

Discursive Constructions about Algeria's Pro-English Policy: An Analysis of Media Narratives in France

البنى الخطابية حول سياسة تعزيز اللغة الإنجليزية في الجزائر: دراسة تحليلية لردة فعل الاعلام الفرنسي

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Abstract:

The recent promotion of English language use in Algeria has garnered increasing attention within media outlets. The world's third francophone country is now making obvious shift towards the promotion of English language use after decades of strong and incontestable presence of French in various domains. The latest language policies, enacting ELT in primary school and enhancing the use of EMI at university, have been received with bias and prejudice against Algeria's pro-English policies. Therefore, the aim of this study is to demonstrate that the interpretations voiced by French media are characterized by partiality towards the maintenance of French. Using media content analysis, findings suggest that French media is owing Algeria's promotion of English to the growing diplomatic tensions between Algiers and Paris, denying the global lingua franca status of English. This research concludes that such denigrating discourse stems from France's pride in its imperialistic past and colonial practices in Algeria.

Keywords: Algeria; English versus French; pro-English policy; French media coverage.

ملخص:

تشهد الجزائر اليوم تعزيزا لاستعمال اللغة الإنجليزية مما جذب انتباه وسائل الاعلام، حيث ان ثالث دولة ناطقة باللغة الفرنسية تعيش ميلا واضحا اتجاه اللغة الإنجليزية بعدما كانت للفرنسية حضورا قويا وقطعيا منذ عقود في عديد من المجالات. تلقت هذه السياسة اللغوية التي تقر تدريس الإنجليزية في الابتدائي وتبنيها كلفة تدريس في الجامعة، تغطية إعلامية متحيزة مليئة بأحكام مسبقة. ولهذا تهدف هذه الدراسة الى اثبات ان التأويلات المعبر عنها من طرف الاعلام الفرنسي هي تأويلات تنحاز لصالح إبقاء اللغة الفرنسية.

وتستعمل هذه الدراسة تحليل المضمون الإعلامي كوسيلة بحث و التي أظهرت نتائجها ان الاعلام الفرنسي يعزى هذا الانتقال اللغوي للصراعات الدبلوماسية بين الجزائر وباريس متناسيا للمكانة العالمية للغة الإنجليزية. توصل هذا البحث الى ان هذا الخطاب الإعلامي الانتقاصي صادر عن فخر فرنسا بماضيها الامبريالي وممارساتها الاستعمارية في الجزائر .

كلمات مفتاحية: الجزائر؛ الإنجليزية مقابل الفرنسية؛ السياسة الداعمة للإنجليزية؛ تغطية الاعلام الفرنسي

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1. Introduction

Among the conundrums in postcolonial African countries is the issue of language policy and planning. Similar to other postcolonial African contexts, Algeria presents a breeding ground for language policies that gave rise to controversies and conflict. Although gradual, post-independence Arabisation was received differently by groups adopting various preferences and adhering to opposing ideologies. Despite decades of Arabisation, French has long been maintained as a language of academia and openness to modernity yet carries the memory and resonance of brutal colonialism. Sebaa comments that it has been the language of university and scientific research without possessing an official status (2002, as cited in Cordel, 2014). However, a quote that president A. Tebboun has become famous: “French is a spoil of war while English is an international language” has foreshadowed a transition in the linguistic tendencies of Algerian policy makers. At first, Tebboun’s declaration only revealed a necessity to introduce the Algerian primary school pupil to English and did not seem to promise dedication to Englishize considerable domains as it is noticed today. The precursor to embark on a journey towards the promotion of English appeared with ELT in primary school then using English as a medium of instruction at university; two institutions where French has coexisted with Arabic for decades. As anticipated, the decision has been highly lauded by most Algerians themselves, yet arose remarkable resentment among the French, which has been manifested in French media. The historical rapport between the two countries and the linguistic heft it engendered have made Algeria’s recent and ongoing language policy an issue of journalistic interest. In addition to highlighting the reaction to the ministry of higher education’s intention to adopt English in 2019, this paper focuses primarily on French media’s coverage of the recent integration into primary education and the effective use of EMI at university. To contextualise our study, it is important to note that the focus starts with the intention of higher education ministry to shift to English in 2019 to President Tebboun’s decision to introduce English in primary school in August 2022, and finally the implementation of EMI in higher education in September 2023. This study aims to analyse the French media’s discursive constructions of Algeria’s pro-English language policies. In pursuing this overall aim, it seeks to answer the following research question: to what extent is the news littered with bias and subjectivity and hence unreliable? Our perspective is the dissatisfied media discourse is littered with bias

and lingual supremacy, chasing the imperfections that have not yet floated on the surface due to the recency of the decision.

2. Literature Review

Laila Bechneb and Mohamed Dridi (2020) conducted a comparative study between the reaction of Arabophone and Francophone Algerian written press towards the then minister of higher education's intention to replace French with English. The study concluded that francophone press usually used pejorative words and phrases to convince readers that the decision would be inappropriate. In a similar study by Khelif Fatima Zohra and Amal Ammi Abaci (2023), findings revealed that the Algerian media was undecided about the convenience of a transition to English. French media, however, had openly opposed the decision vis-à-vis Algeria's latest language policy. While these two papers contribute to the discourse analysis of media regarding Algeria's language policy and planning, the first one is limited to the 2019 ministerial decision, which was not immediately fully implemented. The second one offers a more recent contribution yet focuses only on the articles headlines. To address this gap, this research presents a thorough and recent analysis of French media coverage of Algeria's Englishization, illustrating the inaccurate criticism and subjective attitude, covering the analysis of different articles from 2019 to 2025. Our perspective is that such biased reaction stems from a language ego that rejects the potential override of English over French in Africa's largest country.

3. Method and tools

To examine the reaction of French media towards Algeria's pro-English policy, this study adopts a qualitative approach based on media content analysis. A corpus of 10 press articles flowing from France was compiled, covering the period from 2019 to 2025. Articles were selected according to criteria of thematic relevance and diversity of editorial perspectives. Methodological tools include lexical examination to identify connotative terms and evaluative vocabulary, analysis of syntactic structures revealing bias and partiality, and identification of framing used to present language policy.

3.1. Media Content Analysis

Stephen D. Reese and Jae Kook Lee defines 'media content' as a "range of visual and verbal information carried in the media" ranging from "mainstream professional media" to

“smaller more interactive and targeted channels” (2012, p.749). According to Neuman, content analysis is:

“A technique for examining the content or information and symbols contained in written documents or other communication media (e.g., photographs, movies, song lyrics, advertisements)” (2012, p.49).

Media content analysis is the study of “texts from transcripts of interviews and discussions in clinical and social research to the narrative and form of films, TV programs and the editorial and advertising content of newspapers and magazines” (Macnamara, 2018, p.1).

4. Results

The analysis of French media coverage has generated that their respective writers and editors are expressing their resentment with Algeria pro-English policy. Such biased reaction stems from a language ego that rejects the potential override of English over French in Africa’s largest country, risking the loss of sphere of influence. By engaging in an unmethodical assessment, politicizing a purely educational and linguistic shift, and making derogatory statements about the Algerian student, the articles and interviews under study fail to reach a thoughtful and objective coverage.

4.1. English in Primary Education is a Hasty Decision

Throughout some articles, words like “hasty”, “unthoughtful”, “ill-conceived” are omnipresent. To further strengthen such stance, Kahred (2022) describes the decision as “a race against the clock” focusing on the three-month gap between the president’s decision in June and implementation in September. Ali Boukhlef (2022) uses more explicit lexis to oppose this step and uses words like “Impulsive, hurried, and unconsidered”. He further questions the pedagogical value of the designed textbook asking: “Published in just a few weeks, the manual is one of a kind. Was it prepared beforehand and then left on the shelves?” The question bears critique and astonishment noting that the manual was published in a few weeks only and doubting whether it had been prepared before, which implies suspicion about quality and usability. Similarly, the use of English in higher education received a similar criticism arguing that teachers had not received an anglophone training; thus unable to lecture in English, and that university students had started to learn

English at a later age; an imperfection that Mussa Acherchor (2022) points out “logistical issues” discussing the “unreadiness” of the Algerian university to use EMI. He neglects the efforts exerted to ensure that teachers and students undergo suitable training to master academic writing and analysis in the English language through MOOC including “Improve your English”. For Célia Zouaoui (2022), the introduction of English would “disrupt” the start of the school year. She also doubts the recruitment’s criterion of teachers, which was based on seniority of diploma and age. That being said, Zouaoui implies that the decision is expedient and lacking educational foresight. In addition to overlooking that this decision enables candidates with older diplomas or older age to enter the labour world, her article does not refer to the training that would be offered to the mobilised teachers.

“French language gets you nowhere”, sparked public interest much like Tebboun’s “French is a spoil of war while English is an international language”. In 2019, Tayeb Bouzid openly declared that unlike English, French is no more a language of scientific research. Bouzghaia Chamseddine Bouzghaia (2019) from *France24* described the decision made in 2019 as “a bone tossed to the people” in the midst of the Hirak, a sequence of weekly demonstrations opposing Bouteflika’s government, to quell public frustration and fragment popular unity by focusing on language policy debates, thereby diverting citizens’ attention from active political engagement (2019).

Malik Ben Salem’ article from *Courrier International* (2022) presents a critical view of Algeria’s rapid push to make English a language of instruction. From the title itself, the author implies coercion, describing the process as a “forced march” rather than a gradual, well-planned implementation. This metaphor immediately conveys a sense of urgency imposed without careful preparation. The article repeatedly emphasizes the potential negative consequences, using strong expressions such as describing the policy as a “civilizational massacre” and condemning the political motives behind it as ideologically driven and poorly thought out. The author also underscores the tension between introducing English and maintaining Algeria’s linguistic heritage, suggesting that prioritizing English may come at the expense of national languages. Even where some aspects of the reform are acknowledged as positive, they are presented in contrast to the substantial drawbacks, signaling that the overall evaluation is clearly critical. Through these rhetorical choices—metaphors, moral judgments, and contrasts—the writer conveys explicit dissatisfaction with the government’s approach to English language teaching in Algeria.

4.2. A Decision to Detach from Colonial Past

Another recurrent interpretation about Algeria's shift is that Algeria wants to redefine its nation's identity and detaching from its colonial past. *Arabnews en français* highlights a significant shift in Algeria's educational policy, reflecting a broader desire to redefine the nation's identity and detach from its colonial past. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's directive to introduce English as a second foreign language in primary schools marks a departure from the longstanding dominance of French, a remnant of Algeria's colonial history. This policy change is not merely an educational reform but a deliberate move to align Algeria more closely with global scientific and technological advancements, where English predominates. The establishment of new institutions focusing on mathematics and artificial intelligence that utilize English as the medium of instruction further underscores this shift. By prioritizing English, Algeria aims to foster a generation capable of engaging with international research and innovation, thereby distancing itself from the linguistic and cultural influences of its colonial past. This strategic pivot signifies a conscious effort to reshape national identity, emphasizing modernization and global integration over historical ties to French colonialism. In the same context, Acher and Pagesy (2022), writing for *Slate Fr*, argue that Algeria's most recent educational reforms aim to progressively distance the country from French cultural influence. Conversely, the prominent Algerian francophone author Kateb Yacine describes French as "a spoil of war," highlighting the significance of the Algerian Francophone novel in challenging the narratives of the colonizer. This linguistic inheritance from colonial times allowed previously marginalized voices to reconstruct history and contest the dominant discourse. As Aimé Césaire notes, the colonizer's language can serve as a tool to make the unseen visible, give form to the unspoken, and amplify the voices of those who were silenced (as cited in Mestaoui, p.4).

4.3 A Focus on Resisting Voices against Algeria's Linguistic Shift

The article from *Le Monde* titled "*En Algérie, polémique linguistique sur fond de crise politique*" by Madjid Zerrouki (2019) highlights the controversy surrounding the decision to replace French with English in university curricula, particularly in scientific and technical disciplines. It presents concerns from various stakeholders, including educators, students, and cultural figures, who argue that this shift undermines Algeria's linguistic heritage and could have detrimental effects on academic quality and national identity. For instance, the

article references Mohammed Harbi, a prominent historian, who criticizes the policy as part of a broader cultural regression in Algeria. He contends that such moves reflect a deeper crisis of identity and intellectual decline in the country.

In another article by *TSA*, the focus lies on this transition's possible downsides voiced by specialists including Rabeh Sebaa (2023) who warns that the rapid introduction of English in Algerian higher education is premature and potentially problematic. He argues that the reform was implemented without consulting language specialists or the academic community, and that the country is not adequately prepared in terms of human, pedagogical, and logistical resources. He also highlights the inexperience of newly recruited English-speaking teachers, particularly in complex fields like medicine, pharmacy, and biology.

Audrey Senecal (2025) accounts for other governmental efforts to replace French with English including medical courses, radio stations and flight tickets and quotes Nouredine Boudierba "Disrespectful to customers who only understand French".

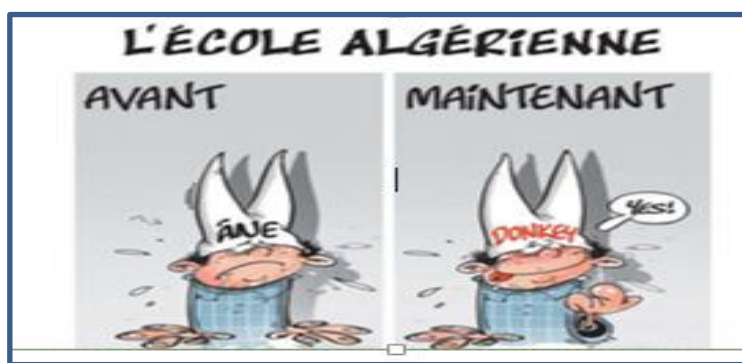
4.4 The Decision is Politically Driven

In the same article, Senecal (2025) highlights that starting from September 2025, medical courses in Algeria will be taught in English. The article notes that French is being systematically removed from various sectors, including education and public services, in a context of increasingly strained diplomatic relations with Paris. Ali Boukhlef's article in *Orient XXI* emphasizes that the rapid introduction of English in primary schools aims to counterbalance French influence, portraying it as a political move against the colonial legacy (2022). It suggests that the decision is driven by a desire to replace French with English, rather than addressing educational needs. Similarly, Mensah Degbetchi's article (2025) in *Afrique-sur7* reports that the Ministry of Higher Education has mandated the use of English in universities, particularly in fields like medicine and science, starting from the 2025 academic year. The article links this shift to broader geopolitical tensions, implying that the move is politically motivated. Moreover, Arab News (2022) discusses Algeria's decision to replace French with English in higher education, framing it within the context of deteriorating diplomatic relations with France. The article suggests that the language shift is a response to political tensions, rather than a strategic educational reform.

In addition to owing it to political tensions, French media was sometimes derogatory. In an article by *Courrier International*, the Algerian pupil is portrayed through a caricature as

“ane” -donkey in French- prior to the pro-English policy and as “donkey” after introducing ELT in primary school. The idea conveyed is that Algerian pupils are “donkeys” in both cases. If the writer or the caricature designer had wanted to be objective, they would have opted for other common words in English like “Bonjour” prior to reform and “Good morning” after promoting English. The choice of word “ane” and “donkey” written on the pupil’s forehead by no means meet journalistic ethics.

Figure (1): A Caricature Comparing the Algerian Pupil Before and After Introducing English in Primary School



Courrier International, 2022

5. Discussion

Because linguistic promotion counts as soft power, the potential rise of English in the former French colony may undermine France’s linguistic empire. French motives of linguistic and culture hegemony will eventually be threatened if English continues its successful penetration into the Algerian linguistic landscape. Therefore, the news of promoting ELT and English language use in general by Algeria is expected to cause resentment among the French, which was clearly expressed through various media outlets. Such linguistic pride has blinded French media from the fact that French is losing ground in Algeria and hence in Africa. Lingual supremacy and pride in their imperial and colonial past has made French media engage in unmethodical assessment by purely politicizing a linguistic and educational shift necessary to the needs of nowadays’ Algeria. As a result, articles and interviews under study fail to reach objective coverage. The misleading and

biased interpretations are in denial that English is overriding French in not only previous Commonwealth countries but also worldwide including French former colonies.

6- Conclusion

The latest language policies, enacting ELT in primary school and enhancing the use of EMI at university, have been received with bias and prejudice by French media. By highly politicizing the news and articulating insulting and derogatory statements about a policy favouring English, French media's interpretations have gainsaid the utilitarian reasons of English that would be advantageous to the Algerian individual in terms of scientific research, tourism, economy, and global citizenship. This study demonstrates that the interpretations voiced by French media are characterized by partiality towards the maintenance of French. Findings also suggest that French media is owing Algeria's promotion of English to the growing diplomatic tensions between Algiers and Paris, denying the global lingua franca status of English. In this respect, the media content covering the new of Algeria's pro-English policy often lacks professionalism in journalism and stems from a colonial mindset emphasizing superiority over the former colonized.

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