

SIT Graduate Institute/SIT Study Abroad

SIT Digital Collections

Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection

SIT Study Abroad

Spring 2024

Darija's Dilemma in Defining Moroccan Identity

Amina Anshasi
SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection



Part of the [African Studies Commons](#), [Arabic Language and Literature Commons](#), [Arabic Studies Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Culture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Anshasi, Amina, "Darija's Dilemma in Defining Moroccan Identity" (2024). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 3801.

https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/3801

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

Darija's Dilemma in Defining Moroccan Identity

Amina Anshasi

University of San Francisco College of Arts and Sciences

Politics Major, Peace and Justice Studies Minor

SIT Morocco: Multiculturalism, Social Justice, and Human Rights

Rabat, Morocco

Taieb Belghazi, Academic Director

Mohamed Daoudi, ISP Advisor

May 13, 2024

*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Human Rights, Social Justice, and
Cultural Transformation (MOR)

SIT Abroad, Spring 2024

Abstract

The relationship between language and national identity has become increasingly significant in the context of globalization, where nations grapple with the complexities of cultural diversity and collective belonging. Language serves as a powerful tool through which shared values, traditions, and historical narratives are transmitted and preserved, shaping the formation of national identity and influencing government policies. In Morocco, the linguistic phenomenon of Darija exemplifies the intricate interplay between linguistic diversity and national identity, reflecting centuries of historical interactions, conquests, and power dynamics. As a conglomerate of Arabic, Amazigh, French, and Spanish influences, Darija embodies Morocco's multicultural heritage and serves as a symbolic marker of collective belonging within a diverse society. By exploring the multifaceted relationship between language and national identity in Morocco, we gain insight into the complex socio-political dynamics that shape the contours of national identity and cultural continuity within diverse socio- and geo-political contexts.

We also begin to see the cracks of the multilingual structure present in Morocco, and how the lack of a cohesive language for the national identity creates tension and ethnic divide within the country.

Table of contents

Abstract **1**

Table of Contents **2**

Acknowledgements **3**

Introduction **4**

Methodology **7**

Historical background on Darija and Moroccan linguistics **9**

Moroccan policies and government initiatives related to language **17**

Cultural attitudes and social perception related to Darija **22**

Conclusion **25**

References **27**

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my most sincere gratitude to Taieb Belghazi, our incredible academic director. From sitting across from him at the lunch table in Tangier with a huge ice cream sundae before us to our formal meetings (where he sang Raja football chants for me), I always walked away from every interaction with Taieb, no matter how small, feeling inspired.

I would also like to thank Mohamed Daoudi, my advisor during this research period who provided me with such wise advice and direction, without which I could not have completed this paper. I would like to especially thank him for introducing me to his network and putting me in touch with contacts.

I'd also like to thank Maria, from Tiznit, who I met on our southern excursion early on in this program, but whose kindness, authenticity, and fierceness inspired me to choose this subject.

I would like to thank all my interviewees and participants for the time they gave me and their genuine responses.

I'd like to give my greatest thanks to Ahlam Baoui and Fatima Zahra Boussat for being there for me throughout the program and ISP period, and acting as both guiding mentors and beloved companions to me.

And lastly, I would like to thank the beautiful city of Rabat, for being my home for the last few months and blessing me with countless memories and connections that I will hold dear to me for the rest of my life. My soft map of Rabat will be something that I will never forget.

Shukran lakom!

Introduction

Over the course of the previous century, the world has witnessed the rise of nationalism and the extreme emphasis placed on the concept of national identity as a result of globalization, international conflict, colonization, and the formation of nation-states. Both as a result and as a product of the en masse formation of national identities, language has taken a pivotal and foundational role in the existence of a nation. Serving as a powerful vehicle through which collective values, traditions, and historical narratives are transmitted and preserved, language has the ultimate power to form national identity, influences government policies, and shapes intra-nation attitudes. It exists as a symbolic marker of belonging and affiliation within a nation-state, those who speak the majority language are part of the “in” group, while those who don’t are othered and excluded from participation in society. In the context of national identity formation, language functions as a cornerstone upon which shared cultural heritage and group solidarity are constructed. Whether through official language policies, linguistic practices, or literary expressions, the choice and use of language reflect complex social, political, and historical dynamics that contribute to the shaping of a nation’s identity. In exploring the multifaceted relationship between language and national identity, no case study seems more apt than the linguistic phenomenon of Morocco in order to highlight the significance of language as a key determinant of collective belonging, cultural continuity within diverse socio- and geo-political contexts.

In any given conversation, a native Moroccan can be heard mixing Arabic grammar structures, Amazigh articulation, French idioms, and Spanish words. This conglomerate of languages becomes compounded into Moroccan vernacular Arabic, colloquially known as *Darija*. Darija is a dialect within the Diglossic Arabic language system, which refers to a situation in which two varieties of the same language are used by the same speakers in different contexts (Al Suwaiyan, 2018). The multi linguistic influence present within Darija can be entirely attributed to Moroccan history; an originally Amazigh nation which was later conquered by the Arabs and colonized by the Spanish and French, Darija reflects a long and rich history which accumulated itself in a multicultural language and society (Daniel, 2009).

In the intricate tapestry of Moroccan national identity, language emerges as a central thread weaving together the diverse cultural strands that comprise the nation. The linguistic landscape of Morocco is rich and multifaceted, reflecting centuries of historical interactions, conquests, and migrations. At the heart of this linguistic mosaic lies the complex interplay between Arabic and Tamazight, the indigenous languages spoken by Morocco's Amazigh population (Wyrzten, 2011). This linguistic duality reflects not only Morocco's geographical location as a bridge between Africa and the Arab world but also its rich history of cultural exchange and synthesis. Against the backdrop of this linguistic diversity, the formation of Moroccan national identity is intricately intertwined with language, as it serves as both a symbol of unity and a site of contestation. The tension between Arabic and Tamazight as the primary and most significant language of the nation consequently creates a rift between Moroccans whose native language is Arabic and self-identify as

Arab and those whose native language is Tamazight and who identify as Amazigh. These tensions manifest themselves in inequitable resource distribution, social discrimination, and harsh othering practices. Though this is an ethnic divide, language lies at its center, therefore politicizing language in Morocco. Thus, as language shapes the contours of Moroccan national identity, it also reflects broader socio-political dynamics and historical narratives.

Since the era of French colonialism in Morocco, language has been used to divide the country and empower certain groups on the basis of language identity (Hoffman, 2008). As a result, Moroccan efforts of nation-building became intertwined with language, uplifting specific languages and putting down others in hopes of creating a cohesive and united national identity. This serves to explain the politicization of language in Morocco over the course of the previous century, which has forged a linguistic hierarchy that places Amazigh languages at the bottom, the colonial-imported French at the top, and to a lesser extent, Arabic. The spoken language of Darija, which contains heavy influence from both Amazigh and Arabic, has been misconstrued as an Arabic dialect for geopolitical strategy rather than sociolinguist reasons. As a result, Morocco's alignment as an Arab country, both linguistically and culturally, constitutes a deliberate denial and erasure of Amazigh history and influence, perpetuating a hegemonic narrative that undermines the rich Amazigh heritage integral to the nation's identity and cultural mosaic (Lamas, 2010).

Beginning with a discussion of my methodology with specific considerations for assumptions and challenges that personally afflicted me during this research period, I will then move to provide historical background on language in Morocco. In this section, I will analyze and

flesh out the evolution of both Darija as its own dialect as well as language hierarchies in Morocco throughout history. Here, I will establish the differences between the contexts in which Darija is used as opposed to other languages that are common in Morocco in order to define the crucial nature of Darija to Moroccan identity and culture. Afterwards, I will provide a brief synopsis of government-issued Moroccan policies and initiatives related to language. This will provide the reader with some context and background as it relates to the Moroccan regime's perspective on the divisive nature of the linguistic scene in Morocco. In a similar vein, I will then discuss the larger cultural perspectives of the language debate, focusing heavily on attitudes and perceptions held by Moroccans. Then, I will compare the view of the average Moroccan to the government's actions in a forward-oriented conclusion, suggesting areas for further research and policy interventions to address the gap.

Methodology

My research for this paper was two-pronged: firstly, the linguistic angle in relation to Darija, with some research being done on Tamazight as well, and secondly, the larger, broader consequences of the lack of a distinction of Darija as a unique vernacular. To address the first prong, I found many pre-existing linguistic sources about the phenomenon of Darija, and the influence of a number of non-Arabic languages (primarily Tamazight) on its formation and evolution. I used what I learned from these sources to establish the link between Darija and Tamazight.

With respect to the social explanation of my research topic, there existed a plethora of sources related to the transmission of loanwords and linguistic evolution that provided me with a broad image of sociolinguistics as a field of study, providing me with the foundational knowledge needed to think critically about the historical and cultural causes and effects of my research interest in relation to the strictly linguistic aspect. Then, I delved into the historical, social, and political perspectives where I reference my sources on the academic and social consequences of recognizing Tamazight as an official language of Morocco across the post-independence period. The second prong of my research was interview-focused. I adopted a qualitative research design in which I interviewed a number of Moroccans from varying backgrounds and of different ages to investigate the social attitudes of Moroccans towards their own ethnic group and the “other.” Using language as the central component to my questions, I was able to gain valuable insight into the interviewees’ genuine perceptions because I was able to extract their authentic opinions in an indirect fashion. That is to say, rather than ask what they think about Amazigh Moroccans, for example, I asked what they thought about the Amazigh language and the efforts being made to uplift it. Because I was able to speak to Moroccans of varied backgrounds in terms of age, education levels, socioeconomic class, and gender, I believe I received a more accurate understanding.

I understand that it was a privilege to be able to conduct these interviews in Darija, but that this may have created some bias in my subject pool. However, I was intentional in my selection of interviewees and had a significant pool of Moroccans who are fluent in Tamazight that I tapped into to avoid this skew towards Darija-speaking monolingual Moroccans.

Ethically, I initially had worry that I might be leading with my questions or in explaining my project to my interviewees beforehand, and in order to mitigate this, I focused my research question and objective more before meeting with people. Additionally, I structured the interviews to be more formal, open-ended, and conversational to ensure the ease and comfort of the interviewees.

I recognize the limitations of this research, including the scope of my pool of interview subjects, which included primarily people within my personal network and mostly those living in Rabat. On top of this, given the sensitive nature of the research topic, I have operated under the assumption that my interviewees may have self-censored their answers.

This methodology was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how language in Morocco affects national identity, cultural policy, and perceptions of people, particularly within the Amazigh and Arab communities, thereby contributing to a deeper insight into the complex socio-cultural dynamics of the nation.

Historical background on Darija and Moroccan linguistics

Darija is an extremely fluid vernacular, adapting to the quick pace of global events, certainly as they affect Morocco. At its core, Darija is a fusion of primarily Arabic and Amazigh elements, though French and Spanish have left significant traces behind. For instance, many of the French loanwords that exist in Darija were added on during the decades during which Morocco was under

French rule (Hoffman, 2008). On top of that, the Spanish influence on Darija primarily reflected in the northern part of the countries are marked remnants from Andalucia.

One Amazigh linguist I interviewed recalls discovering just how prevalent Spanish is in the northern dialect of Darija. He grew up in an eastern Moroccan town where everyone spoke Tarifit, or the Riffian dialect of Amazigh, however, after college, he moved to a larger city where Darija was more frequently spoken. He shared that he went to a local store to ask for a *bombia* or lightbulb in Tarifit, only for the shopkeeper to look at him with confusion. After some back and forth, my interviewee realized that *bombia* meant firefighter in northern Darija, derived from *bombero* in Spanish. Though Darija and Tarifit were both languages that were commonly spoken in that city, it turned out that, in this particular instance, the word in Darija was much more similar to Spanish than it was to Amazigh. This goes to prove that Darija is a changing language and reflects the Moroccan environment in a contemporary and timely manner.

In order to properly understand the linguistic composition of Darija, one must first understand Moroccan history. Centuries ago, Morocco was made up of strictly its indigenous Amazigh population, including the Riffians, Soussis, and Chleuh. Amazigh people inhabited Morocco from as early as the first millennium (de la Rosa, 2015). Though they were all one ethnicity, the Amazigh identity as known today was not as cohesive and unified during this era. Different Amazigh groups spoke different variations of Tamazight, had different leaders, and complex and varied social structures (Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, 2000). Following this period of Amazigh dominance over Morocco, the Romans, Vandals,

and Byzantines each took rule. However, these periods of foreign rule had limited impact on the indigenous Berber population, who continued to maintain their distinct cultural identity and autonomy. Under these empires, Morocco was home to several powerful Amazigh confederacies, such as the Masmuda (García, 1990). In the 7th century, the Arab conquest of North Africa was in full effect. The Arab conquests brought Arabic, Islam, and the monarchy to Morocco. It wasn't until this period that Moroccans began adopting Arabic as a foundational language to the nation. As the language of religion, administration, and culture, Arabic gradually permeated Moroccan society during this time, fusing with local dialects of Amazigh and becoming the dominant language of communication known as Darija. However, this era of Darija is still vastly different to the Darija spoken today, and that is because though the history up until this point has laid out a correlation between Darija and two of its foundational languages of Tamazight and Arabic, the European influences on Darija have yet to be established.

To begin, it is important to discuss Andalusia, the southern part of Spain which was once under Islamic rule. From roughly the 8th to the 15th centuries, Andalusia was under the control of various Muslim dynasties, including the Umayyads, the Almoravids, and the Almohads (Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, 2000). During this period, Andalusia flourished as a center of learning, trade, and culture, with cities like Cordoba, Seville, and Granada becoming renowned for their architectural marvels, scientific advancements, and artistic achievements. There was migration of people, ideas, and languages occurring between what is now known as Morocco and what is today known as Spain. Many staples of Moroccan culture can be

seen in this part of Spain, such as the famous Moroccan styles of tiles and architecture. As Moroccan culture permeated Andalusia, Spanish, as a language, entered the Moroccan mainstream. This is most evident in the northern cities of Tangier and Tetouan, where, instead of the commonly used French, Spanish can be seen on street signs and in administrative contexts. It is important to note that the names of these two cities have Spanish-esque names, derived from *Tánger* and *Tetuán*, respectively. Additionally, Spanish loanwords have been integrated into the Darija spoken in these parts of Morocco, particularly in domains such as food, clothing, and everyday items (Morocco World News, 2018). For example, words like *zanahoria* (carrot), *tomate* (tomato), and *silla* (chair) have counterparts in Darija, albeit with phonetic adaptations to fit the Arabic phonological system. Other words such as *semana* (week), *cozina* (kitchen), and *marrio* (closet/cabinet) all have etymology that points directly to their Spanish roots.

The Spanish influence on Darija and Morocco has been exacerbated since the possession of two Moroccan cities as Spanish enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla. Though these cities exist on the African continent, they are under Spanish control, yet remain crucial to Moroccan life. For instance, due to the number of Moroccan commuting laborers in the enclaves, Spain has granted residents of the neighboring Moroccan provinces of Tetuan and Nador the ability to enter both Ceuta and Melilla visa-free. The Spanish influence on life in Morocco, particularly Darija, is a significant aspect of Morocco's linguistic and cultural landscape. The historical and geographical proximity between Morocco and Spain has led to centuries of interaction, exchange, and mutual influence, which are reflected in various aspects of Moroccan Arabic.

Aside from Arabic, Tamazight, and Spanish, another language with significant influence on Darija is French. French arguably has more influence on Darija than Spanish, due to the harsh and more direct overlap between France and Morocco as a result of the colonial period. Morocco came under French colonial rule in the early 20th century, following the signing of the Treaty of Fes in 1912, which established the French protectorates in Morocco (“Treaty Between France and Spain Regarding Morocco,” 1913). During the colonial period, French became the language of administration, education, and commerce, exerting a significant influence on Moroccan society and culture. French colonial policies aimed to assimilate Moroccan elites into French culture and language, leading to the adoption of French by the urban elite and the spread of French linguistic and cultural norms. There existed a clear social divide between the French and French-adjacent Moroccan class, and the common Moroccan. This can be seen in the urban design of Rabat, where the old medina inhabited the average Moroccan and upscale, more Westernized neighborhoods right outside the medina which housed French administrators.

The French colonial presence in Morocco led to extensive linguistic contact between French and Darija speakers, particularly in urban centers and among educated elites. As a result, Darija absorbed a considerable number of French loanwords and linguistic features, particularly in domains such as politics, education, technology, and popular culture. French borrowings in Darija include vocabulary related to governance, such as *bureau*, education, like *école*, *lycée*, *professeur*, technology, as in *téléphone* and *ascenseur*, and even in everyday life, like words such as *merci*. Beyond the loanwords, many French words have been adopted in a Moroccanized style into Darija,

such as *zmagria*, coming from the French *les immigrés*, and *tomobil*, from the French word *automobile* (Mrini and Bond).

Though efforts were made post independence to promote Arabic as the official language and a symbol of national identity, French retained its status as a prestigious language associated with education, commerce, and international relations, leading to its continued influence in Moroccan society (Loutfi, 2020). Many pathways to higher education in Morocco are in French, as are many government positions and media broadcasts. The lasting legacy of French colonialism in Morocco has made it difficult to participate in Moroccan society or even to succeed without speaking French. Take, for instance, the story of an older Moroccan man who struggled to understand an official bill he received from the Taxation and Revenue Department (Arbaoui, 2013). Due to it being written in French, despite the national languages of Morocco being Arabic and Tamazight, it is fair to assume the man felt confused about the components of a Moroccan national identity. Parliament is another example of a French-dominated sphere. Though political discourse, certainly if being done by democratically elected officials, should be comprehensible and accessible to the voters, however, if Parliamentary debates are held in French, or even Modern Standard Arabic, it is difficult to imagine the average Moroccan citizen being able to understand to a confident degree. As a result, Moroccans feel discouraged from participating in the political sphere because of its inaccessibility linguistically.

In recent years, English has been on the rise in Morocco as well. With the age of the internet and globalization in full swing, many Moroccans find it easy to learn English online, and

considering how universal English has become, many Moroccans, especially the younger generation, are motivated to learn English. Much like how French has become a pseudo-national language, so, too, has English. Wandering Rabat, it would be difficult to find someone, especially in the younger generation, who doesn't speak English (Goff, 2021). This phenomenon is similar to the way the generation that remembers living under French rule and the generation immediately following independence glamorize the French language. Code-switching between French and Darija in addition to English and Darija are common in various domains of Moroccan life, reflecting the linguistic diversity and cultural hybridity of Moroccan identity. It is important to ask why many Moroccans feel the urge to learn languages native to Europe, and the answer simply lies in the prospect for opportunity. Darija, as difficult and fascinating as it may be, is not an official language and certainly doesn't have a far reach. Thus, many Moroccans feel as though, in order to succeed in today's globalized world, it is necessary for them to speak languages more commonly found, which happen to be languages that are both not native to Morocco and also imperialist languages. The correlation between such languages and the concept of success as well as the emphasis on learning and speaking non-Moroccan languages falls in stark contrast to Darija usage, which is prevalent in informal areas of Moroccan life, such as entertainment, casual discussions, and music. The convoluted histories and attitudes Moroccans hold towards any one of the numerous languages found in Morocco further complicates the question of national identity. Language attitudes in post-colonial Morocco reflected a tension between promoting Arabic as the

language of national identity and maintaining French and English as languages of worldliness and opportunity (Loutfi, 2020).

Consequently, Morocco has a strict language hierarchy which places “imported” languages such as French, English, and Spanish at the top, Modern Standard Arabic in the middle, and Amazigh languages at the bottom. Darija, though isn’t formally recognized as its own language, would typically fall between Modern Standard Arabic and Amazigh on the hierarchy. Yet, it is the go-to form of speech used by the vast majority of Moroccans. This demonstrates the lack of a cohesive national identity as a result of the bewildering and complex social and political system of languages that has been propped up in Morocco over the past several decades.

During my interviews, I asked participants to estimate how much of Darija they believed was influenced by other languages. Interestingly, I found that their answers varied depending on their ethnic identity. Arab Moroccan respondents were more likely to downplay the Amazigh influence on Darija, while emphasizing the French and Arabic influences. On the contrary, Amazigh Moroccans highlighted the Tamazight influence on Darija, regardless of their Amazigh background. I believe this to showcase the linguistic diversity of Darija, and how all of the aforementioned languages do, indeed, make up much of the content of Darija. Though the exact percentage breakdown of which language has a greater influence on Darija is unclear, it is clear that all the languages have played significant roles in the formation of Darija as a result of Moroccan history.

Morocco's diverse history is seen in its most commonly spoken language, Darija. Because Darija is a spoken language, as opposed to a written one, it can embrace linguistic changes much quicker than a standardized language, such as Fusha, also known as Modern Standard Arabic. Taking in words and grammatical habits from any and all languages that pass through Morocco, Darija uniquely encompasses much more than simply Modern Standard Arabic. Because of this, it is this paper's argument that Darija should be considered its own language. Darija's fluidity solidifies its spot as a central factor in understanding the country's social, political, historical, and cultural intricacies and dynamics.

The historical background of Darija reflects the dynamic interplay between linguistic, cultural, and historical factors that have shaped Morocco's identity as a multicultural society. Despite the dominance of Arabic as the official language and the preservation efforts of Amazigh languages, Darija remains the primary means of communication for Moroccans across different social strata, serving as a testament to the enduring legacy of linguistic diversity in the country. At the same time, however, priority and privilege is given to languages that come from abroad.

Moroccan policies and government initiatives related to language

Morocco has implemented various policies and government initiatives related to language, aiming to promote linguistic diversity, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance educational opportunities. In 2011, the constitutional reforms made Amazigh an official Moroccan language. Soon thereafter, the government issued signs, such as those that can be seen on highways and roads

and in front of government buildings, all included Amazigh translations, in its original Tifnagh script (Schwed, 2017). Because of these constitutional reforms, Amazigh languages began gaining more recognition and credibility in the eyes of the Moroccan population. It was beginning to be taught in select schools and featured on state-sponsored TV and media channels. However, many of those I interviewed say that Amazigh is not at all viewed as equal to Arabic, both in the eyes of the government as well as the people. One academic pointed out to me that the phrasing of the constitution section is noteworthy: “Arabic is the official language of the State. The State works for the protection and for the development of the Arabic language, as well as the promotion of its use. Likewise, Tamazight constitutes an official language of the State, being common patrimony of all Moroccans without exception,” (2011). What’s interesting in this phrasing is the choice to keep the officialization of Arabic and Tamazight as languages of Morocco in two separate sentences. The constitution also emphasizes the state’s commitment to the “protection” and “development of the Arabic language” on top of its “promotion.” There are no such add-ons in reference to strictly Tamazight; there are no promises to promote or preserve it as a language, suggesting that it does, in fact, lay beneath Arabic on the Moroccan language hierarchy.

There have been government-sponsored movements to promote teaching Tamazight in schools, yet, one Moroccan I interviewed did two years of Tamazight schooling during her childhood years where she lived in the Rif region. She was fluent in Tarifit as it was what she spoke at home with her family, but struggled in the Tamazight classes at school because she felt like it was learning a new language. She recalled to me how there were many unfamiliar words to her, which

she later learned were from other Tamazight dialects, such as Tachelhit. In the government's push to teach Tamazight in schools, there became a standardized Moroccan Amazigh dialect, which wasn't accurate to what was, in fact, being spoken and used by Amazigh people today.

Standardizing the three Moroccan Amazigh dialects into one seems both ignorant and hasty, especially when considering the fact that there were no uniform textbooks to teach this standardized new dialect, according to the Moroccan I interviewed.

Others I spoke to expressed concern about Amazigh being taught in schools due to the fact that Moroccans already have to learn a number of other languages in the early years of elementary school already. It is standard practice for courses in Modern Standard Arabic, French, and English to be taught to children as young as 7 years old. Therefore, many of the people I interviewed argued that it would be difficult to add Amazigh to the mix, especially given the fact that the Moroccans I spoke to saw much less of a "need" for Amazigh compared to English, for example. One interviewee in particular said that root of the Moroccan school system's ails lies in the fact that none of the subjects are ever taught in the mother tongue of Moroccans: Darija. As a result, Moroccan students will have to do double the work, learning the subject material *and* a new language in the same class. Yet, they described the other languages as having "international justifications," and talked about how Tamazight is rarely spoken, especially outside of North Africa, making it less of a priority to learn. The general consensus of my interviews was that Moroccans would rather have their education be in non-native languages in order to have more opportunities within and outside of Morocco than to learn Tamazight.

Still, the government continues to push and encourage Amazigh languages. King Mohammed VI founded the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe), or IRCAM in 2001. This institute is run by Amazigh scholars and activists and is effectively independent from the executive branch of government, lending it some unbiased credit. It works to develop the Standard Moroccan Amazigh dialect, encourage the usage of the Amazigh language in the Moroccan educational system, promote Amazigh in social and cultural fields and media, among other advocacy related missions.

French is also a language that is promoted by the government, especially in educational settings. Unless related to religion or history, most higher-education degrees are taught entirely in French, which the government sees as a means to enhance economic opportunities and international relations. While the appeal for teaching Tamazight is more social and historical, French has a more economic draw, representing employment opportunities and business prospects. France is the largest foreign direct investor in Morocco and countless French companies rely on thousands of Moroccan laborers to produce their products. As a result of this symbiotic relationship, giving up French will be unlikely for both the government and Moroccan people. This, however, means that the existing colonial mindset rewarding French over Tamazight will continue to prevail. Since French has been consistently privileged economically since the colonial period, people will continue to value it, especially in comparison to Tamazight, a language with seemingly no utilitarian or economic measure at the moment. Because Morocco feels like it has much to lose by destabilizing French in its language hierarchy system, the regime will continue to

reward and promote all things French, including learning the language and migration to France for business reasons.

Though there have been efforts to pull Amazigh into the mainstream in terms of government policy, the process has only just begun. The decades-long conditioning that valued French and other European languages that was brought in decades ago by the European colonists will take time to deconstruct. However, those I interviewed all expressed deep hope, saying that though Amazigh is still very much marginalized, there is an “equalization” process occurring and over the next several decades, there will be more evidence of a linguistic change in Morocco. One notable milestone for change was the King’s recent decision to recognize Amazigh New Year (Zouiten, 2023). As of 2023, January 14 is an official holiday. A statement from the Royal Court shared that this decision comes from the King’s “commitment to the Amazigh language, a fundamental part of Morocco’s authentic identity and a shared asset for all Moroccans,” (Zouiten, 2023). This displays the Moroccan regime’s true willingness to advocate for Amazigh visibility within Morocco. Between the recognition of Amazigh as a national language, and recognizing Amazigh New Year as a national holiday, it is evident that the Moroccan identity is becoming more inclusive of all things Amazigh, particularly language.

Morocco’s language policies and government initiatives reflect a commitment to linguistic diversity, cultural pluralism, and inclusive development but are reasons for hope with respect to the promotion and preservation of Amazigh traditions and customs. Though there is fiscal benefit to promoting international languages such as French and English, especially in today’s globalized

economy, the Moroccan government has been taking steps to incorporate Morocco's heavy Amazigh influence into the national identity.

Cultural attitudes and social perception related to Darija

Darija is not merely a mode of communication but a symbol of national identity and cultural pride for Moroccans. It serves as a linguistic bridge that unites diverse ethnic and regional identities, transcending linguistic differences and fostering a sense of belonging among Moroccans of all backgrounds. However, because it is not its own official language, there are also offshoots of Moroccan nationalism that fall in different linguistic camps. The most frequent alternative form of Moroccan pride is Arab pride. Because of the deliberate efforts to brand Darija as a dialect of Arabic, many Moroccans feel a sense of Arab nationalism (Cline, 1947). Because Morocco is not an Arab country, that is, Arabs are not indigenous to it and only came to the nation by way of migration and conquest, this nationalism is misplaced, and divides the country deeply. The alternative and opposite to Arab nationalism is the Amazigh nationalism. As a direct response to Arab nationalism, which is a threat towards the Amazigh given its inherent need to erase and seclude Amazigh people from the Moroccan mainstream, Amazigh nationalism has been on the rise. Representing the political and cultural movement advocating for the recognition, rights, and empowerment of the Amazigh population, it distinguishes itself from the Arab identifying movement strictly by language. A central tenet of Amazigh nationalism is the promotion and preservation of Amazigh languages, including Tamazight, Tachelhit, and Tarifit, which are spoken

by millions of Moroccans (Silverstein & Crawford, 2004). Efforts to revive and standardize Amazigh languages have gained momentum in recent decades, yet the prevailing attitudes towards Arabic and French maintain hegemony. This language divide undoubtedly causes tension between Moroccans. One person I interviewed who self-identified as Arab because Arabic was her mother tongue expressed feeling that the Amazigh of Morocco intentionally exclude themselves from the Arab Moroccans like herself. She felt excluded on the basis of not being able to understand Amazigh, and echoed what other interviewees said about the importance of uniting under the Moroccan identity, rather than ethnic divides between the Arabs and Amazigh.

This will be difficult insofar as the Moroccan identity is not linked to an official language. That is why it is important for Darija to be recognized as its own language so that it may act as a unifying force rather than Moroccans feeling pulled to either the Arab pole or the Amazigh pole. Darija is the lingua franca between these two ethnic groups, and in order to overcome the ethnic tensions and complications, uniting under the shared Moroccan identity will be the most effective and sustainable course of action for Morocco. An added benefit of this form of nationalism would be a decrease in anti-Amazigh discrimination.

As it stands, the Amazigh population exists below the self-identifying Arabs, due to the heavy emphasis placed on the Arabic language as well as the Moroccan monarchy existing as an evidently and undeniably Arab royal family (Silverstein, 2012). Amazigh nationalism in Morocco faces several challenges, including linguistic discrimination, socio-economic marginalization, and political underrepresentation. While the recognition of Tamazight as an official language marked a

milestone in the struggle for Amazigh rights, implementation remains limited, and disparities persist in access to education, media, and government services. By defining Tamazight as a clearly separate language in the constitution, it suggests that it runs separate to Arabic, rather than conjoined with Arabic in the uniquely Moroccan vernacular of Darija. This pits Arabic and Tamazight against one another, in a battle for dominance over Morocco. Since Arabic remains the main language of the government, it holds reigning power over Amazigh, however, recognizing that both Arabic and Tamazight can coexist in the form of Darija will equalize and neutralize both.

At the same time, Darija is often subject to linguistic prejudice and societal stigma, particularly in formal and official contexts where Modern Standard Arabic or French may be preferred. While Darija is widely spoken in everyday interactions, its use in more formal settings such as education, government, and media is often discouraged or marginalized. It is viewed as a “lower” language due to the lack of effort invested in formalizing and standardizing it. Placing more government-sponsored time and resources into Darija would reverse the stigma and allow for languages that are not in fact native to Morocco, such as French and Arabic, to trickle out to the mainstream.

Despite its informal status, Darija is celebrated as a vibrant and dynamic language that reflects the diversity and richness of Moroccan culture. Its unique blend of Arabic, Amazigh, and French influences gives it a distinctive flavor and character, marked by colorful expressions, idiomatic phrases, and regional variations. Darija serves as a repository of Moroccan folklore, oral

traditions, and collective memory, embodying the shared heritage and collective identity of the Moroccan people.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of Darija as a cultural asset and a vehicle for self-expression and creativity. Efforts to promote the use of Darija in literature, music, and the arts have gained momentum, with artists, writers, and performers embracing the language as a means of reclaiming cultural authenticity and challenging linguistic hegemony. Darija is the language of the people, it is what is heard around the dinner table in the evenings, at protests and demonstrations, in beloved songs, and in all contexts that are unique to Morocco. This is exactly why it must surpass all other languages to be the primary and most significant language within the Moroccan linguistic hierarchy. As Morocco continues to navigate the complexities of linguistic diversity and cultural globalization, Darija remains a powerful symbol of resilience, resistance, and cultural continuity in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

As a Moroccan, I have long been fascinated by the French loanwords and Amazigh accent and Arabic grammatical structure that Darija holds. I believe it to be so far removed from any of its original language influences that it must become its own language, for both linguistic and political reasons. As it stands, Moroccans are divided between identifying as Arab or identifying as Amazigh. Those who grew up speaking Amazigh and surrounded by Amazigh customs have no trouble identifying as such, however, Moroccans who spoke Darija at home find it more difficult to

recognize the deeply Amazigh influences on what is known as Moroccan culture. For this reason, they feel drawn to the title of Arab, especially since it provides them with access to the expansive and powerful Arab network of countries. In contrast, Amazigh nations have little recognition on the world stage, discouraging nation states to align themselves with that identity. The linguistic divide in Morocco further gets complicated with international languages such as French, Spanish, and English entering the nation. These languages represent globalization and opportunity to Moroccans, especially in an economic sense, propelling them forward in importance beyond Arabic and Amazigh. However, much like French, Spanish, and English have all become their own languages despite being derived from Latin, so, too, must Darija become its own language and break off from Modern Standard Arabic.

Though my research took place over a short time frame, it unveiled the depth of the Amazigh/Arab divide in Morocco, and it underscored how much of the issue is due to the language divide. Moving forward, I would suggest and would like to see the continuation of the efforts taken place by King Mohammed VI's regime promoting and popularizing Tamazight. I would like to see more funding for IRCAM so that it may provide more resources for schools to teach Amazigh. Above all, I would like to see the creation and standardization of Darija as its own language.

References

Al Suwaiyan, Layla A. “Diglossia in the Arabic Language.” *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, vol. 5, no. 3, Sept. 2018, pp. 228–238, <https://doi.org/doi:10.30845/ijll.v5n3p22>.

Arbaoui, Larbi. “Moroccans and the Complex of Speaking French.” *Morocco World News*, Morocco World News, 8 Feb. 2013, www.morocoworldnews.com/2013/02/77653/moroccans-and-the-complex-of-speaking-french.

Cline, Walter. “Nationalism in Morocco.” *Middle East Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1947, pp. 18–28. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4321825>. Accessed 14 May 2024.

De la Rosa, José Farrujia “Written in stones: The Amazigh colonization of the Canary Islands,” *Corpus* [En ligne], 14 | 2015, mis en ligne le 29 août 2017, consulté le 14 mai 2024. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/corpus/2641> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/corpus.2641>

Garcia, Senén A. “The Masmuda Berbers and Ibn Tumart: An Ethnographic Interpretation of the Rise of the Almohad Movement.” *Ufabamu*, 1 Jan. 1990, www.africabib.org/rec.php?RID=08703932X.

Goff, Shaquile. "Raja Casablanca and the Declining Prestige of French in Morocco." *Morocco*

World News, 8 Sept. 2021,

www.moroccoworldnews.com/2021/09/344337/raja-casablanca-and-the-declining-prestige-of-french-in-morocco.

Hoffman, Katherine E. "Purity and Contamination: Language Ideologies in French Colonial Native Policy in Morocco." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2008, pp. 724–52. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27563696>. Accessed 14 May 2024.

Llamas, Carmen, and Dominic Watt, editors. *Language and Identities*. Edinburgh University Press, 2010. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv2f4vpr>. Accessed 14 May 2024.

Loutfi, Ayoub. "The Status of Mother Tongues and Language Policy In ..." HAL, *HAL*, 27 Aug. 2021, shs.hal.science/halshs-01623045v2/document.

"Morocco 2011 Constitution." Translated by William S Hein and Jefri Ruchti, *Constitute*, 2011, www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011.

Mrini, Khalil, and Francis Bond. Putting Figures on Influences on Moroccan Darija from Arabic, French and Spanish Using the WordNet, aclanthology.org/2018.gwc-1.46.pdf. Accessed 14 May 2024.

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada. "Morocco: Brief History of the Berbers Including Their Origins and Geographic Location." *UNHCR Web Archive*, Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 16 Nov. 2000, webarchive.archive.unhcr.org/20230531192805/https://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be668.html.

Schwed, Jessica. "An Analysis of the Positionality of Amazigh Language ...", *SIT*, 2017, digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3656&context=isp_collection.

Silverstein, Paul A. "A New Morocco? Amazigh Activism, Political Pluralism and Anti-Anti-Semitism." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2012, pp. 129–40. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24590868>. Accessed 14 May 2024.

Silverstein, Paul, and David Crawford. "Amazigh Activism and the Moroccan State." *Middle East Report*, no. 233, 2004, pp. 44–48. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1559451>. Accessed 14 May 2024.

Staff Writer - Morocco World News. "Spaniard, Moroccan Publish Spanish-Darija Dictionary for Moroccan Arabic." *Morocco World News*, 8 Nov. 2018, www.morocoworldnews.com/2018/11/257262/spaniard-moroccan-spanish-darija-dictionary.

"Treaty Between France and Spain Regarding Morocco." *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1913, pp. 81–99. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2212275>. Accessed 14 May 2024.

Wyrzten, Jonathan. "COLONIAL STATE-BUILDING AND THE NEGOTIATION OF ARAB AND BERBER IDENTITY IN PROTECTORATE MOROCCO." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2011, pp. 227–49. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23017396>. Accessed 14 May 2024.

Zouiten, Sara. "Moroccan Government Officially Adds Amazigh New Year as Public Holiday." *Moroccan World News*, 23 Nov. 2023, www.morocoworldnews.com/2023/11/359123/moroccan-government-officially-adds-amazigh-new-year-as-public-holiday.