

Algerian Society between Multilingualism and ‘Semilingualism’ : Towards a Linguistic Physiognomy

المجتمع الجزائري بين التعدد اللغوي و "شبه اللغوية": دراسة في البنية اللسانية

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Abstract:

This paper examines the intricate linguistic situation of Algeria, a country officially bilingual yet effectively multilingual. The central concern is whether Algerian speakers achieve balanced proficiency across the languages they use, or whether their linguistic performance reflects a state better described as *semilingualism*. Such a condition is often manifested through code-switching, code-mixing, and other forms of interference that complicate communication.

The study begins with an overview of Algeria’s linguistic environment, emphasizing the gap between official policies and sociolinguistic realities. It then introduces the notion of semilingualism and considers its applicability to the Algerian context through selected examples. Finally, the paper discusses the potential implications of semilingualism for both individual speakers and Algerian society at large.

Keywords: Multilingualism; Semilingualism; Language Interference; Code-Switching; Code-Mixing; Linguistic Policy.

ملخص:

يعني هذا المقال بالدراسة الوضعية اللغوية المعقدة السائدة في المجتمع الجزائري الذي يعتبر، رسمياً، ثنائي اللغة بينما يظهر في الواقع تعددية لغوية فعلية. فيسلط هذا البحث الضوء على مدى تمكن الجزائريين من اللغات المستعملة أو عجزهم على ذلك، أو بعبارة أخرى إذا كان المجتمع الجزائري يعيش فعلاً حالة من التعدد اللغوي، أم أنه أقرب إلى ما قمنا بترجمته حرفياً، لعدم وجود مكافئ في اللغة العربية، بشبه اللغوية *semilinguism* الذي يعني، حسب هانسجارد Hansegård، عدم التحكم في أية لغة.

إن تحليل بعض الأمثلة المنتقاة لخدمة موضوع الدراسة أكدت وجود هذه الظاهرة في المجتمع. تتجلى انعكاساتها في اعتماد المتحدثين أثناء عملية التواصل على التناوب اللغوي و المزج اللغوي و غيرها من أشكال التداخل اللغوي. كما أدت إلى ظهور لغة هجينة تستمد مفرداتها من كل اللغات المعتمدة و لا يستوعبها سوى المتخاطبون المحليون. و تجدر الإشارة إلى الخطر الذي تشكله هذه الظاهرة على هوية المتكلمين و ثقافتهم بل و حتى تعلمهم و ما يقدمونه للأجيال القادمة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الجزائر؛ التعدد اللغوي؛ شبه اللغوية، التناوب اللغوي؛ المزج اللغوي؛ التداخل اللغوي.

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1. Introduction

Language constitutes both a central marker of identity and a decisive factor in social integration. In multilingual societies, language contact and competition often generate complex dynamics that directly affect educational outcomes, cultural transmission, and national cohesion. Algeria represents a particularly illustrative case of such dynamics, given its long and turbulent history of successive conquests, colonisation, and post-independence nation-building policies.

The linguistic situation in Algeria constitutes one of the most intricate areas of sociolinguistic inquiry. The country has continually been shaped by overlapping linguistic layers. This stratification has produced a sociolinguistic environment in which several languages coexist but with unequal status and functionality. Officially, the country recognizes Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) **and** Tamazight as its national and official languages. In practice, however, the linguistic landscape is far more complex. French, often regarded as a *spoil of war*, continues to play a prominent role in administration, education, and daily communication, while English has recently gained momentum as the government promotes its use in higher education and scientific fields. Added to this are the diverse Algerian dialects that structure everyday interactions among citizens.

While multilingualism is generally perceived as an asset, this entangled constellation of languages raises fundamental questions. Chief among them, and central to the present study, is whether Algerian speakers succeed in attaining genuine proficiency across these linguistic codes and in shifting fluidly between them, or whether they instead encounter limitations that hinder effective communication, leading to a condition that may be characterized as **semilingualism**.

To address this question, the present study adopts a methodological framework designed to investigate the extent to which Algerian speakers are able to master the multiple linguistic codes at their disposal and to shift between them according to context. To this end, the methodology employed relies on the observation and analysis of selected examples with the aim of offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of multilingualism and the potential emergence of semilingualism within Algeria's multilingual society. By doing so, the study seeks not only to shed light on the challenges and opportunities of multilingualism in Algeria but also to contribute to broader debates on language policy, identity, and linguistic competence in postcolonial societies.

2. Linguistic Environment of Algeria

Algeria is fundamentally an Amazigh (Berber) country with a long and complex historical past. Over the centuries, it witnessed the arrival of successive peoples seeking to expand their civilizations and establish settlements, including the Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Spanish, Ottomans, and French. With the exception of the Arabs, these groups eventually

departed, yet they left behind valuable legacies, both material and immaterial. Among these legacies, the most relevant to linguists are the languages they introduced, or in some cases, only fragments that survived.

At its core, Algeria has always been Amazigh. The first communities inhabiting its territory communicated in Tamazight, though regional and tribal variations were evident. As Martinet (1980, p. 30) observed, “languages are not necessarily identical all over the territory they are used on... and no large community is linguistically homogeneous.” Indeed, several distinct Amazigh-speaking groups illustrate this diversity. In the northeast, the Kabyle tribes of the Djurdjura massif speak Kabyle (Takvaylit). Further east, along the Aures Mountains, the Chaoui people use Chaouia (Tachawit). West of Algiers, the Chenoui people are settled around Mount Chenoua. About 600 kilometres south of Algiers, in the M’Zab Valley on the edge of the Sahara, the Mozabite community speaks Mozabite, another Tamazight variety. Deeper into the Sahara, the Tuareg use Tergui (Tamachek/Zenati), completing the mosaic of Algeria’s Amazigh linguistic heritage.

With the arrival of the Arabs during the Muslim Conquests, the Islamisation of the region began, and a new language – Arabic – entered the existing linguistic landscape. Its spread took place through both conflict and peaceful coexistence, gradually reshaping patterns of communication. As is natural in situations where communities interact, a profound process of linguistic contact emerged. One of its clearest manifestations was the large number of borrowings exchanged between Arabic and Tamazight, which testify to the depth and complexity of this interaction.

With the long coexistence of Arabs and Amazigh populations, the sociolinguistic environment of the Algerian territory underwent significant transformations. Later, Spanish incursions and, subsequently, the allegiance of Algiers to the Ottoman Empire further complicated this linguistic mosaic. As a result, the Algerian linguistic landscape evolved into a crossroads of multiple influences – Arabic, Tamazight, Turkish, Spanish, and others – though some of these left only marginal traces and are of limited relevance to the present study.

In 1830, Algeria witnessed a major historical event that radically transformed the face of the country and whose effects remain palpable even 62 years after its official end. The French colonisation, which lasted 132 years, was a totalising enterprise that spared no sphere of life. For more than a century, an alien tongue was imposed as the official language of the land, institutionalised across all branches of the colonial administration. As a result, the autochthonous population was pushed to the margins of society, their native languages stripped of any official status or recognition. Algerian children were left with no alternative but to attend schools where instruction was delivered exclusively in the coloniser’s language. This gave rise to a new generation of Algerians who learned French, mingled with their French peers, and became acquainted with French culture and modes of living. They grew up in a reconfigured linguistic environment where their mother tongue (Tamazight or dialectal Arabic) coexisted with French, and Modern Standard Arabic for those who pursued specialised studies in the language. Over successive generations, French became deeply embedded in Algerian society and identity, leaving a linguistic legacy that endured well beyond independence.

On the 5th of July, 1962, Algeria emerged as a newly independent nation. In the aftermath of independence, the immense task of reconstruction began, with one of the most urgent priorities being the recovery of an identity long subjected to colonial alienation. At the heart of this endeavour stood the question of language, a matter inseparably tied to cultural authenticity, national unity, and the reassertion of sovereignty.

The first post-independence constitution of Algeria, issued in 1963 and largely inspired by the Soummam Platform, laid the foundations of the new state. Its opening articles defined the political system, the state religion, and, crucially, the official language. Modern Standard Arabic was declared the sole official language, thereby excluding the other linguistic forms spoken across the country.

The language policy of the newly independent Algerian state was primarily driven by the will to erase the remnants of colonial rule and to restore a sense of authentic national identity, beginning with language. With Modern Standard Arabic proclaimed the language of all Algerians, situating the country within the broader framework of the Arab Nation, the Arabisation process was promptly set in motion. At the same time, however, the institutions inherited from colonialism were preserved, at least during the early years, in order to ensure continuity and facilitate the functioning of the nascent state.

A series of ordinances and decrees were subsequently promulgated to gradually implement the Arabisation project, though always accompanied by transitional measures that allowed for the continued use of French in many domains. Among the most notable measures were:

- Ordinance 68-92 of April 26, 1968, which made it mandatory for civil servants and those in similar positions to master the national language (JORA n°36, 05-03-1968);
- Ordinance 71-2 of January 20, 1971, extending the provisions of Ordinance 68-92 to Algerian personnel in public enterprises (JORA n° 7, 01/22/1971);
- Ordinance 73-55 of October 1, 1973, concerning the Arabisation of national stamps (JORA n° 81, 10/09/1973);
- Decree 74-70 of April 1974, relating to the Arabisation of commercial advertising (JORA n° 29, 04/09/1974);
- Decree 81-36 of March 14, 1981, relating to the environment Arabization (JORA n° 11, 03/17/1981).

This legal trajectory culminated in Law n°91-05 of January 16, 1991, which officially consecrated MSA as the sole language of the state, thereby dismissing any institutional recognition of bilingualism or multilingualism.

2.1 Official Monolingualism, Real Bilingualism

It is worth noting that Law n°91-05, which aimed to extend the use of MSA to all sectors and definitively ban French, nonetheless provided for certain dispensations (articles 16, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 38) that permitted the continued use of the latter. Moreover, the enforcement of this

law was repeatedly postponed until the necessary conditions were deemed to be in place (Legislative decree n° 92-02, 07/04/1992). This hesitation reveals that the legislature could not ignore the sociolinguistic reality that resisted the policy of strict monolingualism—a reality reflected both in the practical demands of daily life and in the broader requirements of globalisation.

2.2 The Use of French: An Undeniable Reality

A number of facts testify to the persistent and widespread use of French in Algerian society, among which:

- The continued existence and growth of the French-language press, with newspapers such as *El Moudjahid*, *El Watan*, *Horizons*, *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, *Liberté*, and others.
- The launch of a public television channel broadcasting in French (*Canal Algérie*), alongside the long-established French-language radio station (*Radio Alger Chaîne 3*).
- The use of French in higher education, particularly in the teaching of scientific and technical disciplines such as medicine, pharmacy, and computer science.
- The teaching of French as a foreign language throughout the entire educational curriculum.
- The teaching of French as a foreign language throughout the entire educational curriculum.
- The continued publication of legislative and statutory texts in French, whether in print or digital form.
- The widespread availability of French-language references within academic institutions, the Supreme Court, and courts of appeal. It is significant that most dissertations and theses written in Arabic still include French references in their footnotes and bibliographies.
- The publication of French-language research papers in journals affiliated with universities, the Supreme Court, and research centres (Filali, 2012, pp. 87-88).

Beyond these internal realities, a major external factor also compelled the Algerian state to diverge from its official linguistic policy: globalisation, which imposed international standards that necessarily required the continued use of French in various domains of public and professional life.

2.3. Globalisation and the Rise of New Multilingual Practices

The advent of globalisation marked the end of an era, characterised by nations jealously guarding their sovereignty, and the commencement of a new epoch that fosters global exchange and a rapprochement of people, cultures, languages, and traditions. Its influence is tangible in all aspects of life, and the world became increasingly interconnected. Algeria has not been immune to this phenomenon, and the government's obstinacy in implementing its monolingualism policy has been compromised. Indeed, to confirm its presence on the international scene, Algeria had no alternative but to reconsider its decision. The country's accession to numerous world organisations, in addition to the ratification of a considerable

number of international conventions and treaties, resulted in the integration of foreign languages, the initiation of leadership training within the framework of international cooperation, and the adaptation of its laws and institutions to international standards. Furthermore, Algeria's economic and political liberalisation in addition to its integration into international markets created a favourable environment for foreign direct investment, leading to the establishment of numerous multinational enterprises across diverse sectors.

As a result, the monolingualism policy initiated by the government began to lose its relevance and validity. The situation was further exacerbated by the rise of a contestation movement seeking to affirm Amazigh identity and demand that Tamazight be granted equal status with Arabic. The movement was notably fuelled by the *Berber Spring* of 1980 and, later, the *Black Spring* of 2001. After years of talks and negotiations, the crisis culminated in the 2016 constitutional revision, which elevated Tamazight to the status of a national and official language alongside Arabic, ensuring its promotion and protection by the state (JORA n°14, 03/07/2016, article 4). This milestone definitively marked the end of official monolingualism and the beginning of official bilingualism.

This was a watershed in the linguistic policy led by the government. However, its implications for societal structures and dynamics remain a subject of significant debate. The question of whether citizens actually utilised Modern Standard Arabic and Tamazight in their daily lives has drawn academic interest, and evidence suggests that this was not the case. In informal communication, Algerians continued to utilise dialectal Arabic in its various regional forms, along with Tamazight dialects such as Kabyle, Chaoui, Mozabite, etc, as well as French. On the other hand, in institutional interaction, and despite their status, the two languages of the state, Modern Standard Arabic and Tamazight, are not widely utilised, and in some cases not used at all, as is the case with Tamazight. By contrast, French has remained deeply embedded in higher education, science, technology and business, making it *de facto* working language across much of the country. This divergence between official bilingualism and societal multilingualism highlights the persistence of historical language practices and the enduring influence of colonial and postcolonial linguistic dynamics.

Furthermore, a major outcome of globalisation was observed across the globe: the hegemony of the English language, which did not spare Algeria. English increasingly came to symbolise science, knowledge, technology, modernity, and progress. In Algeria, its introduction was gradual. Initially, it was confined to the status of a second foreign language integrated into pupils' curriculum from the second year of secondary school. However, it gained further prominence in the late 1990s and early 2000s, primarily with the arrival of multinational enterprises such as BP, Anadarko, Schlumberger, and General Electric which brought English into professional and technical domains, often by providing training for their employees to meet linguistic requirements. The growing popularity of English was further reinforced by the active involvement of the US Embassy and the British Council in Algeria, which promoted the language through a wide range of academic exchange programmes targeting diverse demographics and aimed at fostering collaboration and mutual understanding between cultures, peoples, and institutions. Moreover, the overarching objective of the US Embassy, as stated on

its website, is to institutionalise English as a language of instruction in Algeria (U.S. Embassy in Algeria).

On the other hand, the rapid spread of the English language in Algeria has sparked fears and apprehensions. In a society historically dominated by French, English emerged as a serious rival – and even a potential threat – to its status. It is particularly noteworthy that younger generations, born and raised in the digital age, tend to display a natural preference for English over other languages. From early childhood, they are exposed to English through children's programmes, music, films, and online platforms; they use it to communicate with peers worldwide, complete homework and research, and explore opportunities in international universities abroad. These emerging trends have profoundly unsettled Algeria's linguistic landscape, setting the stage for an increasingly visible rivalry between French and English.

In response to recent trends and the imperatives of globalisation, the government undertook measures in this direction. It resolved to incorporate English as a subject of instruction from the third year of primary school and to authorise its visibility in public spaces, such as in airports, ports, and road signage. Moreover, it launched, in 2007, an international radio channel, *Radio Algérie Internationale*, broadcasting in different languages, including English, and permitted certain television programmes – such as news bulletins and religious talks – to be aired in English. In the more recent context of strained relations between Algeria and France, marked by political divergences, the government intensified its efforts to promote English, whether as a strategic move of defiance or as a matter of genuine conviction. It called for the substitution of French with English in higher education and required all university instructors to undergo linguistic training in order to deliver their lectures and courses in English.

It is evident that the once-prestigious status of French in the former Algerian colony has been undermined, and the country's sociolinguistic landscape has been profoundly reconfigured. At the same time, the rising hegemony of English appears unquestionable. Few societies, in fact, have been able to withstand the linguistic upheaval brought about by the wave of globalisation. As for Algerian society, its citizens have found themselves engaged in a complex linguistic adventure: officially bilingual in Modern Standard Arabic and Tamazight, yet in practice profoundly multilingual, drawing on Algerian Arabic dialects, Tamazight varieties, MSA, French, and increasingly English.

Within this multilingual context, a sensitive question arises—the very essence of this study—namely, whether Algerians are able to shift smoothly and accurately from one language to another, or whether they encounter obstacles and limitations that place them in a condition described as *semilingualism*. In other words, this research seeks to analyse the extent of speakers' command of the various linguistic systems at their disposal and to determine whether the situation can truly be characterised as multilingualism or, rather, as semilingualism. To this end, the study will first clarify the notion of semilingualism before examining its relevance and applicability to the Algerian context.

3. What is Semilingualism?

Semilingualism is a label that dates back at least to the early nineteen-sixties. The construct has been borrowed from Scandinavian researchers. (Edelsky, 1983, p. 2) The term is not appreciated neither by linguists nor by didacticians, but the phenomenon it designates exists. (Kremnitz, 2019, p. 107) It was coined as a term to designate the state where bilinguals know none of the two languages properly and it was used to designate the psycholinguistic and, more particularly, emotional maladjustment of the minorities. (Hansegård, 1979, p. 41) Hansegård defines semilingualism as the unfavourable linguistic (and psychological) consequences of an early deprivation of the native language (Stroud, 1978, p. 153). It emerged in the Scandinavian societies when assessing migrants' success in learning the official language of their host country. The definition of semilingualism set by Hansegård concerned then the special case of migrants in their attempt to assimilate a second language. He identified six aspects of language command as criteria to assess a speaker's mastery of a language. These include:

1. Size of stock of words, phrases, etc, which are understood or actively used;
2. Correctness, i.e. the ability to understand correctly and realise the language elements correctly in the speech act;
3. Degree of automatism, i.e. the extent to which the understanding of the language and the production of speech take place spontaneously and without blockages or other impediments;
4. Ability to neologise or create in the language;
5. Command of the cognitive, emotional and volitional functions of the language;
6. Richness or poorness in individual meanings, i.e. whether reading or listening to a particular linguistic system evokes lively and differential semantic images or not (Hansegård, 1979, p. 42).

Therefore, in Hansegård's opinion, a bilingual speaker is deemed to be semilingual if they display deficiencies in the aspects listed above.

In light of the framework outlined above, and with the aim of shedding light on the extent of language command within Algeria's multilingual society, we will draw on case studies to examine the actual proficiency of Algerian speakers, explore the potential manifestations of semilingualism, assess their alignment with the theoretical definition attributed to the term, and evaluate the effectiveness of the state policies on language planning and promotion.

4. Instances of Semilingualism

Mrs. M. is an Amazigh woman, whose mother tongue is Kabyle. Born during the French colonial period, she completed her entire education in French, while MSA remained only a secondary subject during her schooling. Upon moving from Kabylia to Algiers to begin her career as a mathematical teacher, she initially relied exclusively on Kabyle and French for communication. Adaptation to her new linguistic environment was relatively smooth, as French was widely spoken alongside dialectal Arabic. Between 1972 and 1983, Mrs. M. used French in her professional duties. However, from 1985 until her retirement, she struggled with the state's imposition of MSA as the primary medium of instruction, despite her long teaching

experience. In retirement, Mrs. M. continues to master her native Kabyle, which she maintains as the language of family interaction, even while living outside her hometown. She remains unable to fully express herself in dialectal Arabic, despite its dominance in everyday communication. Her command of MSA is minimal, restricted to the terminology she acquired for teaching purposes. She also perceives a decline in her French proficiency, attributing this to a lack of practice. As for English, the language remains unfamiliar to her, despite limited exposure during her schooling.

Dr. B. is a general practitioner who was born and raised in an Arab-speaking family, with an absent knowledge of Tamazight in any of its varieties. He received his education in MSA from primary through high school, with French and English taught as the first and second foreign languages respectively. At university, however, his entire medical training was conducted in French, as is customary in the Algerian medical field. In his professional practice, Dr. B. predominantly relies on French, the working language of medicine in Algeria. Nevertheless, his command of the language is marked by deficiencies in correctness, both in oral and written communication, and by limited fluency. However, despite these linguistic challenges, Dr. B. is recognised as a highly competent and respected physician. With regard to English, he is actively attempting to develop his proficiency in order to access it for international training opportunities and participate in medical symposia.

L. M. is a student at the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, an institution that delivers its entire curriculum in English. She demonstrates a strong command of English, both orally and in writing. Her schooling prior to university was carried out in MSA, with French and English as first and second foreign languages, respectively. From an early age, she developed a particular affinity for English and actively invested her learning through books, social media, movies, and music benefiting from the broader access to knowledge offered by her generation. However, her proficiency in French and MSA has declined significantly since she ceased to engage with them after obtaining her baccalauréat, which granted her admission to university.

The instances of linguistic deficiencies among Algerian speakers are legion and varied. For the purpose of this study, however, we will confine our analysis to the cases outlined above, as they are sufficiently illustrative of the broader phenomenon. Mrs. M. began her professional career as a competent bilingual, but the sociolinguistic upheaval brought about by the imposition of MSA as the language of instruction and work significantly disrupted her linguistic performance. Within Hansegård's framework of semilingualism, Mrs. M. exhibited deficiencies across all six dimensions. Her lexical repertoire in MSA was extremely limited, aside from the terminology she memorised to perform her duties, often forcing her to resort to literal translation from Kabyle or French to communicate. While her receptive abilities were somewhat stronger than her productive skills, her overall correctness remained insufficient. As a result, her degree of automatism was low, and her ability to innovate in the language was nearly absent. Similarly, her control over the cognitive functions of MSA was minimal, likely due to limited, if not non-existent, exposure, which resulted in a clear poverty of individual meaning. To summarize, Mrs. M. involuntarily found herself in a state of semilingualism: she

exhibited a weak command of MSA, even after sixteen years of teaching in it; a declining mastery of French, despite having received her entire education in that language; only superficial competence in dialectal Arabic; strong proficiency in her mother tongue, Kabyle; and only beginner-level of English.

As regards Dr. B., his progressive acquisition of MSA was abruptly interrupted in favour of French, which he has never fully mastered. Consequently, within Hansegård's framework, he can be considered semilingual, as he does not smoothly produce the linguistic elements of French, particularly due to recurrent issues of correctness in both oral and written expression. A telling example is his tendency to mix grammatical genders, as in *la bouton* instead of *le bouton*. This error can be explained by language interference: the speaker first conceives the signifier (spot) in dialectal Arabic, *habba* حبة, a feminine noun, then translates it into French as *bouton*, but erroneously assign it the feminine determinant *la*, resulting in *la bouton*. Such instances reveal the limits of his spontaneity in French and the constraints on his ability to innovate linguistically, both of which are central criteria in assessing semilingualism.

In L. M.'s case, semilingualism is reflected in the deficiencies she exhibits in both MSA and French. While she can more or less comprehend these languages, she struggles to communicate effectively in them. Her weaknesses are chiefly characterised by a limited lexical repertoire, inaccuracies in realising the language elements, frequent blockages in speech production, and a lack of ability to innovate or neologise, whether in MSA or French. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that L. M.'s condition is less constraining than the previous cases, as she possesses full mastery of English, the international lingua franca, which not only facilitates her education but also enhances her professional prospects. This strength is reinforced by the state's own commitment to promoting English, to the point of establishing it as a language of instruction. Consequently, her semilingualism, though linked to deficiencies in MSA and French, carries less weight given her strong command of English, the dominant language worldwide, which equips her with global opportunities unavailable in the earlier cases.

The concept of semilingualism, as originally defined by Hansegård, was primarily applied to migrants who, upon settling in host countries, were compelled to acquire new languages. Research in such contexts confirmed the existence of the phenomenon, typically marked by limited mastery in both the mother tongue and the newly learned language. In Algeria, however, linguistic deficiencies are observed within the autochthonous population itself. These shortcomings align closely with Hansegård's criteria, which makes it absolutely relevant to apply the notion of semilingualism in this context, understood as the inability of an individual to command any one language fully. As previously noted, the forms of semilingualism in Algeria are diverse and vary according to each speaker's sociolinguistic background and the degree of their deficit. In certain cases, the phenomenon constitutes a genuine handicap, particularly when individuals lack mastery even of their native language, thereby impeding communication and leading to social isolation. In other situations, however, semilingualism has a limited impact, especially when the language in question is not the dominant medium of interaction or opportunity.

5. Semilingualism Implications

The peculiarity of Algeria's complex linguistic situation lies in the fact that deficiencies are observed across several languages within a society that is, in practice, multilingual. A substantial proportion of speakers demonstrate limited proficiency in MSA, which is rarely used in daily communication outside formal or religious contexts. Others experience difficulties in French, a trend that has become more pronounced in recent years, while older generations tend to struggle with English. Moreover, although less frequent, some Algerians also exhibit limited competence in dialectal Arabic, the most widely spoken variety in the country.

These linguistic imbalances generate important implications. On the educational level, they may hinder learners' ability to access knowledge effectively, since the language of instruction often does not align with the linguistic repertoire mastered by students. This mismatch can lead to lower academic performance, restricted literacy development, and a fragmented learning experience. On the sociolinguistic and cultural level, the coexistence of multiple languages, each with uneven degrees of mastery, has given rise to hybrid linguistic variety marked by interference, code-switching, and code-mixing, intelligible primarily to Algerians themselves. While such hybridity may reflect adaptability and creativity, it also raises concerns regarding linguistic cohesion, intergenerational cultural transmission, and the long-term positioning of Algeria within global linguistic dynamics.

The future trajectory of Algeria's linguistic choices is far from trivial. The cultural and identity stakes it entails, combined with the imperatives of globalisation, call for careful consideration and informed decision-making. In this respect, the contribution of aware and pragmatic didacticians, linguists, and educationalists is indispensable.

6. Conclusion

Algeria's sociolinguistic landscape, shaped by its colonial legacies, state language policies, globalisation, and shifting geopolitical relations, reveals a complex multilingual reality in which speakers often display uneven competence across languages. Deficiencies in Modern Standard Arabic, French, English, and even dialectal Arabic, among some individuals, highlight the persistence of semilingualism, understood as limited mastery in more than one linguistic code. This has fostered the rise of hybrid practices such as code-switching and code-mixing, which, while enabling communication within the community, also raise questions about linguistic identity, cultural cohesion, and educational effectiveness. Indeed, the capacity of Algerians to master multiple linguistic codes has a direct impact on their access to knowledge, professional mobility, and international integration.

Ultimately, the challenge for Algeria lies in articulating a coherent and balanced language policy that recognises the multilingual reality of its society, strengthens proficiency in its national and official languages, and equips future generations with the global tools, particularly English, necessary to thrive in an interconnected world, while safeguarding its cultural and linguistic heritage.

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