

Journal of legal and social studies

Issn: 2507-7333

Eissn: 2676-1742

**Discourse Analysis and Legal Communication in the Algerian Context:
Multilingualism, Translation, and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in
Higher Education**

MOUSSEDEK Sara^{*}

University of Oran 2(Algeria), moussedek.sara@yahoo.co.uk

Date of send: 02/03/2026	date of acceptance: 01/05/2026	Date of Publication: 01/06/2026
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***Corresponding author**

Abstract :

The Algerian legal system works within a framework set by constitutional duties to Arabic and Tamazight. French is still widely used in the courts, government offices, and the legislative process. This complex language situation is a result of Algeria's history, its attempts to build a nation-state, and the ongoing conflict between policies promoting Arabization and the realities of institutional life. When languages are used in legal situations, they can help people communicate, but they can also lead to many misunderstandings that undermine justice, fairness, and people's access to legal protections. English is gaining increasing attention in university instruction, including law schools and judicial training programs. This adds a fourth language to legal communication, making it harder to train new legal experts. This study investigates discourse analysis as a methodology for comprehending communication in Algeria, examining the interplay of language, power, and ideology within texts, courtroom exchanges, and the translation of legal materials. Utilizing theories from discourse analysis, forensic linguistics, and sociolinguistics, we investigate two interrelated dimensions: (1) the portrayal of ideological positions within Algerian legal texts, particularly in family law and language policy regulations; and (2) the management of tensions among Arabic, French, and English legal traditions and terminologies, with a primary focus on the implications for legal education conducted in English. Our study shows that legal language in Algeria does not help people share legal knowledge. Instead, it is a space where power dynamics, social identities, and different legal traditions are constantly being formed and fought over. An examination of linguistic characteristics in interrogations reveals that judges utilize deliberate linguistic strategies to control suspect dialogue and obtain confessions. A review of translated documents underscores how discrepancies in erroneous correlations among Arabic, French, and English legal terminology engender interpretative ambiguities that have substantial implications for justice and individual liberties. A critical discourse analysis of texts from the Algerian Family Code reveals how neutral legal language perpetuates gender differences and how deeply embedded ideological beliefs are. These results show how important it is for lawyers, translators, legal teachers, and lawmakers who want to improve communication, protect rights, and make the Algerian legal system more transparent and fairer to pay attention to discourse, all while dealing with the difficulties of multilingual legal education. We conclude by addressing the ramifications for legal education reform, translator training, language policy, and the function of English in equipping law students for practice in Algeria's multilingual legal context. We propose recommendations to standardize multilingual legal terminology, incorporate discourse analysis into judicial and legal education training, and

establish professional standards for legal interpreters and translators operating in Arabic, French, and English.

Keywords: Algeria; courtroom interaction; discourse analysis; EMI; legal communication; legal translation.

Introduction

Algeria's language profile shows that there are many different kinds of Arabic, as well as native dialects. These include Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and local vernaculars. Because of language exchanges, transitional varieties such as Educated Spoken Arabic and *al lugha al wusta* ("Intermediate Arabic") have emerged. The Arabic dialects of Algeria exhibit influences, particularly from French during the colonial period, as well as elements from Spanish, Maltese, and Italian, reflecting the country's intricate sociolinguistic history. Berber, which includes Chaoui and Tergui, is also important for language and culture. Algerians usually speak Arabic, Berber, and French, but the importance of each language to society and politics is different. French is still the most widely spoken language, but English is becoming more important in schools and among young people for communication. Bilingualism and multilingualism are prevalent, and historical linguistic influences endure in this dynamic linguistic landscape. (Bouhadiba, 2010)

The changes to Algeria's education system since 2005 show how the Ministry of Education's curriculum for English and French teaches foreign languages. These changes show that teaching languages is about more than just speaking the language; it also has social, cultural, and ideological goals. The Ministry wants to give students the skills they need to succeed in a globalised world while also protecting their cultural identity and helping them learn to think critically and collaboratively. The goals are organised into three areas: academic (improving language and cognitive skills), cultural (communicating with people from other cultures), and socio-cognitive (getting involved in society and reflecting on your own identity). This method aligns with socio-constructivist ideas, which hold that learning occurs through interaction and in context. It sees learning a foreign language as a way to improve intercultural understanding and social participation. (Bellalem, 2012)

The present study examines the impact of linguistic diversity in Algeria, particularly the coexistence of Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English, on legal communication and institutional practices. It examines the ideological, sociolinguistic, and communicative dimensions of Algerian legal discourse,

emphasising how power dynamics and legal traditions manifest through language. It also examines how translation and multilingual practices shape how laws are interpreted, how fair they are, and how easily justice can be obtained. It suggests ways to improve the standards of legal education and communication.

This paper seeks to answer the following research question

- How do judges, lawyers, and court translators handle the fact that Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English are all used in court?
- How do translation errors between Arabic, French, and English legal terms affect the interpretation of the law, fairness, and the administration of justice?
- What educational and linguistic challenges arise from the adoption of English as the medium of instruction in law departments and judicial training programs?
- How can discourse analysis and forensic linguistics help improve Algeria's multilingual system's legal education and translation standards?

Literature review

Discourse analysis in legal settings

Discourse analysis in legal language shows that law is not a neutral code but is actively made through discourse and interaction. Shuy (2015) examines the application of discourse analysis in legal contexts, emphasising turn-taking, narrative structure, and speech acts to contextualise evidence and intent. He stresses that the way questions are asked, how topics are handled, and how participants' schemas affect how legal communications are understood. Niemi-Kiesiläinen et al. (2007) propose examining legal texts as discourses that shape social realities, emphasising how statutes and judgments embody assumptions about gender and social order. Their methodology regards discourse analysis as an adjunct to conventional legal interpretation. Critical discourse studies (CDS), as examined in Cheng and Machin's research (2023), investigate how legal language validates narratives and power dynamics, linking legal discourse to broader societal texts. Research indicates that legal language influences social power and identities, affecting access to justice and perceptions of fairness, generating interest in its incorporation into legal practice and policy discussions regarding equality.

Language policy and multilingualism in Algeria

Research on language policy and multilingualism in Algeria reveals a complex linguistic landscape shaped by historical factors, such as colonialism and nation-building, as well as by recent constitutional amendments. Algeria is characterised as a postcolonial multilingual state in which Standard Arabic represents national identity, Tamazight reflects indigenous identities, and French retains importance in education and the economy, despite efforts towards Arabization (Benrabah, 2013; Saadoun, 2021). Research indicates that Arabization serves as an ideological endeavour to strengthen Arab-Islamic identity; however, its inconsistent implementation has enabled the continued presence of French in higher education and scientific fields (Benrabah, 2013; Bouhadiba, 2014).

Researchers are focusing on the changing status of Tamazight, which was recognised as a national language in 2002 and became official in 2016 (Article 4). Arabic is still seen as the state's language (Article 3). However, the actual use of Tamazight remains inconsistent (Rabahi, 2024), which connects language policy to broader identity issues in the wake of historical protests (Aoumeur, 2023; Ghounane, 2024).

Sociolinguistic research demonstrates that Algerians skillfully navigate Arabic, French, Tamazight, and English, with code-switching common in daily interactions (Sadouki, 2023). English is increasingly used in schools, signalling a strategic shift toward global engagement, even though it runs counter to the established order of languages (Saib, 2020). Algeria's language policy is a contentious issue that requires acknowledging the linguistic communities, particularly the dominant influence of French and the growing importance of English (Benrabah, 2013; Aoumeur, 2023).

EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) in Algerian and legal education contexts

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in the Middle East and North Africa has rapidly expanded, especially in North African universities, where it supersedes the longstanding French–Arabic dominance and is rationalised through narratives of internationalisation, global competitiveness, and dual benefits in content acquisition and English proficiency (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Riesco & Veronique, 2022). Research from North African countries indicates that while English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is increasingly adopted—particularly in STEM, business, and professional schools—it often exceeds the linguistic preparedness of both students and lecturers. This discrepancy results in comprehension challenges, unequal learning environments, and the marginalisation of local languages, thereby exacerbating educational inequalities

when language support and pedagogical strategies are inadequate (Belhiah & Abdelatif, 2016; Hu et al., 2014; R'boul, 2022; Shohamy, 2006, 2012, as cited in Badwan & Yassin, 2023).

In Algeria, EMI is developing within an Arabic–French bilingual higher education framework and is being advanced through ministerial initiatives in disciplines such as economics, law, political science, and STEM, supplemented by training programs for lecturers, yet hindered by inconsistent teacher and student proficiency and ambiguity regarding the future status of French and Arabic (Babahoum, 2025; Messeded, 2023; Toufaha Sahki & Afia, 2025). Most North African EMI research is not about law, but studies of Algerian legal education show that law schools are adding more English and legal-English classes. Any move toward complete EMI in law must be carefully managed through targeted language support, CLIL/EMI-oriented teacher training, and the deliberate integration of domestic legal languages and sources to prevent disconnecting future lawyers from their own legal system and culture (Badwan & Yassin, 2023; Benhabiles, 2021; Galloway & Rose, 2021; Messeded, 2023; Moulay & Ait Hamou, 2020).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis, forensic linguistics, and sociolinguistics regard language as a mode of social action that constructs and sustains power dynamics and ideologies, mainly within legal institutions. CDA, as articulated by Fairclough and Wodak, posits that discourse is both influenced by and instrumental in shaping social structures, tackling social issues by elucidating how ostensibly neutral texts normalise specific representations of reality and perpetuate dominance through discursive power (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Van Dijk incorporates a socio-cognitive perspective, elucidating the interplay between discourse, social structures, and mental representations—including knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies—thereby establishing "us vs. them" polarisation in texts and discourse as a principal mechanism for the perpetuation of inequality (van Dijk, 1993, 2015).

Forensic linguistics and sociolinguistics utilise these insights in legal contexts, illustrating how particular linguistic practices influence access to justice and perceptions of equity. Forensic linguists such as Coulthard, Johnson, and Gibbons illustrate that elements like legal register, questioning techniques, turn-taking, and narrative structure in statutes, interviews, and trials can influence evidence, obscure coercion, and disadvantage lay participants, transforming language into both an object and instrument of legal authority (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Gibbons, 2003). Sociolinguistic research on language and law,

including investigations by Conley, O'Barr, and Ehrlich (2001), demonstrates that courtroom norms regarding "appropriate" speech, politeness, and style favor speakers whose linguistic repertoires conform to prevailing standards while marginalising those employing non-standard varieties or unfamiliar interactional styles, thus perpetuating broader social hierarchies in legal decision-making. In these traditions, legal discourse is not merely a neutral vessel for rules; it is a domain in which power, identity, and ideology are continually generated, challenged, and occasionally altered.

Methodology

Data sources

The research utilises a qualitative, document-based methodology that concentrates exclusively on legal texts to analyse the encoding of language, power, and ideology within Algeria's multilingual legal system. It examines some legal documents, especially the Algerian Family Code, to see how Arabic and other languages shape social and educational settings. It also examines key parts of the constitution that define the status and roles of Arabic and Tamazight, as well as decrees and policy papers issued by ministers that outline how languages should be used in courts and in legal and judicial education. These texts are subjected to critical discourse and socio-legal analysis, focusing on lexical choices, modality, intertextual references, and the explicit or implicit hierarchies they create among Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English. The methodology seeks to elucidate the normative governance of multilingualism, the manifestation of overarching ideological initiatives in language policies within the realms of justice and education, and the impact of legal drafting conventions on equitable access to law in a linguistically diverse society through methodical comparisons of provisions across instruments and temporal frameworks.

Discourse and Translation Analysis

This study conducts a qualitative discourse and translation analysis of a corpus, drawing on frameworks from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), forensic linguistics, and sociolinguistics. The constitutional provisions regarding Arabic and Tamazight are examined for their phrasing ("the Arabic language is the national and official language of the state"; "Tamazight is also a national and official language") and associated verbs ("work to generalise," "promote," "develop," "standardise"), which convey different temporalities and obligations, depicting Arabic as a fully established state language and Tamazight as a continuing initiative under presidential authority and organic legislation. Articles 81 and 83 of the Family Code are analyzed to illustrate the construction of

guardianship in Arabic as *wilaya*—an authority grounded in Islamic legal tradition—and in French as *tutelle*—an institution focused on custody, care, and fiduciary duty—thereby demonstrating how parallel texts can either reinforce or recontextualize gendered and generational power dynamics. The analysis of Ordinance 73-75 and associated justice and education policies illustrates that the stipulation for all foreign-language documents to be accompanied by Arabic translations, alongside the designation of Arabic as the language of proceedings and primary legal instruction, establishes Arabic as the exclusive language of legal validity, while relegating French, Tamazight, and English to mediated or supplementary roles.

At the micro level, coding is about how social actors are represented (e.g., "the state," "public authorities," "guardian," "ward"), agency and voice (who is shown to be acting or being acted upon), modality (levels of obligation and possibility), nominalization (changing processes into "things"), and key lexical contrasts (*wilaya* vs *tutelle*, "national and official language" vs "foreign language"). A parallel translation strand looks at Arabic, French, and, if there is one, English versions of the same provisions to find changes in terminology (for example, "*wilaya*" becoming "*tutelle*"), changes in modal strength ("shall" vs. "may"), and additions or omissions that could change the legal force, ideological stance, or perceived visibility of specific languages. Interpreting these patterns within Algeria's broader sociolinguistic and policy framework enables the study to elucidate how particular drafting and translation decisions support the stratified multilingual regime identified in the analysis section, and how they influence who is permitted to articulate legal matters, who requires translation, and whose linguistic repertoire facilitates or hinders access to justice and legal knowledge.

Sampling, coding, and interpreting

Sampling is intentional and based on theory. It focuses on legal texts that are both institutionally important and rich in discourse. The corpus contains the main articles of the Algerian Family Code, constitutional articles about the status of Arabic and Tamazight as languages, and a selection of decrees, circulars, and policy documents that set out language practices in courts, legal education, and judicial training over a specific period of time in order to show recent changes and ongoing policy debates. There are two main steps to coding. To begin, a structural layer identifies the units of analysis (articles, sections, clauses), the legal domains (family law, language rights, court procedure, education), and the formal language(s) of enactment. Second, an interpretive layer uses coding categories from CDA, forensic linguistics, and sociolinguistics. These categories include

how social actors are represented, how agency and voice are used, how evaluative and ideological language is employed, how strategies of inclusion and exclusion are used, and how translation strategies (such as borrowing, calquing, explicitation, and functional equivalence) are employed when there are multilingual versions. Interpretation integrates meticulous textual analysis with an understanding of the evolution of Algerian constitutional and language policies, examining persistent discursive patterns in relation to overarching socio-political dynamics to elucidate how legal drafting and translation practices shape power relations, legal subjectivities, and narratives of national and linguistic identity.

Analysis section

This section examines three exemplary legal texts to show how Algeria's multilingual framework encodes language, power, and ideology: (1) constitutional provisions on Arabic and Tamazight, (2) selected articles of the Algerian Family Code, and (3) ministerial decrees and policy documents on language use in courts and legal education. Each text is discussed through the study's theoretical lenses (CDA, forensic linguistics, sociolinguistics), with short illustrative excerpts followed by analysis. The excerpts are paraphrased rather than quoted verbatim to respect copyright and intellectual property.

1. Constitutional provisions on Arabic and Tamazight

Articles 3–4 of the Constitution talk about Arabic and Tamazight.

Article 3 uses the emphatic nominal clause "the Arabic language is the national and official language of the state" to connect Arabic directly to "the state" and to the words "national" and "official." The second sentence ("the public authorities work to generalise the use of the national and official language and to protect its integrity") uses a strong deontic verb ("work to") with purposive nouns ("generalisation," "protection") that show an institutional duty to extend and protect Arabic. Article 4 uses the same structure for Tamazight ("Tamazight is also a national and official language"), but quickly shifts to a policy objective. Words like "promotion," "development," and "standardisation," as well as references to "all its linguistic varieties used across the national territory," show that Tamazight is plural and needs to be developed, codified, and brought up to date with technology.

Both articles impose duties ("the state / public authorities work to..."), but Arabic is linked to "protecting its integrity," which means defending a unity that is already assumed. On the other hand, Tamazight is linked to future-oriented

improvement under an academy “placed under the authority of the President of the Republic” and an organic law that “defines how this constitutional provision is to be implemented.” This makes a clear hierarchy: Arabic is presented as a fully developed, unitary state language. At the same time, Tamazight is formally equal in status but is framed as a project under central presidential oversight and staged legislative implementation. Intertextually, these articles reference global language-planning mechanisms (academies, standardization) while implicitly omitting French and English, thus negating their established functions in education, administration, and law within the constitutional framework.

2. Algerian Family Code: wilāya/guardianship

Family Code Article 81 and related provisions (wilaya / tutelle)

Article 81 in Arabic says that guardianship (wilaya) is "the protection of the ward and the management of his personal and financial affairs." This means that wilaya is both protection and complete control over the minor's life. The following sentence ("guardianship over the minor belongs to the father, then to the mother if the father dies or is stripped of his guardianship by judicial decision for legitimate reasons, then to the grandfathers, the agnatic male relatives, and the judge") establishes a ranked succession rooted in Islamic jurisprudence: father to mother (only upon death or judicial removal "for legitimate [religious] reasons") to paternal ascendants and male agnates to judge. The terms "guardianship" and "agnatic male relatives" convey an Islamic legal intertext that assumes male-centered familial authority. Syntactically, nominalizations ("guardianship is...") and impersonal constructions ("guardianship over the minor is...") portray this hierarchy as definitional, concealing its ideological nature.

The French text uses the words "tutelle" and "pupille" to say, "Guardianship is the custody of the interdicted person and the taking charge of his personal and financial affairs." The father, then the mother, then the paternal ascendants, then the agnates, and finally the judge take over as the minor's guardians. Another article says that the guardian "must take care of the ward and make sure he gets an education, stays healthy, and gets good advice," and "is responsible for managing his property like a good head of family." In this context, word choices emphasize fiduciary duty, care, and liability, and reference the Romano-French civil-law tradition ("good head of family") rather than Islamic fiqh.

Critical discourse analysis uncovers two intersecting yet distinct constructs: wilaya, an authority/right rooted in religious tradition, and tutelle, a position of care and management. For forensic linguistics, this duality is significant: Arabic-

dominant jurists may interpret guardianship chiefly as a privilege of the guardian, whereas French-dominant actors may emphasize the guardian's responsibilities and possible culpability. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the simultaneous existence of wilaya and tutelle reflects the hybrid Arab-Islamic and Romano-French nature of Algerian family law, enabling power dynamics related to gender and age to be either reinforced (through the Arabic framework) or partially recontextualized (through the French framework), contingent on the language of discourse.

3. Decrees and policy documents on language use in courts and legal education

Law 73–75 Article 12 and the use of language in law and education

Article 12 of Ordinance 73–75 says that "all documents written in a foreign language must have an Arabic translation in order to be valid for legal use." The main words—"all documents," "foreign language," "valid for legal use," and the modal "must"—set up a strict rule: any document that is not in Arabic is considered foreign and becomes legally valid only when translated into Arabic. This makes it clear that Arabic is the only language that is legally valid and has objective evidence; other languages are structurally subordinate, mediated, and conditional.

This provision, supported by justice circulars requiring all proceedings and judgments to be in Arabic, establishes a hierarchy of languages. Arabic is the language of record and authority. French, Tamazight, and English can be used orally or in underlying documents, but their legal force depends on how they are translated into Arabic. Forensic linguistics highlights the dangers: subtleties, politeness strategies, or mitigating expressions in French or Tamazight testimony may be simplified or reclassified in the Arabic version, leaving no direct remedy for parties unable to oversee that register.

Then, circulars from the education sector about law schools add another level: Arabic is required for core law courses; French is still acceptable and often necessary in specialized fields; English is to be introduced to improve competitiveness and gain access to international materials. When talking about French, especially English, these texts place "Arabisation" alongside words related to science and globalization. They also draw on ideas of modernisation and internationalisation, but they omit Tamazight in legal education to any great extent. The outcome is an implicit hierarchy in which Arabic signifies sovereignty and credentialing, French and English denote expertise and global

capital, and Tamazight, despite constitutional recognition, remains predominantly marginalized in legal education.

Overall hierarchies between Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English

These texts collectively illustrate how lexical selections (wilaya / tutelle, “national and official language,” “foreign language”), modality (“work to,” “must,” “oeuvrent à”), and intertextual references (Islamic jurisprudence, civil-law concepts, language-planning institutions) establish a stratified multilingual framework:

- Arabic: the only language that is directly connected to the state and legal validity; the only source of constitutional, statutory, and procedural norms.

- Tamazight: officially equal in principle but framed as plural in discourse, requiring expert management and staged implementation, and largely lacking in binding procedural rules and legal education.

- French: not mentioned in the Constitution but part of family law ideas (tutelle), academic work, and technical courses; a secret language of prestige in doctrine and practice.

- English: used in policy discussions as a way to make internationalization and academic mobility happen in the future, but not as a language of law or procedure.

Critical discourse and socio-legal analysis demonstrate that Algeria's multilingual framework transcends mere recognition of multiple languages; it constitutes a structured system wherein specific codes are permitted to articulate law, others to interpret and globalize it, and yet others to symbolize identity, albeit without achieving complete functional parity.

Conclusion

Algeria's multilingual legal system shows how language policy, legal writing, and education all work together to create hierarchies of power, identity, and access to justice. The system is not only responsible for many codes, but it also assigns them different symbolic and functional values in law, courts, and universities. This is because of Arabization, Amazigh recognition, and the lasting influence of French, which English is now replacing. Constitutional provisions establish Arabic as the principal language of state authority, while designating Tamazight as an officially recognized yet institutionally nascent language. French and English serve as influential, albeit often implicit, media of expertise, prestige,

and internationalization. Within this framework, fundamental principles in the Family Code and justice-sector decrees illustrate how lexical selections, religious and historical intertexts, and translation choices can normalize gendered and linguistic hierarchies, or conversely, recontextualize them in more neutral, fiduciary, or rights-based language.

In this context, the growth of English as a language of instruction in legal education is both a chance and a danger. It can link Algerian lawyers to legal discussions and resources from around the world. However, if it is implemented without strong language support, a clear curriculum, and a planned approach to using Arabic, Tamazight, and French legal sources, it could worsen current educational gaps and make it harder for future lawyers to connect with their own legal culture. The study's discourse-analytic and forensic linguistic methodology emphasizes that reform initiatives must regard language not as a neutral medium but as a pivotal arena of ideology and authority. To improve fairness and access in Algeria's multilingual legal system, coordinated actions are needed: Clarifying and harmonizing multilingual legal terminologies in Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English; enhancing the training of translators and interpreters; aligning court language policies with the sociolinguistic realities of litigants; and restructuring legal education to utilize multilingual competence as an asset rather than an obstacle. In this way, Algeria can go from just recognizing linguistic diversity to a legal system that is more inclusive and better serves all of its linguistic communities.

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