

***Comparing Language Use and Attitudes to
Language
Between Oran and Adrar Arabic Speakers***

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During a field-research carried out in Oran in 1999 (Magister Thesis), it appeared that young Algerian Arabic speakers had a different tendency towards foreign languages. That phenomenon was contrary to the expected results of the Algerian language planning policy: Arabisation.

In a book published in 1996, Rabah Sebaa noted that the application and generalisation of Arabic to all levels of society, starting with the school system, faced some unsuspected outcomes. That is instead of a total and successful Arabisation, young speakers had neither control nor mastery of Arabic or of other foreign languages, such as French, English and Spanish.

In the following study, we will compare statistical figures obtained in 1999 to those attained in 2004 in Adrar. The questions asked in the questionnaires were, for the most, the same. However, the tendencies were quite divergent.

- Field / research
- Oran 1999

The research carried out in Oran was done through the use of three means of inquiry: the reading-list (RL), the interviews, and the questionnaires. The latter, in a number of 31, consisted of eleven (11) questions dealing with language use, language usage and attitudes to language. The questions were given to secondary school students belonging to both Arts and Science branches of study. The informants involved in the study were from the three levels of education.

- Adrar 2004

The study in Adrar dealt with University students. Those were from the department of English and from the four levels. The number of questionnaires was one hundred (100), and consisted of thirteen (13) questions about language use, language usage and attitudes to language.

- Results of Questionnaires

The outcomes of the questionnaires of both Oran and Adrar were compared. They produced various results depending on whether they involve attitudes to language, language use and/or language usage. The figures were calculated under the form of percentages.

- Attitudes to Language

Concerning the attitudes towards language, four questions were asked:

Do you think that Arabic-French-English- Dialect-Tamazight-Other- is 'rich'?

Rich	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	53.125	28.125	0	15.625	3.125	0
Adrar	44	25.34	0	30.67	0	0

cf. graph C1: comparison of Attitudes to Languages-Oran & Adrar (Rich)

- Do you think that Arabic-French-English- Dialect-Tamazight-Other- is 'scientific'?

Scientific	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	25	56.25	0	9.375	3.125	6.25
Adrar	19.34	29.34	0	49.34	0	10

cf. graph C2: Comparison of Attitudes to Languages-Oran & Adrar (Scientific)

- Do you think that Arabic-French-English- Dialect-Tamazight-Other- is 'easy'?

Easy	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	46.875	31.25	9.375	9.375	3.125	0
Adrar	28.44	12.22	0	27.11	0	32.22

cf. graph C3: Comparison of Attitudes to Languages-Oran & Adrar (Easy)

- Do you think that Arabic-French-English- Dialect-Tamazight-Other- is 'useful'?

Useful	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	9.375	12.5	50	0	0	28.125
Adrar	34	20	0	46	0	0

cf. graph C4: Comparison of Attitudes to Languages-Oran & Adrar (Useful)

- Language Usage

Questions concerned with language usage were:

- Which language do you use at home?

Home	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	3.125	15.625	81.25	0	0	0
Adrar	75	20	0	5	0	0

cf. graph C5: Comparison Language Usage at Home-Oran & Adrar

- Which language do you use at school?

School	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	26.562	17.137	39.062	15.625	1.614	0
Adrar	17.5	7.5	0	0	0	75

cf. graph C6: Comparison Language Usage at School-Oran & Adrar

- Language Use

Concerning language use, three questions were asked:

- Which language do you use to talk to a friend?

Friend	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	6.25	25	62.5	0	0	6.25
Adrar	42.5	22.5	0	35	0	0

cf. graph C7: Comparison Language Use with Friends-Oran & Adrar

- Which language do you use to talk to your parents?

Parents	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	12.5	15.625	68.75	3.125	0	0
Adrar	62.5	2.5	35	0	0	0

cf. graph C8: Comparison Language Use with Parents-Oran & Adrar

- Which language do you use to talk to a doctor?

Doctor	Arabic	French	Dialect	English	Tamazight	Other
Oran	21.875	59.375	18.75	0	0	0
Adrar	37.5	57.5	2.5	0	0	2.5

cf. graph C9: Comparison Language Use with a doctor-Oran & Adrar

- Analysis and Comparison of Results

- Attitudes to Language

Both Oran and Adrar informants admit that Arabic is a rich language. However, their opinions diverge when foreign languages are concerned. Adrarians see that English is richer if compared to French, whereas Oranians see that French is the second richest language among the three.

The percentages concerning French are not too different between Oran and Adrar speakers (28.155 vs. 25.34 %, respectively). But those concerning English are significant: 30% of Adrarians against 15.625% of Oranians classify English as second richest language. It is worth pointing out Adrar informants belong to the department of English, and that they reactions may be under the influence of their exposition to that language within their syllabuses.

As concerns science, the results diverge from one area to the other. Oran informants classify French as first scientific language, just before Arabic and English. The percentages involved are well illustrative: 56.25 vs. 25 and 9.375 % respectively for French, Arabic and English.

However, Adrar students do the reverse and classify English (49.34%) as first scientific language followed by French (29.34%) then by Arabic (11.34%).

For Oranians, Arabic is easier than French and English. Adrarians see that the dialect (under the heading 'other' in the table) is easier than Arabic, English and French. They classify French as the most difficult of the four proposed language varieties. Concerning the usefulness of a language, Oranians rank the dialect on the first position, followed by 'other' than by French and Arabic. Whereas Adrarians say that English is more useful than Arabic and French.

- Language Usage

Oran Arabic speakers use their own dialect at home, but admit that they also make use of French in the same situation. However, the difference of percentage between those varieties of language as concerns usage is quite important: 65.625%! In the south, we find nearly the same results, i.e. Arabic is the first medium of communication used at home, then French as second language variety (20%). The difference between them is 55%. Oranians, therefore use French 10% more than Adrarians do.

Concerning school, Oran Arabic speakers say that their dialect is the first means of communication used in this speech situation. At the reverse, Adrarians say that they use another language variety (under the heading 'other') which, according to us, is most certainly Zenete, for the area is characterised by the secular presence of that variety of language. Arabic occupies the second rank in this classification; it is followed by French.

The comparison of the use of French at school between Oran Arabic speakers and Adrar Arabic speakers reveals that the former use French 10% more than their southern counterparts. We find the same figure concerning the use of Arabic at school: Oranians prefer to use it with 9.062% more than Adrarians.

- Language Use

Oranians interact in the dialectal form with their friends. They also use French with them. The difference between these two languages in this case is more than 37.5%. They also make use of Arabic with a reduced percentage only: 6.25%. Adrarians, on the other hand, use Arabic to talk to a friend, and also use French but with 20% of difference with the national standard language variety. Informants in Adrar say that they use English (35%) to talk to a friend. This result is a normal figure, for our respondents belong to the department of English, and they, most certainly try to give 'idealised' answers to questionnaires.

Oranians use their dialect with their parents (68.75%), followed by French (15.625%) and Arabic (12.5%). Adrarians, on the contrary use Arabic (62.5%) to talk to their parents. They do not use French or very rarely (2.5%), and admit their use of the dialect (35%). The difference between north and south speakers as concerns Arabic is 50% for southerners, and is 33.75% as concerns the dialect for northerners.

In Oran, most speakers say that they interact in French with a doctor (59.375%). On the second rank is Arabic (21.875%) followed by the dialect (18.75%). We find the same results in the south: French (57.5%), then Arabic

(37.5%). The only difference is that Adrarians say that they do not use dialect when talking to a doctor, or they do that with a reduced frequency (2.5%).

- Sociolinguistic Interpretation

It is important; first and foremost, to mention that although speakers come from the north and the south of Algeria, belong either to secondary school or to University, they do not have the same attitudes to languages, especially to foreign languages.

- Attitudes to Language

The different attitudes to languages as presented by north and south Algerian speakers can be accounted for not only through the relative mastery of the involved languages, but also through some extra factors such as history, social presuppositions and beliefs.

The history of Algeria, the colonial era in particular, has left imprints on people's linguistic behaviour. North Algerians, for example, react to foreign languages in a different manner from their southern counterparts. Oranians, who, faced with the Arabisation process at school, feel that French is neither rich, nor easy nor useful. This result is quite revealing, for Oranians are daily exposed to this foreign language through their watching of French films and documentaries in TV and cinema, or through the satellite television aerial. They also listen, use and hear French in the streets of Oran. The other reaction is that Oranians classify French as a scientific language well before English, the worldwide

means of technological, scientific development and communication.

North Algerians do not have a good mastery of foreign languages as many are imposed on them through the educational system. This does not facilitate any learning and ability in the language taught. Southern speakers reject a foreign language (French) as they consider it a heritage left by the French colonisers to independent Algeria. They prefer English to French even if they do not control it.

Adrarians see that Arabic is 'rich-easy-useful', but is not scientific. French is depicted as neither rich, nor easy nor useful. It is the second scientific language after English, according to them. Their reaction to this foreign language is dictated by the general belief that French is still "the colonial language of France"; it must be avoided and not used in the area. This is well illustrated through their classification of English well before French whichever the criterion of selection or classification is.

Another important attitude towards languages is that concerning Arabic, as a standard language, and dialect, as a substandard regional language. Oran Arabic speakers discriminate between these two varieties of language, as they did while answering nine (09) questions. This means that they split between the two speech varieties. Adrar Arabic speakers, on the other hand, do not discriminate between these varieties of language. The rare cases where they differentiate between them were in questions concerning whether these were 'rich' and/or 'scientific', or whether they use them to talk to a doctor or to their parents.

The obvious difference concerning language usage is that Oranians, whether at school or at home, always use French 10% more than Adrarians do. This is also important, for it shows that the linguistic behaviour of people is not all homogeneous or predictable in any given area.

Concerning language use, we always find the same discrepancy between the north and the south of the country. Oranians use foreign languages to interact with their parents, but Adrarians do not use any one of these. The only cases where Adrarians use French are while they are talking to a doctor or when they are discussing with a friend. In all other cases, they prefer to use Arabic rather than any other means of communication.

Conclusion

Both field-research studies lead us to some general conclusions: (1) the concept of 'homogeneous speech community', as proposed by Chomsky (1957) does not exist. (2) People may belong and believe (Bell, 1983) to belong to the same speech community, but they do not have the same attitudes towards languages found in their verbal repertoire. (3) Concerning the remark of R. Sebaa, Arabisation might have enhanced the spread of foreign languages in the north of Algeria, but in the south the reality is at the opposite.

To account for the results of these field-research works, one has to admit that society is not free from the influence of external factors such as history. The way society perceives languages dictates the attitudes that young speakers will have concerning these. The comparison done between the attitudes of speakers

towards languages, their use of language and language usage enables us to see the extent to which there is divergence between north and south Algerian Arabic speakers concerning national and foreign language varieties.

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