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The Reality of the Arabic Language in the Tourism Sector in Algeria

واقع اللغة العربيّة في القطاع السياحي في الجزائر

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Abstract:

Language serves as an essential medium for communication within society and is a cornerstone in the development of cultural identity. It functions as a tool for thought, creativity, and self-expression, making its preservation crucial for facilitating intergenerational dialogue and interaction. Tourism, as both a cultural and developmental phenomenon, serves as a reflection of a nation's image and acts as a conduit for transmitting its identity to the broader world. However, the prevalence of foreign languages in the tourism sector, particularly within the Arab world and Algeria, poses a significant threat to this identity, distorting the true essence of our rich cultural heritage.

In Algeria, a notable contradiction exists between the theoretical role of the Arabic language and its practical application in the tourism sector. Although Arabic is the official language of Algeria, its presence in tourism-related activities is minimal, with foreign languages, notably French and English, dominating communication and promotional efforts. This study aims to investigate the current status of the Arabic language within tourism institutions and explore the underlying reasons contributing to its marginalization.

Keywords: The Reality; the Arabic Language; the Tourism Sector; Algeria.

المخلص:

تلعب اللغة دورًا حيويًا في التواصل بين أفراد المجتمع وبناء الهوية الثقافية. فهي أداة التفكير والإبداع والتعبير عن الذات. إن الحفاظ على اللغة هو ضمان لاستمرار الحوار والتفاعل بين الأجيال.

والسياحة باعتبارها ظاهرة ثقافية وتنموية تعدّ واجهة البلد، وناقلة هويته للآخرين. إلا أنّ الهيمنة اللغوية الأجنبية في قطاع السياحة العربي عامة والجزائري خاصة تهدد هذه الهوية وتطمس معالمها المميّزة، ويجعلنا نقدم صورة مشوهة عن حضارتنا العريقة.

فقطاع السياحة في الجزائر يعاني من تناقض صارخ بين النظرية والتطبيق فيما يتعلق باستخدام اللغة العربية، فرغم أن اللغة العربية هي اللغة الرسمية في الجزائر، إلا أن حضورها في القطاع السياحي يبقى محدودًا، حيث تُهيمن اللغات الأجنبية، خاصة الفرنسية والإنجليزية، على التواصل والترويج السياحي.

ونهدف في بحثنا هذا إلى الوقوف على واقع اللغة العربية في المؤسسات السياحية وتحديد أسباب تهميشها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: واقع ؛ اللغة العربية ؛ القطاع السياحي ؛ الجزائر.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the fundamental medium through which thought and culture are conveyed, linking the knowledge and intellectual achievements of a nation. It serves as the essential tool for communication, enabling individuals and communities to express their needs, emotions, and ideas. Arabic, one of the six official languages recognized by the United Nations, is spoken by hundreds of millions globally as a first or second language. However, it faces several challenges, including the widespread misconception that it is incapable of adapting to modern advancements and scientific progress. This belief has led many to neglect their duty to

protect and advance the language. The truth is that, if afforded the respect it deserves, Arabic is fully capable of expressing all branches of knowledge and science.

A nation that preserves its language is safeguarding its identity and heritage. Conversely, abandoning one's language renders a society vulnerable to external influences and cultural domination. The significance of language extends beyond communication; it is a pivotal element in the evolution of civilizations and cultures. This realization has prompted Arab scientific institutions to increase efforts to enhance the development of the Arabic language in various sectors, particularly in the tourism industry.

However, while tourism institutions aim to attract the highest number of visitors, they often marginalize Arabic in favor of foreign languages, despite its status as the official language and its cultural importance. This contradiction raises critical questions about how the tourism sector can balance the pressures of globalization with the need to preserve cultural identity.

2. Definition of Language:

The concept of language has been widely discussed by scholars, who define it as a system of sounds and symbols consciously and intentionally created by humans to facilitate communication and the expression of emotions and thoughts. These definitions vary depending on the scholarly perspective, reflecting the diverse interpretations of language's role and function.¹

One of the earliest and most profound definitions was offered by Ibn Jinni, who stated: "Sounds by which a people express their purposes." This definition accurately captures several key characteristics of language, including its phonetic nature, its social function in facilitating communication and the transmission of ideas, and its specificity to each community.

Language, like other social phenomena, is deeply influenced by the societal system within which it exists, thriving with the advancement of its speakers and deteriorating when neglected.²

3. Definition of Tourism:

Tourism has been defined in a variety of ways, with interpretations spanning across economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Ghada Saleh provides a comprehensive definition: "The activity undertaken by people who tend to travel, and possibly stay in environments different from their usual ones, for a short or long period without permanent residence, with the primary goal of enjoying their leisure time in ways that cannot be achieved in their usual environment, and with a willingness to bear limited risks in their activities within their physical and moral capacities."³

The Cairo Scientific Academy defines

tourism as: "The movement from one country to another in pursuit of leisure, or exploration and discovery."⁴

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) offers a more standardized definition: "The activity of individuals traveling and staying in places outside their usual environment for a period not exceeding one year, for the purposes of recreation or other activities."⁵

German scholar Frouiller Gourer describes it as: "A modern phenomenon arising from the increasing need for rest, fresh air, the enjoyment of nature's beauty, and the growth of this sense of pleasure, as well as the feeling of joy and enjoyment, and staying in areas with their own distinctive nature. It is also attributed to the growth of communications, particularly between people, which was a result of the expansion of trade and transportation means."⁶

This definition highlights tourism as a modern phenomenon primarily driven by leisure, relaxation, and the appreciation of nature's beauty, in addition to the fostering of communication between diverse peoples, while notably excluding financial and business-related activities.

From the above definitions, it can be inferred that tourism has two central components: first, the act of traveling to a destination distinct from one's usual place of residence for leisure, recreation, treatment, sports, or other purposes; and second, the duration of the stay, which must extend for at least one night, with the activity not linked to paid employment.

4. Tourism and Language:

The state has increasingly recognized tourism as a pivotal element in economic development. Language plays an indispensable role in this sector, serving as the key medium for communication and cultural exchange among diverse populations.

Before deciding to travel to a foreign country, tourists typically prepare both financially and linguistically. While not all tourists may be fluent in the language of the host country, many rely on functional

language guides that offer essential phrases needed for basic interactions. The better a tourist's command of the local language, the more effortlessly they can communicate and navigate between locations, saving valuable time and reducing the risks associated with misunderstandings or potential threats to personal safety, finances, or possessions.

Historically, language acted as a barrier for tourists, who often faced challenges when interacting with locals due to language differences. Even the most basic requests could become problematic when neither party understood each other, with tourists often attributing the issue to the inability of others to comprehend, rather than acknowledging that the challenge was primarily linguistic.

However, following World War II, tourism evolved into a well-organized and lucrative economic activity. Along with this transformation, language education expanded, leading to certain languages attaining the status of "tourism languages". English, for instance, became the global tourism language, while French gained prominence in Francophone countries such as Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, the Maghreb, and several African nations.

The importance of language in various tourism-related sectors—including transportation, accommodation, dining, and entertainment—has led to the development of travel dictionaries and guides, which are now commonplace in libraries, airports, travel stations, and hotels. These languages gained prominence due to the strength of the tourism industries in their respective countries, with tourists often finding themselves compelled to interact in these languages both domestically and internationally. As a result, tourism has contributed significantly to the spread and evolution of these languages, as well as to the dissemination of the cultures associated with them.

5. Arabic Language and Tourism:

The Arabic language undeniably faces a significant linguistic disadvantage within the tourism sector. This challenge, however, does not stem from any inherent limitations

in its structure or meaning. A language that carries the Quran, the noble Hadith, and embodies the wisdom of ancient civilizations—such as those of India, Persia, Greek philosophy, and Rome—undoubtedly possesses the capacity to express everyday human activities, including travel, dining, socializing, and introducing others to historical landmarks and monuments. The core issue lies in the relatively recent engagement of Arabs with tourism-related activities.

As language is fundamentally a tool for practical use, the Arabic language must be employed and integrated into the tourism sector. However, this integration cannot occur without the active involvement of the Arab people themselves. The responsibility of preserving, developing, and expanding the use of Arabic remains a collective obligation, as its perceived weakness reflects a broader societal shortcoming.

Advocating for the empowerment of Arabic within the tourism industry does not suggest a retreat into linguistic isolation or a refusal to engage with other languages. The importance of foreign languages is acknowledged, and their mastery is essential for facilitating communication with tourists and visitors to our countries. Moreover, such linguistic openness enables the promotion of our tourism and cultural offerings to the global community. Nevertheless, this openness should never come at the expense of the Arabic language, which forms the foundation of our identity, preserves our national memory, stores our heritage, and is a hallmark of Arab culture and personality.

The Arab tourism movement has gained significant momentum, with Arabs now traveling extensively across the globe. Despite this, services offered by international tourism companies are rarely available in Arabic, forcing Arab tourists to rely on global tourism languages such as English or French. Conversely, foreign tourists in Arab countries also impose their languages, further marginalizing Arabic in the tourism sector. In countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, and the Gulf states, the

tourism sector frequently communicates with foreign tourists in their native languages or in intermediary languages, completely sidelining Arabic. Several reasons contribute to this phenomenon:⁷

- The belief that foreign tourists are wholly unfamiliar with Arabic, and that its use would cause alienation, disregarding the fact that language is not the primary factor in attracting tourists. If language barriers were truly prohibitive, tourists would never venture beyond familiar linguistic boundaries.
- An exaggerated deference to foreign tourists, with the aim of pleasing them by all means, even though they are often in search of distinction, novelty, and cultural diversity. How can this be offered to them in their own language?
- The limited Arabic tourism lexicon, which presents a significant challenge for Arab tourism professionals. The vocabulary available is often restricted in both quantity and scope, frequently relying on colloquial expressions that are tinged with rural or primitive connotations. However, tourism requires a more sophisticated, urban lexicon covering a wide range of sectors such as transportation, accommodation, food, entertainment, and education.

Each tourism domain necessitates specific terms and expressions that have standardized meanings and global usage. Unfortunately, this linguistic inadequacy has not prompted Arabs to work towards the enhancement of their tourism language. Instead, it has led to a gradual neglect of Arabic in tourism contexts, with Arabic being supplanted by foreign languages, as though basic expressions such as "Hello," "Goodbye," "Good morning," "See you later," "Room," "Breakfast," "Visit," or "Tour" are somehow more complex or less precise than their foreign equivalents.

6. The Reality of the Arabic Language in the Tourism Sector in Algeria:

If we were to track the reality of the Arabic language in the tourism sector, we would find a rather bleak linguistic situation. Despite

Arabic being the official language of Algeria and a symbol of national identity, religion, culture, politics, and media according to legal texts, it suffers from neglect and marginalization in many sectors. This exclusion is deliberately maintained by relevant authorities, who believe that the Arabic language is incapable of keeping up with the world of markets, technologies, and production.

In the tourism sector, for example, Arabic fails to perform its intended role; instead, French or English is preferred for communication. The justification for this is that tourism services are primarily aimed at foreign tourists, and that the tourism project is a global endeavor tied to international trade and the free market, governed by the law of supply and demand—other unfounded justifications that reveal their ignorance of the characteristics of the Arabic language. This situation also explains the stagnation of tourism activities in Algeria.⁸

The reasons for the limited use of Arabic are due to the lack of specialized training for tourism workers, the scarcity of tourism content in Arabic, and the absence of a clear strategy for employing Arabic to highlight the country's cultural and civilizational elements. Observing the language used in tourism media, one can notice that most Algerian tourism programs provide their material, cultural, and entertainment services in French or English, and sometimes in Algerian colloquial Arabic.

It's as though Modern Standard Arabic is incapable of conveying objectives or achieving goals and convincing potential tourists. The problem, in truth, lies in the challenge of linguistic development in tourism advertising. It goes beyond that to the issue of Arabic's integration into the social, cultural, and economic environment. In my opinion, the solution lies in the necessity of introducing Modern Standard Arabic into daily usage, as language is a vital component of any culture. Any cultural renaissance that any nation aspires to will inevitably depend on a linguistic revival that expresses the needs of that people and markets their culture

and beliefs.⁹

The reality of tourism institutions regarding the use of language reflects the forced exclusion of Arabic, which poses a threat to its survival.¹⁰ This threat manifests in the weakening of Arabic, the loss of pride in it, and a direct attack on our identity and belonging.

Additionally, when examining the situation, it becomes clear that the Maghreb countries (Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria), despite their political independence, have not achieved linguistic independence.¹¹

The general linguistic situation is dominated by the French language at the expense of Arabic, not just in the tourism sector but in all areas of life, as the French-speaking discourse is fundamentally associated with modernity and progress in the Maghreb mentality, as mentioned in the 2011 Ibrir study.

The Arabic language has been neglected in the Arab tourism sector, becoming almost alien in tourism institutions. The language used in professional work is foreign, from the documents filled out by clients to the dialogues and the services offered. One would be disappointed upon entering any hotel or tourism institution, as the employee greets you in a foreign language, even if you are wearing traditional Arab attire.¹²

Furthermore, when browsing websites for some hotels and travel companies, it feels as though you are not on an Arab site at all, as foreign languages dominate, and there is no indication of the use of Arabic. Additionally, foreign languages are used for booking processes.

The exclusion of the Arabic language is evident at two levels:¹³

- First, at the level of tourism education: Arabic is absent from the educational process in institutes and specializations related to hotel and tourism management (training, technical education, and higher education). Its presence is limited to ornamenting the mosaic of education without being considered a functional language for teaching technical and applied subjects.

- Second, at the level of field behavior: When

entering any hotel or tourism institution, it is evident that the language used for professional transactions is usually a foreign language, predominantly English or French. This starts with the documents that the tourist (client) fills out and extends to the theoretical discussions in conferences and seminars between tourism sector officials and specialists.

7. Ways to promote the Arabic language in tourism institutions:

It is possible to promote the Arabic language in tourism institutions through a set of practical measures, including the following:

- Establishing a clear national tourism language policy and issuing the necessary political decision to implement it in line with both theoretical and practical frameworks. Official authorities can enact supportive language policies that mandate and encourage the use of the Arabic language in tourism institutions—such as requiring the availability of Arabic-language interfaces and services to obtain classifications or privileges—while maintaining a well-considered openness to other languages.

- Promoting the use of the Arabic language across all tourism services—such as guiding, reception, and informational signage—alongside foreign languages, not as a replacement for them.

- Providing tourism sector workers with linguistic training that enables them to use Standard Arabic in a professional and fluent manner, while maintaining the ability to communicate in other languages. Specialized language courses in tourism can also be incorporated.

- Coordinating with technology and software companies to Arabize and develop electronic systems related to booking processes in tourism establishments and hotel chains.

- Encouraging innovation in delivering tourism services in Arabic in ways that enhance excellence and preserve cultural identity—such as developing tourism apps and digital platforms in Arabic (or multilingual with a strong Arabic presence)

that include maps, navigation, booking features, and interactive information.

- Supporting Arabic digital content in the tourism sector—such as producing tourist guides, websites, videos, and articles introducing Algeria's tourist destinations in Arabic with high quality that reflects the richness of local culture—rather than relying on literal translation, in order to expand the presence of the Arabic language.

- Preparing a comprehensive Arabic dictionary of all tourism-related terminology, similar to those available in other foreign languages, encompassing the Arabization of terms, names, meanings, concepts, examples, models, perspectives, and dialogues. This would enable its effective use in language development and cover all topics encountered in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tourist guiding, airports, trains, and markets.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, despite its constitutional and cultural status in Algeria, the Arabic language continues to suffer from forced exclusion in the tourism sector in favor of foreign languages. This poses a significant threat to the language, which manifests in its weakening, the loss of pride in it, and the undermining of our identity and belonging. Therefore, we urge the relevant authorities to address the weaknesses of the Arabic language by working to employ it in the tourism sector.

This can be achieved by strengthening its presence in training, media, digital content, and establishing a national strategy that

makes it an effective tool for promoting the rich heritage and tourism diversity of the country. This would encourage foreign tourists to engage with both the Arabic language and culture, giving tourism a distinctly Arab flavor and promoting our language beyond its linguistic borders.

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⁹ Wafa Sobhi, The Language of Algerian Tourism Advertising: A Study in Argumentation, Journal of Communication in Languages and Literature, Issue 52, 2017, p. 112.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 28.

¹¹ Ibid, same page.

¹² Ibid, same page.

¹³ Amal Shafiq al-Omari, The Arabic Language in the Tourism Sector: Where to?, Al-Balqa Applied University, Jordan, p. 4.