

Linguistic Hegemony and the Erosion of Local Languages: Analysis of Arab–French Domination to Amazigh Existence in Morocco

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ABSTRACT: This research examines how Arabic and French historical and contemporary dominance influences intergenerational communication practices in Amazigh in rural Moroccan communities. The Amazigh language, historically the main marker of the Berber community's collective identity, now faces structural and symbolic pressures from state linguistic policies and social representations that privilege the dominant language. This research uses a literature-based qualitative approach with thematic analysis methods on policy documents, legal products, and institutional and media discourse related to the position of the Amazigh language. The analysis results show that the dominance of Arabic and French impacts not only institutional domains such as education, bureaucracy and the media, but also weakens intergenerational linguistic transmission and creates identity distortions among the younger generation of Amazighs. The Amazigh language is slowly being shifted from its public communicative and cultural symbolic function, becoming a domestic language that lacks legitimacy in the national social system. The absence of substantive policy implementation exacerbates this process of marginalization despite constitutional recognition since 2011. In conclusion, linguistic dominance in Morocco's postcolonial context has created communication disruption and an identity crisis within the Amazigh community. Therefore, revitalizing the Amazigh language requires a legal-formal, community-based, and intergenerational approach. This study provides a theoretical and practical basis for a more inclusive language policy, strengthening postcolonial sociolinguistic discourse in the Maghreb region.

Keywords: Amazigh Language, Linguistic Domination, Intergenerational Communication, Morocco, Postcolonial Sociolinguistics, Language Revitalization.



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INTRODUCTION

The Amazigh language is an essential cultural identity for the interior tribal communities in Morocco, known as the Amazigh or Berber communities. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is a communication tool and a symbol of collective identity and cultural expression (Fishman, 1991). Therefore, the use of the Amazigh language cannot be separated from its function as a marker of ethnic existence and continuity of the cultural heritage of the Amazigh people. This language represents social memory, traditional values, and the historical attachment of the Amazigh community to their ancestors and homeland. As a collective identity, the Amazigh language functions as a social glue that strengthens relationships between community members and is a medium for preserving distinctive traditions, norms and values passed down from generation to generation through oral practices and unique cultural rituals.

In the daily life of the Amazigh community, this language is used intensively in various social interactions, ranging from communication between family members, traditional ritual activities, and economic transactions in local markets (Fishman, 2006). (MacDonald, 2021) emphasizes that the continuity of this language in social life reflects the resilience of Amazigh culture, even though it is faced with the currents of modernization and globalization. In this context, the Amazigh language is the main means of maintaining social cohesion and transmitting knowledge and values between generations.

Historically, Indigenous North African communities used the Amazigh language for more than three millennia before outside influences arrived. (Chaker, 2022) states that before external intervention, this language functioned as a lingua franca that united various tribes in the Maghreb region. However, linguistic dynamics began to change significantly in the 7th century, when Islamic expansion reached the region.

The process of Islamization, led by the Umayyad dynasty, introduced Arabic as a tool for religious propagation and administrative governance. Uqba ibn Nafi' played a pivotal role in this expansion, notably through the founding of the city of Kairouan in 670 CE, which became a central hub for the dissemination of Islamic teachings and Arab culture in the Maghreb (Abun-Nasr, 1987). The city served as a strategic religious and administrative center from which Arabic was spread through institutions such as mosques, madrasahs, and caliphal bureaucracies. (Ennaji, 2005) notes that Arabic gained political and religious legitimacy through this institutionalization process, solidifying its status as the official language in religious, legal, and educational domains. This aligns with the early Islamic linguistic policy articulated by (Dakhli, 2008), who stated "*La langue de l'empire est celle de la révélation*" (The language of the empire is that of revelation). This principle reveals how the caliphate ideologically positioned Arabic as the language of governance, reflecting spiritual authority and serving as a tool of administrative control and ideological unification across its territories.

In the 20th century, French colonialism further intensified the marginalization of the Amazigh language through a systematic linguistic strategy (Berque, 1967). *Traité de Fès*, (1912) established Morocco as a French protectorate, granting the colonial government full authority over domestic affairs. The treaty stated:

"Le Gouvernement de la République française aura le droit de faire occuper, par les troupes françaises, les points du territoire marocain où sa présence sera jugée nécessaire au maintien de l'ordre intérieur et à la défense contre toute agression extérieure"

(The Government of the French Republic shall have the right to occupy, with French troops, any point of Moroccan territory where its presence is deemed necessary to maintain internal order and defend against external aggression) (Traité de Fès, 1912).

This clause legitimized France's military and administrative occupation under the guise of stability and security, effectively transferring sovereign power to colonial authorities. (Berque, 1967) argued that French intervention extended beyond the military sphere to encompass administrative and cultural control, including language policy that systematically privileged French over local languages such as Amazigh.

One of the central figures behind the colonial linguistic agenda was Hubert Lyautey, Morocco's first Resident General, who institutionalized the use of French through colonial education and bureaucracy (Burke, 2014; Leveau, 2013). French came to be perceived as a symbol of modernity and elitism, while local languages, including Amazigh, were excluded from formal institutions. The French strategy ignored the Amazigh language and reinforced Arab-Amazigh divisions through a dual administrative system. Thus, colonialism did not merely usurp political sovereignty; it actively reconstructed a language-based social hierarchy. This continued presence of French as the primary language of expertise and administration further entrenched the marginalization of the Amazigh language, effectively limiting its role and visibility in national strategic domains (Bassiouney, 2014).

The hegemonic presence of Arabic and French in Morocco has produced a structural configuration that systematically undermines the sustainability of the Amazigh language. Drawing on (Phillipson, 1992) linguistic imperialism theory, dominant languages are maintained through state control of education and policy, while local languages are increasingly excluded from formal institutions. In this context, (Abdelhay et al., 2020) argues that such marginalization directly impacts the intergenerational transmission of Amazigh and leads to the erosion of its social and cultural functions within its native-speaking communities.

At the policy level, recognition of the Amazigh language was formally established through Morocco's 2011 Constitution. Article 5 states:

"L'arabe demeure la langue officielle de l'État... L'amazighe constitue également une langue officielle de l'État, en tant que patrimoine commun à tous les Marocains sans exception"

(Arabic remains the official language of the State... Amazigh is also an official language of the State, as a shared heritage of all Moroccans without exception)

Despite this legal recognition, implementation has been limited, and substantive integration of Amazigh has yet to be achieved in education, administration, or mass media. This reflects a form of symbolic language policy that lacks concrete institutional transformation.

The gap between constitutional recognition and practical implementation has reinforced the layered dominance of Arabic and French in Morocco's strategic sectors. According to the ethnolinguistic vitality framework (Giles et al., 1977), such institutional imbalance reduces the

perceived value, accessibility, and prestige of the Amazigh language in broader society. Therefore, the threat to Amazigh's existence lies in the lack of legal protection and the absence of systemic affirmative policies that support revitalization and intergenerational transmission at the community level.

The central research question guiding this study is: How does the dominance of Arabic and French influence the existence of the Amazigh language in Morocco? This inquiry stems from an understanding that language functions as a communication tool and a core element in shaping collective identity, cultural heritage, and social positioning. In multilingual societies such as Morocco, the vitality of a local language depends heavily on its recognition within the state's symbolic systems and its functional integration into public domains. When dominant languages—Arabic and French—receive structural support through education, administration, and media, Amazigh is at risk of functional reduction, social exclusion, and diminished roles within its communities.

Previous studies have shown that language shift is a global phenomenon often driven by modernization, urbanization, and globalization. Study by (Hornberger, 2002) found that language policies shaped by dominant ideologies usually obstruct the transmission of minority languages within indigenous communities, as these languages are frequently excluded from formal systems. Furthermore, (Errihani, 2006) demonstrates that Morocco's education system, which centers on Arabic and French, has marginalized Tamazight from the national curriculum. These studies suggest that exclusive and non-participatory language policies are among the main causes of the weakening position of local languages in both public and domestic spheres.

Nevertheless, these previous studies have generally focused on macro-level structural contexts, such as national education policies and language regulation, without thoroughly examining how the dominance of Arabic and French directly affects the social, symbolic, and cultural existence of the Amazigh language at the community level. These institutional analyses often overlook micro-level dynamics within Amazigh daily life, where language use is intricately linked to identity, power relations, and the transmission of cultural values. Moreover, no prior literature review has systematically employed thematic analysis to identify local Amazigh communities' linguistic domination and resistance patterns. The absence of such an approach has left narratives of Amazigh exclusion largely descriptive and insufficiently interpretive of their sociocultural complexities.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a critical sociolinguistic framework informed by Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony and Phillipson's concept of linguistic imperialism to examine how power relations operate in the language practices of Amazigh communities. Through thematic analysis of selected literature, this study maps various forms of communicative oppression, symbolic, such as the delegitimization of Amazigh in media and education, and structural, via exclusive language policies. The focus is placed on how language shift occurs in daily intergenerational interactions, how Amazigh is excluded from educational and media spaces, and how Arabic and French are constructed as languages of authority that gradually displace the ancestral language as the primary medium of identity expression.

This approach allows the study to make a theoretical contribution by broadening the scope of postcolonial sociolinguistics, particularly by centering the communicative practices of minority communities as a site of symbolic struggle within a multilingual nation-state. Beyond offering conceptual insights, the study also aims to generate empirical grounding for more inclusive and equitable language policymaking. Focusing on intergenerational relations and micro-social settings, this research aspires to inform culturally responsive revitalization strategies that empower families, traditional communities, and local institutions as key agents in preserving endangered languages and restoring marginalized identities (Benrabah, 2014).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative-based approach *literature review* to analyze the dynamics of the dominance of Arabic and French on intergenerational communication practices in the Amazigh language in rural Moroccan communities. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine the historical and contemporary policy discourses and representations that shape linguistic practices at the community level. This study focuses on the analysis of secondary documents that have direct relevance to the issue of linguistic domination and intergenerational communication, including educational and cultural policy documents, Amazigh language learning syllabi, legal products from the Moroccan Ministry of Education and Ministry of Communications, as well as reports from international organizations, news articles, statements by state officials, and Amazigh community archives.

The documents were selected purposively, considering historical representations and contemporary policies regarding languages in Morocco. Through approach *thematic analysis*, the analysis process is carried out in several stages: thorough reading of the entire text to gain contextual understanding; open coding to identify meaning units related to language dominance, communication practices, and policy roles; and the compilation of main themes that show discourse patterns about the subordination of the Amazigh language, language shifts in family communication, as well as the internalization of dominant linguistic ideologies by the younger generation in interior communities. The resulting themes are analyzed contextually by considering the ideological and historical constructions underlying the dominance of Arabic and French, both as formal state languages and as languages of modernity and social mobility.

This analytical framework is enriched with a postcolonial sociolinguistic perspective which highlights how intergenerational communication practices are shaped not only by the community's internal dynamics but also by linguistic power structures institutionalized by the state through education, media and cultural policies. This research seeks to reveal power relations in the symbolic realm that influence the process of transmitting the Amazigh language from generation to generation and identify forms of resistance and adaptation carried out by local communities. Thus, it is hoped that the findings of this study will not only contribute to academic understanding of language shifts in the Maghreb region but also provide an empirical basis for formulating linguistic policies that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of linguistic minority communities in Morocco.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Arabic and French Hegemony in the Marginalization of the Amazigh Language

The dominance of Arabic and French over the Amazigh language in Morocco exemplifies the phenomenon of *linguistic imperialism*, as theorized by Phillipson (1992), and reflects a *state-driven language shift* that is deeply embedded in the historical trajectories of colonialism and postcolonial nationalism. This linguistic hierarchy did not emerge organically; rather, it was actively constructed through the convergence of state authority, institutionalized education, and the ideological imperatives of national identity formation. Historically, the Amazigh language served as a vital marker of ethnic identity and cultural continuity among Berber communities (Julien, 1970). However, throughout the twentieth century, it underwent a process of systematic delegitimization through exclusionary language policies and symbolic marginalization, which effectively diminished its presence in both public and institutional life.

The colonial period under French rule laid the foundational architecture for this linguistic order. The promulgation of the *Berber Dahir* in 1930—ostensibly recognizing Berber customary law—paradoxically served to entrench ethnic divisions. French colonial administrators strategically manipulated these divisions to consolidate their control, framing Arabic and Amazigh identities as mutually exclusive (Hart, 1997). French was simultaneously institutionalized as the language of administration, education, and modernity, while Amazigh was confined to the domestic sphere and excluded from all formal domains of power. This colonial language policy thus established a hierarchical linguistic structure that elevated French and, to a lesser extent, Arabic, while eroding the visibility, legitimacy, and institutional viability of the Amazigh language.

Following Morocco's independence in 1956, the state adopted Arabization as a strategic response to the legacy of French linguistic dominance. However, rather than dismantling the inherited hierarchy, Arabization reconfigured it by replacing foreign colonial hegemony with an internalized ideological project rooted in Arab-Islamic nationalism (Abun-Nasr, 1987). Language reforms such as the *Loi Cadre de l'Éducation* (1963) and the *Charte Nationale d'Éducation et de Formation* (1999) institutionalized Arabic as the exclusive language of instruction, reinforcing a monolingual paradigm that further marginalized Amazigh (Marley, 2004). Under this framework, language policy became an instrument of symbolic homogenization, where linguistic diversity was reframed as a threat to national unity rather than a cultural asset.

This trajectory reflects what (Hechter, 2017) characterizes internal colonization as a form of state-driven subordination in which centralized power structures impose political, economic, and cultural constraints on peripheral minority groups. In the Moroccan context, the institutional exclusion of Amazigh has translated into limited access to educational resources, restricted participation in state employment, and an enduring absence from symbolic and public representation. These conditions have not been accidental; rather, they are the result of persistent policy decisions and ideological narratives that reinforce a national identity predicated on linguistic exclusivity.

The 2011 constitutional reform marked an important normative development by officially recognizing Amazigh as a national language alongside Arabic. Nevertheless, this recognition has

remained largely symbolic due to the lack of substantive institutional transformation. The adoption of *Loi organique n°26.16* in 2019, intended to regulate the use of Amazigh in official documents and educational frameworks, has failed to address entrenched structural barriers—such as inadequate educational infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and bureaucratic inertia that continues to relegate Amazigh to marginal functional roles. As a result, the symbolic elevation of Amazigh has not translated into practical empowerment or equitable inclusion within Morocco’s linguistic landscape.

This gap between constitutional recognition and policy implementation underscores the persistence of a hegemonic linguistic regime dominated by Arabic and French. Arabic continues to be reaffirmed through religious discourse, national education, and state bureaucracy, while French retains its prestige as the language of science, commerce, and upward socioeconomic mobility. Together, these languages form a duopoly of linguistic capital that monopolizes Morocco’s institutional and economic opportunities, rendering Amazigh structurally peripheral despite its formal status. The result is a stratified and asymmetrical language order in which Amazigh is constitutionally acknowledged but functionally suppressed—a condition that exposes the limitations of legal pluralism in the absence of redistributive, inclusive, and community-based policy reforms.

Dynamics of Intergenerational Communication and Implications for the Vitality of the Amazigh Language

One of the fundamental aspects in understanding the shifting role of the Amazigh language in Morocco lies in the dynamics of intergenerational communication within families and local communities (Hart, 2014). From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a cultural product that encodes symbolic values, constructs identity, and reflects the social structure of an ethnolinguistic group (Fishman, 1997). Formal institutions such as schools or state agencies support language transmission across generations and through socialization processes within micro-social spaces—including household interactions, traditional ceremonies, and communal religious practices. Consequently, communication patterns between older and younger generations serve as a vital indicator for assessing the sustainability or erosion of the Amazigh language's social function in Moroccan society (Hart, 2014).

Older generations of Amazigh speakers were raised in relatively homogeneous linguistic environments, where the Amazigh language was widely used across various domains of life, including local economic activities, informal education, and spiritual or ritual practices (Boukous, 2012). Their command of the language is not only functional but also deeply embedded in an understanding of the symbolic and philosophical meanings encoded in linguistic expression. In this context, the Amazigh language has long served as a core marker of cultural identity, passed down from generation to generation, and functioning as a key medium in maintaining social cohesion within the community. However, this continuity has been significantly disrupted by the expansion of formal education systems conducted in Arabic and French and the growing influence of digital media, which have flooded public linguistic spaces with dominant languages (El Kadoussi et al., 2024).

In contrast, younger generations of Amazigh, particularly those residing in urban and semi-urban areas, undergo a markedly different process of linguistic socialization compared to their elders. These youth are predominantly exposed to Arabic as the principal language of formal education and to French as a symbol of modernity, prestige, and upward mobility. The widespread influence of mass media, social networking platforms, and digital content further reinforces the prevalence of these dominant languages in their daily communicative practices. In line with that, a study by (Ait Taleb & El Ghazi, 2021) demonstrate bilingual Amazigh youth in Agadir, the use of Amazigh is increasingly being replaced by Moroccan Arabic (Darija), particularly in urban households, where the sociolinguistic environment privileges the use of dominant languages. This trend reflects a clear case of intergenerational language shift, wherein the natural transmission of the mother tongue from older to younger generations is gradually being interrupted, threatening the sustainability of the Amazigh language within its native speech communities.

This language shift is closely tied to changing perceptions of local languages' social value and status. Within the broader processes of globalization and modernization, languages like Amazigh are often associated with backwardness or cultural marginality, while Arabic and French are perceived as primary vehicles for accessing higher education, upward mobility, and economic opportunity. (Boukous, 2012) observes that some families consciously choose not to use Amazigh at home out of concern that it may hinder their children's academic and social success. Such decisions exemplify what has been termed strategic language choice, which further reinforces the symbolic dominance of majority languages. This aligns with (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991) concept of linguistic capital, wherein mastery of dominant languages is a prerequisite for obtaining strategic positions within the social hierarchy.

The imbalance of power in intergenerational communication has further accelerated the erosion of the Amazigh language. As custodians of local values and cultural knowledge, older generations often find themselves disconnected from younger individuals who increasingly adopt globalized orientations in terms of language and worldview. What was once a medium for transmitting language and cultural values across generations has now become a site of identity negotiation (Kroskrity, 2003), where the Amazigh language loses its role as a collective symbol and is recast as a space of tension between tradition and modernity. In this context, language ceases to function as a cohesive marker of shared identity and instead becomes a reflection of the friction between local rootedness and global integration.

Despite the formal recognition of Amazigh as an official language in Morocco through the *Constitution du Royaume du Maroc* (2011), the practical implementation of this status has yet to meaningfully reach grassroots communities. This constitutional recognition is clearly articulated in Article 5, which states::

“L’arabe demeure la langue officielle de l’État. L’amazighe constitue également une langue officielle de l’État, en tant que patrimoine commun à tous les Marocains sans exception”

(Arabic remains the official language of the State. Amazigh is also an official language of the State, as a common heritage of all Moroccans without exception).

In direct response to the mandate established in Article 5 of the 2011 Moroccan Constitution, the same provision was reaffirmed in Article *premier* of *Loi organique n° 26-16*, enacted through *Dahir n° 1-19-121* on 12 September 2019, which states:

“Une loi organique définit le processus de mise en œuvre du caractère officiel de l’amazighe, ainsi que les modalités de son intégration dans l’enseignement et dans les domaines prioritaires de la vie publique, afin de lui permettre de remplir à terme sa fonction de langue officielle”

(An organic law defines the process of implementing the official character of the Amazigh language, as well as the methods for its integration into education and into priority areas of public life, in order to enable it to fulfill its role as an official language).

Although this recognition grants the Amazigh language legal legitimacy, it has not been accompanied by substantive institutional transformation to support its systemic revitalization. Structural challenges—such as a shortage of qualified teachers, uneven curriculum distribution, and limited support from higher education institutions—hinder effective policy implementation. In addition, top-down policy approaches remain inadequate, as they often fail to engage with primary social spaces such as the family unit and customary community networks, which are crucial for sustaining the natural transmission of language.

Without sustained and context-sensitive intervention to strengthen intergenerational communication based on the Amazigh language, its existence will continue to diminish regarding speaker numbers and its cultural significance, social function, and symbolic meaning. Therefore, efforts to preserve the Amazigh language cannot rely solely on state-driven institutional mechanisms; they must also incorporate community-based approaches emphasizing intergenerational transmission as a foundational strategy. Language revitalization programs must be holistically designed to empower families as key agents of linguistic continuity. In line with the framework proposed by (King et al., 2008), family language policy offers a long-term strategy for fostering a linguistic environment that supports consistent use of the mother tongue within the household domain.

Factors Accelerating the Threat to the Amazigh Language

1. Social Transformation within Amazigh Communities

The social transformation experienced by Amazigh communities over the past several decades has had a profound impact on language practices in everyday life. This shift is particularly visible in rural regions of Morocco, which historically served as strongholds for the preservation of Amazigh language and culture. These areas are now increasingly affected by the forces of modernization, urbanization, and internal migration. Urbanization, in particular, not only displaces individuals geographically but also repositions them within new social structures that require adaptation to dominant cultural norms and linguistic repertoires.

Within this evolving sociolinguistic landscape, Arabic, recognized as the official language of the state and the sacred language of Islam, and French, as a colonial legacy and the language of administration, science, and higher education, have gradually displaced Amazigh as the

principal medium of daily communication. Ennaji (2005) identifies a notable decline in the public use of Amazigh, a trend that closely aligns with upward social mobility among Amazigh speakers. Proficiency in Arabic and French is often equated with economic opportunity and social prestige, while the Amazigh language is increasingly perceived as lacking symbolic or instrumental capital (Bourdieu, 1991). This perception significantly limits the utility of Amazigh in formal education, employment, and participation in the modern economy.

Furthermore, highlights that migration by younger Amazigh generations to urban centers such as Casablanca, Rabat, and Marrakesh necessitates the adoption of Moroccan Arabic (Darija) or French for purposes of economic survival and social integration (Maddy-Weitzman, 2011). In these urban contexts, Amazigh is rarely transmitted to children, as it is viewed as irrelevant to the practical demands of city life. This generational discontinuity weakens the role of Amazigh as both a cultural identity marker and a means of intergenerational communication.

Despite the normative recognition of Amazigh as an official language in the 2011 Moroccan Constitution, this legal status has yet to be fully translated into operational and institutional policies. In practice, the presence of Amazigh in public services, education, and media remains minimal. Local communities frequently report the absence of state services conducted in Amazigh, a lack of bilingual administrative documentation, and limited representation of the language in regional and national media (Boukous, 2012). Research by the Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe du Maroc (IRCAM)—a state institution tasked with promoting and preserving Amazigh language and culture—acknowledges that while linguistic norms and educational materials have been developed (Idhssaine, 2022). This is largely attributed to fragmented institutional coordination and the absence of long-term political will.

As a result, a widening gap has emerged between formal legal discourse and actual social practice. This disconnect reinforces the marginalization of the Amazigh language amid Morocco's broader sociocultural transformation. Without functional legitimacy in key public domains—particularly in formal education, public administration, and mainstream media—the Amazigh language continues to be excluded from the institutional arenas that shape public life. Consequently, many Amazigh individuals, especially youth, are increasingly compelled to prioritize dominant languages in order to secure social mobility and full participation in national life.

2. Economic Dominance in Social Mobility

The relationship between language and the economy in Morocco is inextricably linked to historically rooted and enduring structures of hegemonic power. Arabic (state's official language) and French (colonial legacy) hold dominant roles across Morocco's institutional structures (El Aissati, 2001). These two languages function not merely as communication tools but as symbols of prestige linguistique and capital cultural—forms of symbolic power that open access to critical social and economic resources (Bourdieu, 1991). Consequently, symbolically and structurally, the Amazigh language occupies a subordinate position and experiences marginalization across public and private domains of life.

The central role of the French language in Morocco's social and economic mobility structures is particularly evident. Proficiency in French is often a prerequisite for various formal professions, including civil servants, technocrats, academics, and professionals in the medical and technical sectors (Marley, 2004). Many job postings and vocational training institutions explicitly list proficiency in French as a basic requirement. This aligns with national policy, reinforcing French as the primary medium of vocational and technical education instruction. As stated in the official government directive *Note ministérielle conjointe n° 20/0384* (2019):

“Les cours de sciences, de mathématiques et de matières techniques seront dorénavant dispensés en langue française dans les établissements de formation professionnelle.”

(Science, mathematics, and technical subjects will henceforth be taught in French in vocational training institutions.)

Such policies have systemically shaped an educational and professional training environment that emphasizes the superiority of the French language as a gateway to employability. Within Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) theoretical framework, French functions as *linguistic capital*—a symbolic asset that can be converted into *economic capital*, whereas the Amazigh language holds no equivalent exchange value within the labor market. This imbalance not only creates social exclusion for Amazigh speakers but also imposes internal pressure within communities to abandon their native language in favor of dominant ones as a means of securing the economic future of their families.

The implications of this systemic inequality are observable in the linguistic orientations of Amazigh families. Many parents consciously choose to raise their children in Arabic or French, believing that doing so will increase their children's educational and professional opportunities. This practice contributes to the intensification of *language shift*—the gradual replacement of a community language with national or global languages, which UNESCO (2003) has identified as a key factor in language endangerment. In the Moroccan context, this shift does not occur solely through coercive mechanisms, but operates hegemonically through the internalization of social norms that position the Amazigh language as irrelevant to progress and prosperity (El Aissati, 2014).

Furthermore, (Errihani, 2008) Notes that Amazigh is frequently associated with rurality and backwardness. This stigma is exacerbated by the minimal representation of Amazigh in national media and modern economic institutions and the lack of affirmative policy that promotes its use in professional settings. Hence, the marginalization of the Amazigh language is perpetuated not only by state policies but also by societal linguistic ideologies, wherein only economically valued languages are deemed worth learning and using.

Thus, the dominance of Arabic and French in Morocco is not merely a reflection of linguistic preference; it embodies a socio-economic order that constrains mobility opportunities for non-dominant communities. As long as the Amazigh language is denied functional space in strategic sectors such as education and the economy, efforts to revitalize it will continue to encounter both structural and psychosocial resistance. Language policy reform—particularly in the

domains of education and labor—is therefore imperative to establishing a multilingual ecosystem that is both equitable and inclusive.

3. Language Subordination in Morocco's Educational System

Since the post-independence era, educational policy in Morocco has been dominated by a centralized approach that positions Arabic as the primary symbol of nationalism and state identity. At the same time, French has been retained as the language of administration and academia, particularly in strategic sectors such as science, law, and government. This bilingual Arab-French configuration has reinforced structural dominance within the national education system, systematically marginalizing local languages such as Amazigh from formal educational spaces (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991).

This dominance is not without historical roots. During the French colonial period, educational policy was deliberately designed to promote cultural assimilation through the imposition of dominant languages. Colonial educational institutions systematically disregarded local languages and identities to mold colonial subjects loyal to the French language and culture (Berque, 1967). In the aftermath of independence, the policy of Arabization replaced French influence with Arabic as the new national language. Although intended to reinforce cultural sovereignty, this policy paradoxically perpetuated exclusionary practices toward the Amazigh language, which was not recognized as part of the dominant national narrative.

In response to growing demands from civil society and Amazigh cultural movements, the Moroccan government began to adopt formal policies aimed at recognizing and preserving the Amazigh language. A significant institutional milestone in this regard was the establishment of the *Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe* (IRCAM) on October 17, 2001, through *Dahir* n° 1-01-299. This royal decree explicitly affirmed the state's commitment to linguistic and cultural pluralism by declaring:

Il est créé, auprès de Notre Majesté Chérifienne et sous Notre protection tutélaire, une institution dénommée Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe, -IRCAM-, dotée de la pleine capacité juridique, de l'autonomie financière et désignée dans le présent Dahir l'Institut. L'Institut est régi par le présent Dahir, formant son statut général, et par les textes pris pour son application.

(An institution called the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture, -IRCAM-, is hereby established under the tutelary protection of Our Cherifian Majesty, endowed with full legal capacity and financial autonomy, and designated in this *Dahir* as the Institute. The Institute is governed by this *Dahir*, which constitutes its general statute, and by the regulatory texts adopted for its implementation.

Through this legal foundation, IRCAM was mandated to play a central role in standardizing, promoting, and developing the Amazigh language. Its functions encompass the codification of the Tifinagh script, the design of educational curricula, the development of pedagogical resources, and the training of teachers specialized in Amazigh instruction. More than a symbolic gesture, the creation of IRCAM represented a formal institutional mechanism by

which the Moroccan state sought to integrate the Amazigh language into the national cultural and educational landscape.

A more significant and transformative development occurred with the adoption of the **2011** constitutional reform, which formally recognized Amazigh as an official language of the Moroccan state, alongside Arabic. This historic shift is codified in *Titre Premier – Des dispositions générales, Article 5* of the *Constitution du Royaume du Maroc (2011)*, which states:

“L'amazighe est également une langue officielle de l'État, en tant que patrimoine commun à tous les Marocains sans exception.”

(Amazigh is also an official language of the State, as a shared heritage for all Moroccans without exception.)

In addition to granting official status, the constitution also mandated the creation of a legal framework to ensure the practical implementation of this recognition. Specifically, Article 5 calls for the enactment of *Loi organique n° 26.16* to regulate the integration of Amazigh into key domains such as education, public administration, and cultural life:

“Une loi organique définit le processus de mise en œuvre du caractère officiel de cette langue, ainsi que les modalités de son intégration dans l'enseignement et dans les domaines prioritaires de la vie publique.”

(An organic law shall define the implementation process of the official status of this language, as well as the modalities of its integration into education and priority areas of public life.)

Despite the establishment of legal and institutional frameworks to support Amazigh language revitalization, implementation within the education sector remains fragmented and inconsistent. While policies such as the creation of IRCAM and the adoption of *Loi organique n°26.16* represent formal commitments to linguistic inclusion, their practical realization in public schooling systems has been limited. For example, many schools, particularly those located in urban centers or regions where Amazigh is not the dominant language, have yet to integrate Amazigh into their curricula systematically. (Idhssaine, 2022). This gap reflects not only policy inertia but also enduring structural challenges.

Among the key obstacles are the lack of qualified teachers, insufficient instructional materials, and weak coordination between national and local educational authorities. These technical shortcomings significantly impede the scalability and consistency of Amazigh language instruction. Supporting this view, a 2019 UNESCO report observes that pedagogical training for Amazigh teachers remains underprioritized, and efforts to develop a comprehensive teaching infrastructure are unevenly distributed. Even in regions with dense Amazigh populations, schools often lack the necessary resources and administrative support to deliver effective language education. As a result, the teaching of Amazigh is frequently reduced to a token gesture rather than a sustained pedagogical effort.

Beyond technical limitations, ideological resistance constitutes an equally formidable barrier. Elements within the political and educational establishment continue to regard multilingualism—particularly the promotion of Amazigh—as a potential threat to national unity. This perception stems from a monolingual nationalist paradigm that privileges Arabic

as the sole vehicle of national identity. Consequently, such attitudes undermine the legitimacy of multilingual education policies and inhibit the institutionalization of linguistic diversity. In sum, while Morocco has made important normative strides toward the recognition of Amazigh, the disjunction between policy and implementation reveals a broader struggle between symbolic inclusion and structural transformation. Bridging this divide requires not only technical investments in teacher training and curriculum development but also a paradigmatic shift in how linguistic diversity is understood and valued within the national education system.

4. Constraints on the Use of Amazigh Language in Media Platforms

In the era of cultural globalization and digital communication, the media play a central role in shaping linguistic preferences within society. In Morocco, the dominance of Arabic and French in mainstream media—ranging from print publications and television broadcasts to digital platforms—has become one of the structural factors accelerating the marginalization of the Amazigh language. For decades, national broadcasting policies failed to provide proportional space for Amazigh. Even until the 1990s, Amazigh-language programming appeared only sporadically, often as a supplementary feature rather than an integral component of national communication strategies (Belhiah et al., 2020). This exclusion was further exacerbated by the absence of formal recognition of the Amazigh language until it was designated Morocco's second official language in the 2011 Constitution. The representational imbalance in the media clearly illustrates how policy structures have contributed to a systemically entrenched form of linguistic marginalization.

Efforts toward improvement began to emerge in the early 21st century, notably with the establishment of the *Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe* (IRCAM) in 2001. This initiative was followed by the launch of Tamazight TV on January 6, 2010, to promote and preserve the Amazigh language and cultural heritage. Tamazight TV broadcasts approximately 70% of its content in the three main Amazigh language varieties: Tashelhit, Tarifit, and Central Tamazight. However, the presence of this station has not succeeded in transforming the broader structure of media dominance. Amazigh-language programming continues to be relegated to non-prime-time slots and receives significantly less funding and production support than Arabic and French-language programs. This disparity exemplifies what can be termed *symbolic marginalization*, a process whereby Amazigh is continuously relegated to the periphery of popular cultural discourse and national media narratives.

The limited representation of Amazigh is even more pronounced within the digital media landscape. While online platforms and social media have created new opportunities for community-based content production, many Amazigh communities face structural barriers such as low digital literacy, limited access to technological infrastructure, and the absence of affirmative state policies to support local content creation. Although grassroots initiatives such as Amazigh-language YouTube channels and podcasts have begun to emerge, their reach remains limited and cannot yet compete with the extensive presence of content in Arabic, French, and English—languages that are more deeply embedded in global media algorithms

and consumption patterns. Without active state intervention to promote the production and dissemination of Amazigh content in the digital sphere, the process of *language shift*, in which speakers gradually abandon Amazigh in favor of dominant languages, will become increasingly difficult to reverse, particularly among younger generations who are the primary users of online media.

The impact of the dominance of Arabic and French on the identity of the Amazigh community.

Arabic and French's historical and contemporary dominance in Morocco has shaped a hierarchical linguistic landscape that operates hegemonically in shaping the Amazigh community's social structures, value perceptions, and collective identity experiences. This hierarchy is not simply a reflection of linguistic preferences in state policy, but reflects power relations that continually marginalize the Amazigh language in various aspects of public life. In this context, language is not only understood as a functional means of communication but also as a symbolic field that articulates existence, historical memory, and the right to social and political recognition. When a community's language is not officially recognized in the education system, media, or state administration, the identity tied to it will experience a gradual process of deculturalization, starting from negotiation, adjustment, and social delegitimization (MacDonald, 2021)

For the Amazigh community, language has a central role as a symbol of genealogical attachment to ancestral lands and a medium for passing on cultural values that have lasted for generations. This language represents daily communication and becomes a medium for rituals, oral history narratives, and spiritual expressions inherent in community identity. However, Arabic as a symbol of religiosity, legality and national integration, and French as a symbol of economic status and education, have reduced the Amazigh language from the public arena to the domestic sphere. This process is not frontal but takes place through internalizing the dominant language's value as a higher social and economic exchange value. Under these conditions, Amazigh identity is slowly being pushed to the margins of the citizenship structure, where the status of “diversity” is interpreted more as an exception than as substantive recognition.

This situation places the Amazigh community in a liminal position between ideological and practical poles. On the one hand, they maintain their language and culture as a heritage full of cultural and symbolic meaning; on the other hand, they are encouraged to adopt the dominant language to conform to the social and administrative norms of the state. As a result, Amazigh linguistic identity has become hybrid, adapting to the demands of different social spaces. In Gumperz's (1982) terms, this is a form of code-switching that is not only linguistic, but also identity-al: code-switching implies an adjustment of position in the social structure. If it continues without structural support for the community language, this process will erode authentic and sustainable expressions of identity.

This symbolic domination not only impacts the structural realm but also extends to the psychosocial realm of society. An internalized sense of cultural inferiority emerges when a community's language is not recognized in higher education, public services, or national media. The Amazigh language is perceived as a "less useful" language in the context of progress, and as a result, the cultural values attached to it are also experiencing degradation in the collective

consciousness. This process weakens internal social cohesion and the community's cultural confidence in expressing its identity in public spaces. What should be a symbolic legacy that strengthens the group's existence instead becomes a social burden that must be renegotiated every time.

The younger generation of Amazighs most acutely feels this identity crisis. They are a generation born and raised in a predominantly Arabic or French education and media system. When they no longer have access to or active competence in a community language, their connection to history, cultural values, and intergenerational solidarity weakens. Amazigh identity is no longer a relevant cultural choice, but is considered a part of the past that has no bargaining power in the context of contemporary aspirations. In many cases, the younger generation prefers to identify as part of Arab-Moroccan or global society, abandoning local cultural symbols considered “unproductive” in the modern socio-economic system.

Thus, the dominance of Arabic and French contributes to the erosion of the Amazigh language as a means of communication and reconstructing a subordinate and fragmented community identity. In this framework, the revitalization of the Amazigh language is not simply a matter of linguistic conservation, but is an integral part of the cultural and symbolic struggle to restore the position of the Amazigh community in a more just Moroccan social order. Therefore, any revitalization agenda must be able to go beyond a purely legal-formal and technocratic approach. It must be designed as a dialogical and transformative identity recognition project, where the Amazigh language is revived and reinterpreted as an instrument of cultural agency, expression of autonomy, and collective right to representation.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that Arabic and French's historical and contemporary dominance in Morocco has formed a linguistic configuration that is structurally hierarchical and hegemonic in the symbolic and identity realm. The Amazigh language, which has historically been the foundation of the cultural identity of the Berber community, is experiencing a process of marginalization that is not only realized through formal state policies but also through the internalization of dominant values in the community's collective consciousness. The strengthening of Arabic as a religious symbol and French as a symbol of modernity has shifted the Amazigh language to the margins of social practice, making it increasingly irrelevant in education, economics, and social mobility. As a result, Amazigh identity experiences tension between efforts to maintain cultural heritage and demands for integration into a national order dominated by the majority language.

This linguistic dominance not only has the impact of eroding the communicative function of the Amazigh language, but also forms new psychosocial structures in the community, especially among the younger generation. When the mother tongue is no longer used as a medium for transmitting values or does not receive recognition in the public sphere, its identity becomes fragmented and experiences delegitimization. In such a situation, the cultural inheritance process is weakened and distorted due to the loss of the main instrument in cultural transmission. Therefore, the revitalization of the Amazigh language cannot simply be carried out through formal legal

recognition or curriculum development, but must be based on a community-based approach that places families, traditional communities, and local media as the main actors in the reconstruction of language identity.

However, this research has several limitations that need to be considered. The approach used is conceptual, qualitative, and based on literature review, so it does not include empirical field data that can directly capture the experiences of the Amazigh community in interpreting their language and identity. In addition, the study focuses more on macro symbolic and institutional frameworks, while the linguistic dynamics that occur in daily practices, including dialectal variations in various Amazigh regions, have not been analyzed in depth. Therefore, it is recommended that future research adopt a community-based ethnographic approach, involving interviews, participant observation, and documentation of intergenerational communication practices in various geographic contexts. Future studies could also further explore the role of digital media and civil society organizations in reactivating the Amazigh language as part of an ongoing cultural movement. By broadening the empirical dimensions and sharpening the contextual focus, studies on Amazigh language and identity will be able to make a more substantive contribution to developing inclusive linguistic policies and strengthening cultural pluralism in a multilingual country like Morocco.

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