Linguistic Stratification In Algeria: A Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Diglossia And Multilingual Dynamics

التراتبية اللغوية في الجزائر: دراسة سوسيولسانية للازدواجية والديناميات متعددة

اللغات

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Abstract

The sociolinguistic landscape of Algeria exhibits remarkable complexity, characterized by a multilingual repertoire encompassing Arabic, French, and Tamazight, each with distinct registers and sociocultural functions. Particularly noteworthy is the Arabic language system, which, as elucidated in Ferguson's theoretical framework, demonstrates a hierarchical stratification of varieties. Within this paradigm, al-Fusha (Classical Arabic) occupies the prestigious position of a high variety, while Darija represents the low variety in the diglossic continuum. This complicated linguistic dynamic manifests in a dual

communicative pattern: bilingualism in written discourse and diglossia in oral interactions.

Keywords: multilingual; diglossia; Darija; al-Fusha; repertoire

الخلاصة

يتجلّى المشهد اللغوي في الجزائر في تعقيدٍ لافتٍ للنظر، إذ يزخر بذخيرةٍ لغويةٍ متنوعة تشمل العربية والفرنسية والأمازيغية، ولكلٍ منها سجلاتها ووظائفها الاجتماعية والثقافية المتميزة. ومما يسترعي النظر على وجه الخصوص النظام اللغوي العربي الذي يُظهر، كما أوضح فيرغسون في إطاره النظري، تدرجاً هرمياً في المستويات اللغوية. وضمن هذا النموذج، تحتل الفصحى مكانة مرموقة كمستوىً رفيع، في حين تمثل الدارجة المستوى المنخفض في المتصل الازدواجي. ويتجلى هذا التعقيد اللغوي في نمطٍ تواصلي مزدوج: ثنائية لغوية في الخطاب المكتوب وازدواجية في التفاعلات الشفهية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعدد اللغات؛ الازدواجية اللغوية؛ الدارجة؛ الفصحى؛ الذخيرة اللغوية

This paper centers on examining the complex sociolinguistic profile of Algerian pupils within their broader linguistic environment. Algeria presents a particularly nuanced sociolinguistic context, marked by a complex interplay of competing linguistic forces. The primary tension exists between Modern Standard Arabic and French, both vying for dominance in academic, institutional, and formal spheres. This dynamic

creates an unstable bilingual environment, characterized by linguistic competition rather than complementarity. Further complicating this landscape is the relationship between Algerian Arabic dialects and the Tamazight language family—a collection of distinct Berber varieties unified more in concept than in practice—which compete for prominence in informal and interpersonal communication domains. Within this multilayered linguistic ecosystem, true monolingualism among Algerians has become virtually nonexistent. (Derradji, 2007, para. 4)

Research in child development requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates insights from psychology, sociology, linguistics, cognitive sciences, and other relevant fields. Our study is anchored in sociolinguistics, which examines how social actors perceive social phenomena—in this instance, languages. While previous research has predominantly concentrated on adults' perceptions of their native languages (referred to as "Algerian languages," as they embody Algerian identity, whether Arab or Tamazigh) and their attitudes toward "classical, standard, formal" Arabic and French, we contend that it is crucial to investigate students' perceptions of both the spoken and academic languages. As primary stakeholders in the enhancement of linguistic proficiency, students play a vital role in addressing issues of linguistic insecurity and schizoglossia. (Calvet, 1999, p. 23)

Consequently, we administered a survey to forth-grade primary school pupils to assess their perceptions of language, identify challenges encountered in language learning, and propose strategies for curriculum development. This demographic was chosen because these pupils have attained a level of "fundamental education" that equips them to effectively respond to the questions posed. The school is situated near a university teachers' city of 320 in Ennaceur , Ouargla.

1-Observations: Algerian Arabic - An Institutional Minorization

Linguistic minorization refers to the marginalization of certain language varieties, which occurs not only through intentional glottopolitical actions but also through prevailing dominant discourses and behaviors. This perpetuates the subordination of these varieties, despite their functional equivalence to official institutional forms. In Algeria, language varieties deemed "non-stigmatized" are frequently confined to folkloric expressions, further entrenching their marginal status.

In our view, the significance and implications of the linguistic conflict relate less to the actual capacity of maternal Arabic to serve as a national language than to the symbolic value and connotations that Algerian speakers attribute to literary Arabic. We have identified two forms of linguistic minorization: institutional minorization and discursive minorization. Schools, for instance, by remaining closed to maternal Arabic, constitute the primary vector of minorization; as long as this variety remains excluded from official institutions, it continues to be, in our assessment, a minorized language.

Even more troubling is the fact that Algerian Arabic, despite being the first language of the majority of Algerians, is often stigmatized and devalued by its own speakers. Ignoring the pan-Arab or religious ideological narratives that advocate for the use of literary Arabic, as well as the minority of linguists who support maternal Arabic, many Algerian speakers tend to

internalize prevailing dominant discourses. They are conditioned to view maternal Arabic as merely a "dialect," lacking a standardized grammar, "corrupted" by foreign vocabulary, and characterized by the belief that there are as many dialects as there are speakers.

While literary Arabic is esteemed at the expense of maternal Arabic, French continues to be regarded by many as a prestigious language linked to social mobility and success. Despite claims of authenticity or identity purportedly embodied by literary Arabic, numerous speakers strive to master French, as it is the language of academic evaluation and a crucial tool for international transactions and communication. Consequently, contemporary sociolinguistic discussions regarding linguistic conflict and contact focus on whether only conflictual diglossias exist, or if neutral ones are also present.

Sample Description

We administered the questionnaire to 81 forth-grade primary school pupils across two classes, representing the entire forth-grade population at the "Modjaheed Ben Kran" school. We opted for a public school rather than a private one because public institutions better reflect the authentic sociolinguistic context of students in Algeria, and they constitute the vast majority of educational establishments.

Our analysis focused on two variables: parents' educational levels and the languages they speak, in order to assess their influence on children's perceptions. We noted that a significant percentage of parents have attained university-level education, which can be interpreted as indicative of the value placed on education following independence. There is an increasing accessibility to knowledge among the population. Additionally,

the data highlights combinations of educational levels that suggest a lack of social, linguistic, educational, and cultural stratification.
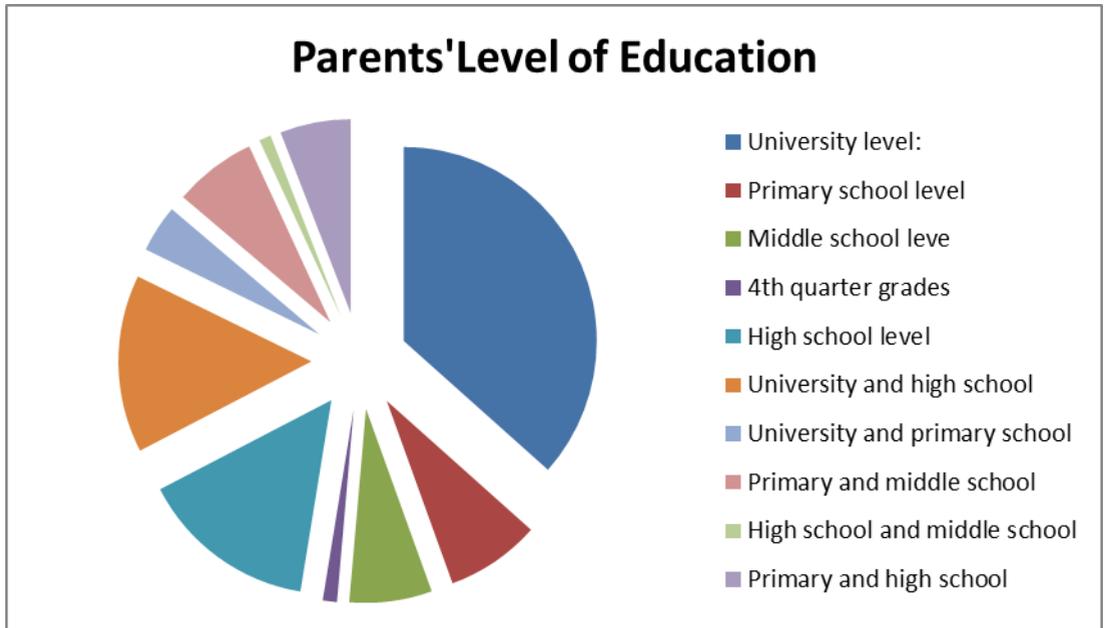
The second figure illustrates the various percentages of languages spoken by parents. Notably, "Darija" emerges as the most frequently spoken language, appearing alone at a rate of 25%. However, this figure does not account for its usage alongside other linguistic varieties (Darija and French: 24%, all languages combined: 22%). This underscores the significance of Darija as a first language, which, as CLERC S. (2012: 2-5) observes, "enables self-construction without self-denial." (Dourari, 2003, pp. 45-46)

Additionally, we noted that "Standard Arabic" was selected by only one student; we suspect this may indicate a misunderstanding of the question. In Algeria, it is uncommon for

individuals to speak Standard Arabic at home or in public settings, whether exclusively or in combination with other varieties. This context is critical for understanding the influence of language use on students' responses, which we aim to investigate further.
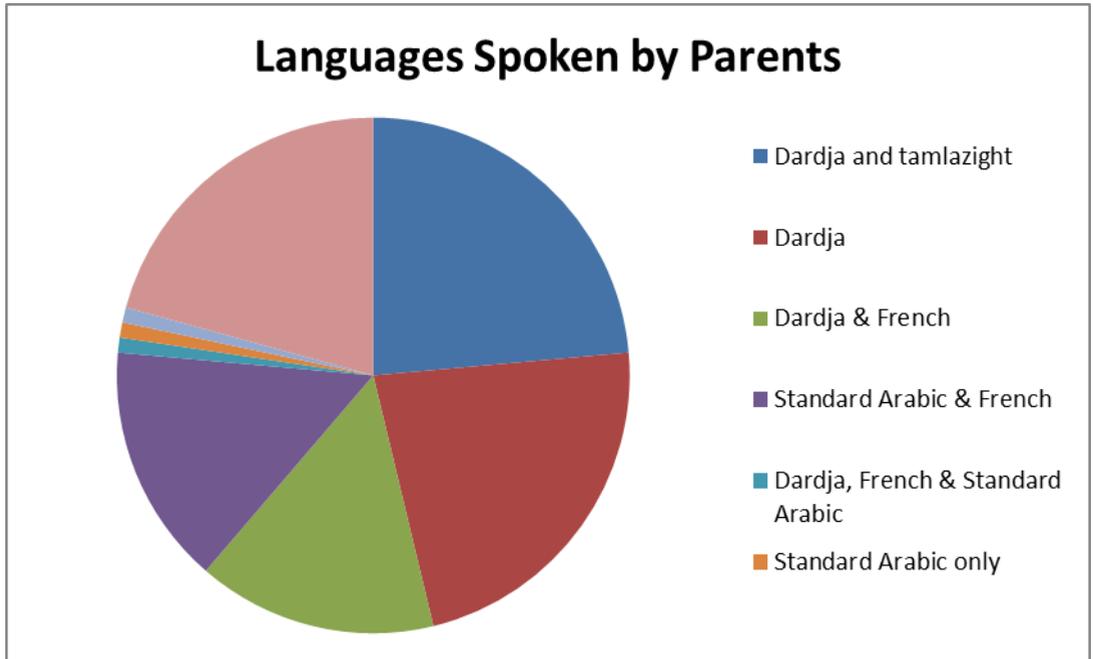
The data presented in the figure indicates that Darija serves as the primary language of communication among Algerians, reflecting their cultural identity and setting them apart from other Arab peoples. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and value Darija. As Laroussi articulates in his definition of "Darija" or Algerian Arabic: "Maternal or (Algerian) Arabic, the language of the majority of (Algerian) speakers (we refer to this linguistic variety as a 'language' in contrast to those who continue to label it a 'dialect,' not for linguistic reasons but for cultural and political

ones), is the true medium of daily conversations." (Laroussi, 1994, p. 708)

Maternal Arabic is linguistically distinct from earlier varieties, characterized by the absence of case endings, alterations in conjugation paradigms, variations in sentence structure, and notably, a high frequency of terms borrowed from Western languages. It encompasses local varieties, with the two primary forms being urban Arabic (spoken in cities) and rural Arabic, both of which maintain mutual intelligibility.

3. Interpretation of Results

Before launching the analysis of the results, it is pertinent to consider a quote from sociolinguist Louis-Jean Calvet regarding language hierarchies:

"The national language, whose linguistic definition poses certain challenges, derives its status primarily from its association with religion. The language of the Quran, known as Classical Arabic, is predominantly a written form, utilized for sermons and specific teachings. However, the version elevated to national language status (referred to as modern Arabic, median Arabic, or, as I prefer, official Arabic), which evolves from the former through vocabulary enhancement and modernization, is more commonly employed in media and public life. In addition, there are mother tongues, typically designated as dialects: the Arabic or Berber vernaculars. While the former are genetically related to Classical Arabic, the latter are not; nonetheless, both serve as the genuine vehicles of daily communication."

The graph below clearly illustrates a significant relationship— potentially a cause-and-effect relationship—between parents'
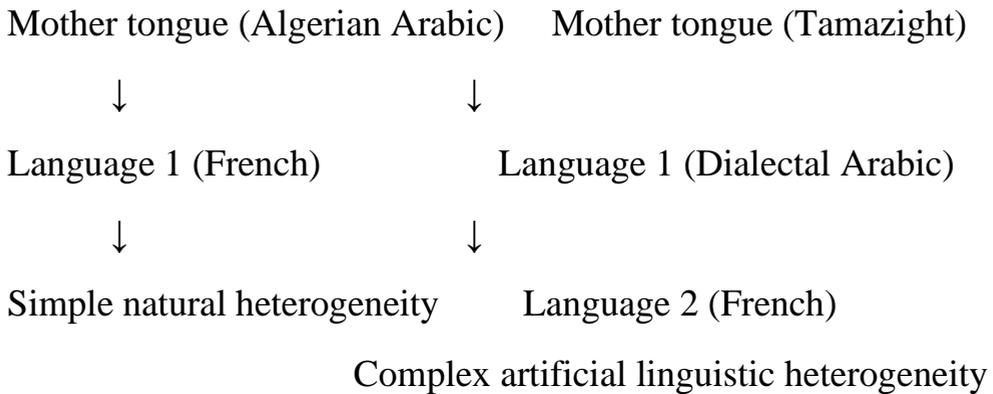
language practices and those of their children. When we inquired about the languages the students use, their responses revealed the following:
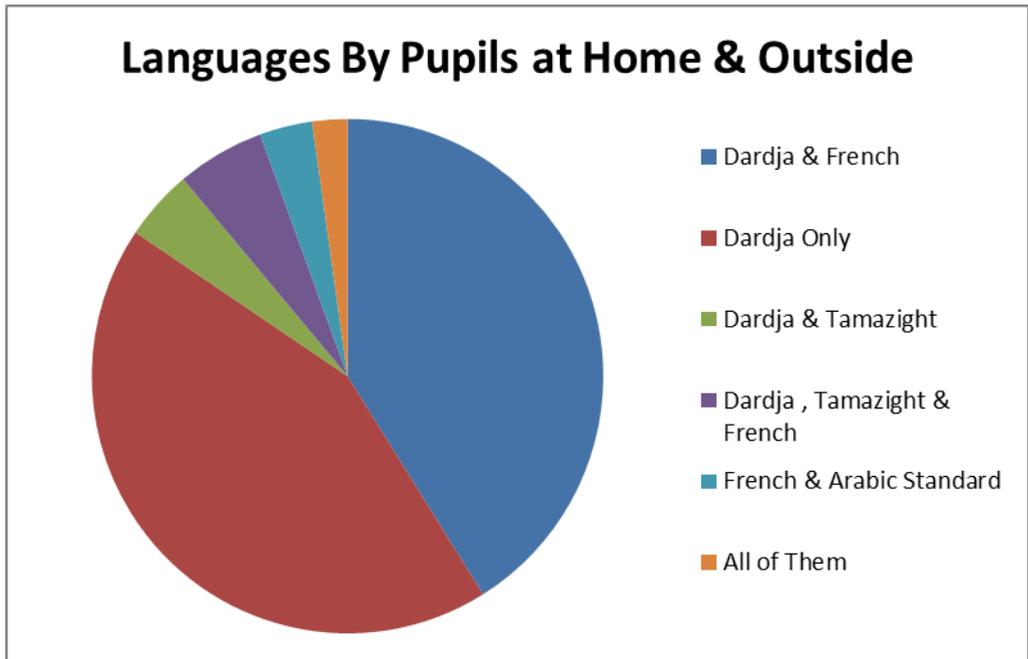
As shown, Standard Arabic plays a minimal role in the students' actual language practices, while Darija emerges as the primary medium of self-expression, with usage rates of 49% and 37%, respectively. However, within the school environment, students encounter a unique situation characterized by juxtaposed linguistic forms, depending on whether the speaker is Arabic-speaking or Berber-speaking. This multilingual context, or even diglossia, often results in inadequate proficiency in both Arabic and French, as new linguistic idioms arise, leading to pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural challenges.

In this context, Deradji (2007: 547) elucidates how linguistic policies that fail to accommodate the child's

multilingual environment can adversely affect both education and socialization:

Mother tongue (Algerian Arabic)   Mother tongue (Tamazight)

        ↓   ↓

Language 1 (French)   Language 1 (Dialectal Arabic)

        ↓   ↓

Simple natural heterogeneity   Language 2 (French)

                 Complex artificial linguistic heterogeneity

According to Deradji, the school system engenders a complex artificial linguistic heterogeneity that "disrupts the natural order by introducing a language presented as superior to the mother tongue and other languages. (...) The Algerian school, as a mechanism of legitimation, exacerbates the divide between the familial and social linguistic contexts experienced during the child's initial linguistic socialization and the institutional linguistic environment imposed by the educational system."
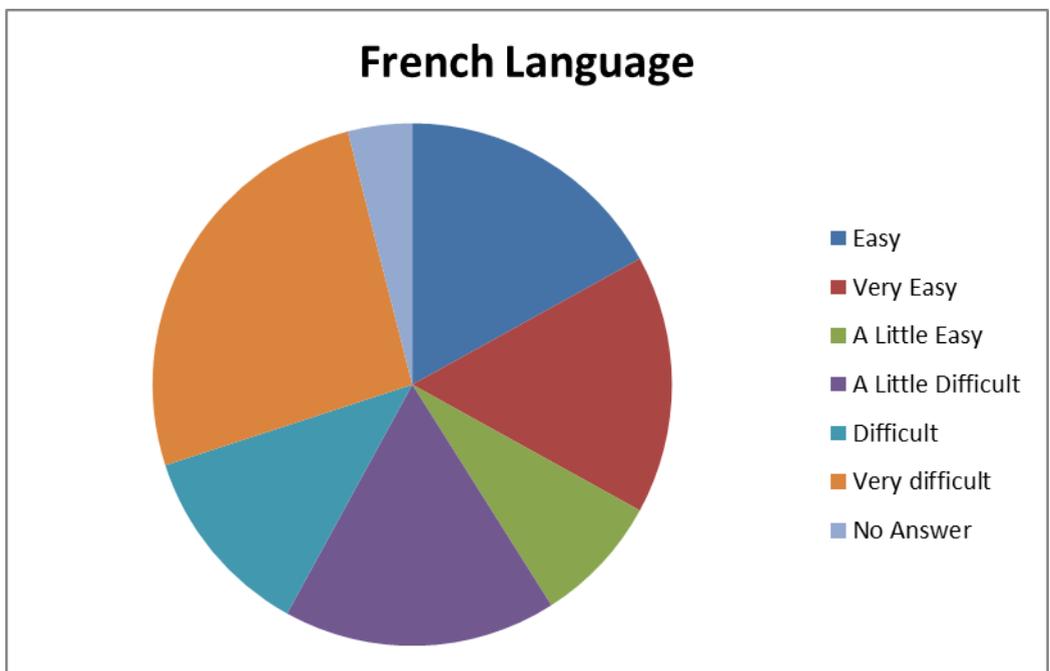
This is why he advocates for recognizing learners' communication skills in their mother tongue as a means to effectively facilitate the acquisition of French on a scientific and pedagogical basis. It is within this framework that we inquired about students' perceptions of Standard Arabic, leading to the following results:
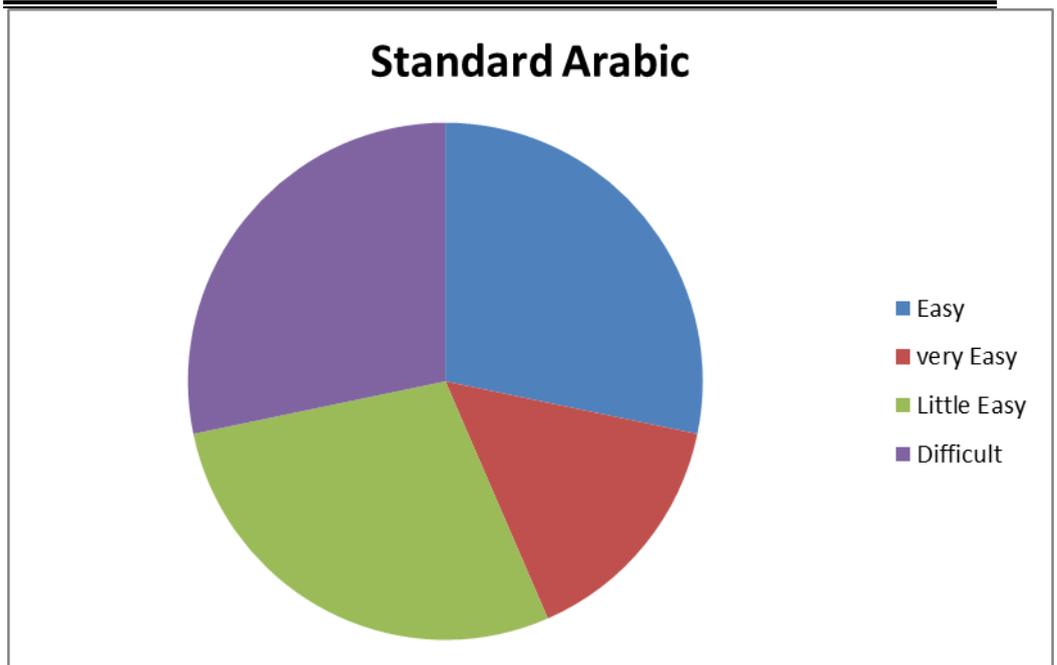
Students' perception of Arabic as difficult (34%) can be attributed to their limited exposure to the language prior to entering school. While the significance of Arabic in the Maghreb transcends religious contexts and primarily reflects a desire to assert Arab identity—an identity that was historically suppressed by French colonization, which some argue has led to cultural schizophrenia—this importance seems to be largely confined to institutional contexts. The findings from our small survey highlight this reality. Consequently, we advocate for an educational approach that considers students' first languages.

The graph below, which illustrates students' perceptions of the French language, yielded surprising results: students rated French

as "somewhat easy" (26%), "easy" (12%), and "very easy" (17%). This can be attributed to the fact that French has effectively become an Algerian language, often manifested as a form of Algerian French that coexists with Darija, or Algerian Arabic. Children frequently incorporate French terms into their language practices, either consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, there are words that many Algerians, particularly children, recognize solely in French. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of considering these factors in the teaching of bothFrench and Arabic languages.

French Language

- Easy
- Very Easy
- A Little Easy
- A Little Difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult
- No Answer

The existing unequal relationships among languages, along with their conflicts and the tensions they create, inevitably result in extralinguistic consequences. Society becomes a battleground where various behaviors are manifested, driven by subjective motivations, as humans are fundamentally subjective beings.

Thus, it is essential to formulate a linguistic policy that, above all, demonstrates respect for and values linguistic diversity. Such a policy aims to prevent or mitigate the hierarchization of languages and, consequently, the social classification of speakers. This acknowledgment remains pertinent even while recognizing that official languages will invariably reflect those of the dominant class, which retains exclusive control over their dissemination.

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