conditioned through a series of social relations and power dynamics, which in the case of our Algerian participants, bears a strong relation in Algeria’s multiplex ties to various languages, politics and cultures.

Interviewees C and D discussed the implications of naming children in Algeria, claiming “if you give him a Berber name, [the government] will take you to court”. The legal implications of such naming shows the constraints enforced by the government. To think of this in terms of an authority/delegitimacy relationship suggests that the power of Algerian authority is influential and therefore restrictive on the identity of citizens. The interviewee’s statements also recount the conflict between languages and communities within Algeria. This concurrently implies that something as linguistically simple as a name holds influence on an identity; in this case associating the bearer with negative connotations of another language due to its condemnation by authority. Additionally, Interviewee C claims that Berber people are “scared they will be punished” for openly identifying as Berber. This rejection of the Berber people by the Algerian government is a reflection on Arabisation (Benstead, 2013).

The policies by the Algerian government regarding names, as described by Interviewees C & D are only one example of the suppression of the Berber languages that, in turn, affect the cultural identity of its inhabitants.

5 Conclusion

In summary, our research has brought to attention several trends which in turn address our initial research questions. Firstly, a pervasive opinion throughout our interviewees was an appreciation, or even love, of language that was equally touching and unprecedented in its consistency. All participants expressed enthusiasm at a minimum, and passion at a maximum, at the thought of their children speaking the languages that are so ingrained in their cultures; this indicates that even post-migration, languages are an important tool used

to teach and maintain personal and familial history. Perhaps migration, in a sense, does not separate the self from cultural heritage but heightens the bond between the two; as if when geographical distance increases, the loss of a language in one's surroundings is felt more strongly, and enthusiasm, at a minimum, is necessary to maintain a bond with one's past. French was not nearly as negatively regarded as we first would have predicted, although there is an obvious lack of enthusiasm due to the violent roots of the language in Algeria. In terms of Arabic, opinions were highly contrasting: some passionately against it, and some boasting of its benefits. Cross-generationally, opinions definitely differed. The older generations can remember a time when language caused conflict, with the French colonization and imposition of Arabic. The younger generations are still aware of this conflict but do not have personal experiences of it, making it unlikely that they will associate one of their languages with severe negative connotations. Languages are commonly maintained through aural tradition, education, and family connections.

In terms of future research, gathering data from a larger number of Algerian people will facilitate more accurate results and a more representative study. Also, due to the sheer amount of information accumulated from the interviews, it was impossible to express all of it in this report. This encourages further, closer and more widespread examination in this field.

6 References

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7 Appendix

7.1 Interview Questions

Background

- How long have you or your family lived in Manchester/ the UK for, and which languages do you speak?
- In what order did you learn your languages?
- Which of your family members speak the same/different languages to you?

Language Use

- In what contexts would you use [language], [language], [language]? Which do you use most?
- Are there any settings (if so, which) which absolutely necessitate one language?
- Do you have a language you prefer to speak in, for any reason? Why?
- If English is not your first language, how did learning it impact your language use?
- Do you or people you know use Tamazight/Berber dialects?

Identity

- What does 'cultural identity' mean to you?
- How does your language use relate to your cultural identity?
- Do any of your languages carry positive or negative associations? // Do you like or dislike any of your languages?
- Has living in the UK (if not native) impacted the way you see yourself, or the way other people see you?

Generational difference

- Do your children speak [language]?
- Would you prefer if it was different?
- Is the version of [language] that your children/grandparents speak different to the version you speak?
- How do your children/parents feel about [language]? Does this differ from your own views?
- Ideally, how would you like your children to speak?

7.2 Consent Forms



CONSENT FORM

Language Use in the Algerian Communities of Manchester

You are being invited to take part in a research study into the use of various languages in Algerian communities in Manchester. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

We are collecting and storing this personal identifiable information in accordance with data protection law which protect your rights. These state that we must have a legal basis (specific reason) for collecting your data. For this study, the specific reason is that it is “a public interest task” and “a process necessary for research purposes”.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before deciding whether to take part and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

We are a group of second year students studying Linguistics at The University of Manchester currently conducting research into the use of various languages in Algerian communities in Manchester. This work may eventually be published, and will contribute towards our respective degrees. For our research, we are hosting interviews with people who consider themselves to be part of the Manchester’s Algerian communities.

All responses will remain completely anonymous, with names concealed by code numbers or letters, or alternatively, a name of your choice. Any responses collected in this research will remain completely private, and be securely stored. In the event of our work being published; your personal responses will not be accessible to anyone other than ourselves.

Each interview is expected to last about 30 minutes; and no longer than 1 hour. You have the right to withdraw at any time, and may stop us at any point to ask questions.

IF WRITTEN CONSENT IS TO BE GIVEN:

Consent of the participant will be obtained by the signing of the attached consent form, which will be securely stored.

IF ORAL CONSENT IS TO BE GIVEN:

Consent of the participant will be obtained via audio recording and securely stored. Researchers will read the above statement and sections 1-7 of the form to the participant.