

Language Attitudes and Identity among Algerian Immigrants in France

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ABSTRACT: *Immigration is a challenging process that can profoundly alter individuals' identities and attitudes towards their country of origin and their home language (s). The present paper concerns the community of Algerian immigrants in France. It explores their Identity issues and language attitudes towards Algerian dialect and Standard Arabic. It aims at providing data about language and identity among minority groups of immigrants in France. The research was conducted using an asymmetric four-point Likert scale questionnaire. The sample consists of fifty Algerian immigrants in France aged between fifteen and forty-five years old, part of a different generation. The results reveal that most informants show positive attitudes towards standard Arabic and Algerian Dialects and wish to transmit that linguistic heritage to their descendants. Additionally, the findings indicate that the majority of the sample maintain their Algerian identity but simultaneously strongly associate with the French culture in various life situations and contexts. This highlights their constant feeling of belonging or non-belonging to two different cultures while generating issues at the level of their identity formation.*

KEYWORDS: *identity, culture, Algerian immigrants in France, language attitudes, Likert scale*

Introduction

Migration is not simply about moving from one country to another; it consists of changing the living environment (De Certeau 1988). This movement can have substantial effects not only on the immigrants

themselves but on both their home and host societies as well (Massey 2004; Taylor 2004). It affects numerous aspects of their lives as it allows for a shift in their ideologies, identities, language practices, political and cultural practices, and economic resources (Gold & Nawyn 2013).

From a sociolinguistic view, in the migration context, the contact between languages can have numerous consequences, such as language shift, which occurs in situations where minority groups are incapable of maintaining positive attitudes towards the use of their home language and identification to their home culture (Romaine 2003). Other consequences of language contact are language attrition and even language death which occur if these minority groups fail to transmit the language heritage across generations of speakers among these minority groups. Therefore, language attitudes and identity play a significant role in the effectiveness of the reconstruction immigrants experience in their receiving society (Dailey-O'Cain 2011; Liebscher 2011).

This study explores the case of Algerian immigrants in France answering the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Algerian immigrants in France towards Standard Arabic and Algerian dialect?
2. How do these immigrants identify themselves?

The hypotheses are as follows:

1. Algerian immigrants have positive attitudes towards both standard Arabic and Algerian dialect because they regard them as parts of their linguistic heritage.
2. Algerian immigrants feel themselves at the same time French and Algerians assuming both cultures equally.

The study intends to find out if Algerian immigrants in France still have consideration for Standard Arabic (hereafter SA), and the Algerian Dialect (hereafter AD) representing the official and the first language of their country of origin respectively. Additionally, it investigates the use of these codes on a daily basis. It studies the attitudes of Algerian immigrants in France towards AD and SA to measure the extent of their

influence on their language choice. Finally, it attempts to reveal the way immigration has affected the identity of these individuals and explore the relationship between their attitudes towards SA and AD and the maintenance of their use. This research can contribute to the promotion of heritage language maintenance.

Theoretical Framework

The Algerian Immigration in France

Algerian immigration in France started at the end of the 20th century. It was encouraged by the French government after the First and Second World Wars due to a lack of workers it manifested. This movement accelerated considerably, reaching, by the end of the 1950s, a huge number of Algerians in France. In the 1960s, emigration to France continued despite the French government's attempts to deport a large majority of them. By 1974, the French and Algerian governments aligned to block this migration process to control it. However, the migration flow never stopped, mostly because of the job opportunities France was offering and for family reunification motives as well (Meynier 2011).

Previous sociolinguistic studies about immigration have shown the numerous challenges that immigrants can face while settling in a new country. When faced with a new language and culture, immigrants tend to develop new behaviors that differ from one individual to the other. Berry (1992) proposed four acculturation strategies representing the different ways individuals negotiate their identity and culture:

1. Integration: The person adopts the receiving culture while retaining the heritage culture
2. Assimilation: The person adopts the receiving culture and neglects the heritage culture
3. Separation: The person rejects the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture
4. Marginalisation: The person rejects both the receiving and the heritage cultures.

Language Attitudes

Among many scholars who studied language attitudes, Crystal defines this concept as "the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others." (Crystal 1992, 215). In this line, Ajzen explains that language attitudes are "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event" (Ajzen 2005, 3). These attitudes have a psychological aspect and can only be evaluated through the use of both indirect questions and manifestations (Baker 1992). Ajzen explains that attitudes can be measured from a scale that goes from up to down, from good to bad, from positive to negative and so on (Ajzen 2001) and the level of their intensity can: - affect judgments - guide behavior - persist - be resistant to change (Perloff 2003, 56).

Despite the discord over the definition of language attitudes, most scholars agree on their significance. Fasold (1984, 158) argues that a language cannot be separated from the different social parameters surrounding it, including attitudes and identity. In fact, positive attitudes are considered a relevant factor in facilitating the learning and use of a language because these attitudes help predict the choice of the language and peoples' perception of it (Garrett 2010). Additionally, Baker (1992) explored and assured the critical role that language attitudes can have in a language's shift and death. In minority groups specifically, Holmes et al.'s (2001) study in Zealand showed that such a population's home language was maintained or not depending on the nature of their attitudes towards it. This study contradicts Slavik's investigation (2001) on Maltese migrants in Canada, who proved that positive attitudes that minority groups manifest towards their language have nothing to do with its maintenance or shift.

Identity

Identity represents how people manifest who they are and to whom they belong. When put in context, personal identity represents the attributes a person possesses that are specific to that person. Gios (2010) explains that age, sex, family, work, and education shape one's identity. This is what differentiates one person from the others. Social identity is

an identity that is shared by several people in a society and "refers to a person's sense of belonging to a group and the attitudes and emotions that accompany this sense of belonging" (Vedder & Virta 2005, 319). Norton defines cultural identity as "the relationship between an individual and [other] members of a particular ethnic group (such as Mexican and Japanese) who share a common history, a common language, and similar ways of understanding the world." (2006, p.02). Lastly, religious identity refers to identifying with a particular religion.

One of the most essential characteristics of identity is its non-static nature. Norton argues that identity is instead "...dynamic and constantly changing across time and place..." (Norton 2006,03). It adapts to the evolution of individuals through time, either out of choice or forced by a set of circumstances. These changes that occur can result in a person holding multiple identities simultaneously (Coulmas 2005). In addition, individuals can acquire different attributes of different social groups to which they once belonged, helping shape their identity. In the context of immigration, identity can be constructed in three possible ways. First, immigrants can adopt normative attitudes toward their home society and normative attitudes toward their receiving society and build from both their identities. Second, they can acquire new normative attitudes from their host society and forget the ones of their home society, building an entirely new identity. Finally, they can come with an already-shaped identity and refuse to adapt to the new norms of the receiving society. Their choice will depend on their own will, the objectives they wish to achieve in that society, and the extent of their knowledge about their cultural heritage.

Language, Culture and Identity

Culture is compulsory in shaping one's identity. Rovira highlights that "The shared values, customs, and histories characteristic of a particular culture have a strong influence on how a person behaves, thinks, and views the world." (Rovira 2008, 66) People should have sufficient knowledge about their cultural heritage, who they are, and where they come from, and should be free to understand and choose the culture with which they identify the most. Cultural heritage is essentially

conveyed through language, and similarly, language is an essential component of cultural identity. It also plays a significant role in transmitting cultural heritage from one generation to another. Therefore, it can be concluded that the loss of a language will ultimately result in the loss of the culture associated with it and cultural identity will be drastically affected subsequently.

In the context of immigration, when immigrants abandon the use of their heritage language, a loss of their cultural identity systematically follows, including "its greetings, its curses, its cures, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its rhymes, its proverbs, its wisdom, and its prayers" (Fishman 1999, 448). On the other hand, if they maintain the use of their native language, they are often obliged to cope with two different cultural identities simultaneously. In that case, immigrants are faced with a sense of belonging to the social group of their country of origin with its language, positive attitudes, values, and customs are still omnipresent, but at the same time, a sense of belonging to the social group of their receiving country where another language is spoken and other normative attitudes are presented. Objectively, neither of these two situations is pleasant, and this is why immigrants are often in conflict with the construction of their own identity due to the complex relationship that exists between language, culture, and identity. This research will try to explain where the identity of Algerian immigrants in France stands to enlighten the relationship between the use of AD and SA among these minority groups and their sense of belonging.

Methods and Data

This research is an exploratory case study where 50 Algerian immigrants in France were selected as a sample population to answer a questionnaire. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic that spread all around the world, the questionnaire was administered online via social media (Facebook groups, Messenger, WhatsApp). The asymmetric four points Likert scale questionnaire was selected among the other existing types. Such questionnaire proposes four options to give their opinion about the presented statements (Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree). It was appropriate for this research because it keeps hold of the

respondents’ attention maximizing the chances for them to give realistic answers. The questionnaire was administered in French language to make it accessible to all the eventual respondents.

The first rubric helped gathering important information about the participants. As a result, it was revealed that the sample consists of 16 males and 34 females who range in age from 15 to 54 years old. The sample is composed of individuals from different generations so some are born in France while others are born in France. Nevertheless, all participants have been residing in France for at least a year. The second and third rubrics were dedicated the attitudes of immigrants towards SA and AD respectively while the last part investigated their identity. The analysis of Data was mostly quantitative due to the nature of the used questionnaire.

Results and Findings

The first rubric was entitled: Attitudes towards Standard Arabic. The results in figure 1 reveal that 56% of the sample strongly agree that SA is a beautiful language while only 8% strongly disagree with that statement. Concerning the usefulness of Arabic, it was reported that 72% of the informants agree that SA is a useful language while 28% disagree. Finally, the answers show that for 40% of the sample try to initiate conversations in Arabic compared to the 60% who never do.

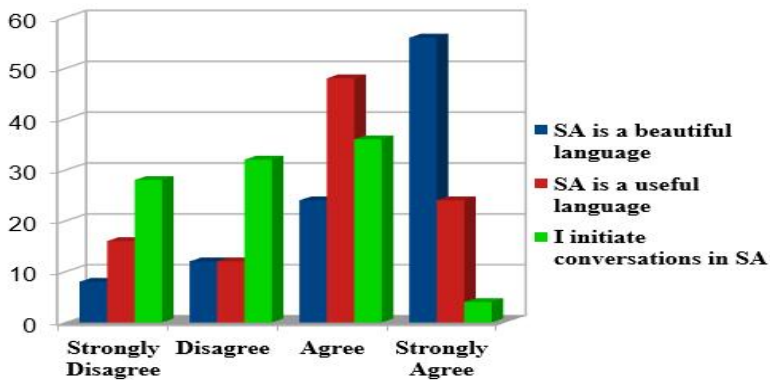


Figure 1. Attitudes towards SA and its use

The following three statements presented in figure 2 concerned the transmission of SA from one generation of immigrants to another. The results show that 48% of the informants wish their children to learn SA and 40% of them wish to preserve this heritage language. Moreover, opinions were different about placing their children in Arabic schools. While 52% of the participants would take such initiative, the rest of them prefer not. Finally, 68% of the investigation panel are not willing to speak to their children in SA.

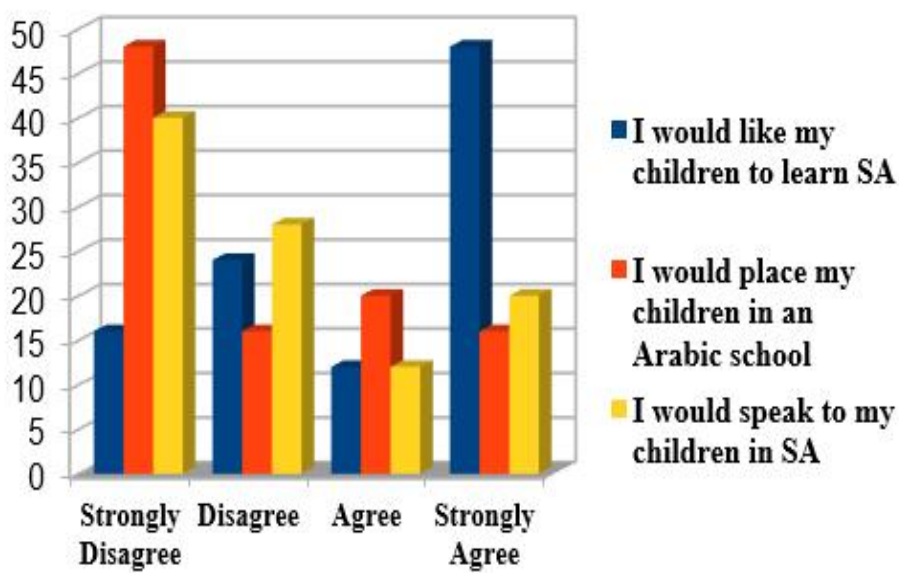


Figure 2. Transmission of SA to Immigrants Children

The second rubric was dedicated to the participants’ attitudes towards AD. The first section of this rubric aimed at investigation how the participants view this code and how often is it used in their daily life interactions. The results can be summarised in the following table 1. The second one concerned both the importance of heritage language transmission over generations and their preference between the Algerian and the French language and cultures in different contexts and situations.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
AD is my mother tongue	12 %	4 %	12 %	72 %
At home, I speak more in AD than in French	20 %	20 %	12 %	48 %
I prefer to speak more in AD than in French	32 %	28 %	20 %	20 %
I initiate conversations in AD	32 %	16 %	28 %	24 %
AD is the language variety that represents me the most	24%	20 %	16 %	40 %

Table 1. Attitudes towards AD and its use

The first item presented AD as their mother tongue and 72% of the informants strongly agree with that statement. The second statement's results show that 60% of the informants confirm they use mostly AD at home daily compared to the 40% of them who prefer using French. In terms of their preference though, 60% of the participants prefer speaking in French. The next statement shows that 52% of the panel initiate conversations in AD. Finally, 56% of the respondents declare that AD is the language variety that represents them the most.

In the second part of this rubric, the participants were initially questioned about the transmission of AD to their children. The results revealed that 72% of them declared they would speak to their children in that code. The following statement addressed the participants linguistic preference concerning television programs and listening to radio podcasts and it was reported that 76% of the panel preferred French over AD. Finally, 76%

of the informants think that AD speakers can easily integrate into the French society while 12% disagree with this statement.

The last part of this questionnaire was meant to investigate the identity of these minority groups in different life situations. In the French context, 52% of the respondents identify more to the Algerian community than to the French, at home, with friends, at work, school or university. However, when being in an Algerian context, the results reveal that 32% of respondents feel more French than Algerians while 56% feel more Algerians. Concerning their clothing style, 40% of the informants identify to both French and Algerian cultures and 52% of them like both Algerian and French food. Additionally, 76% of the sample declare prefer Islamic celebrations and would support the Algerian football team while opposed to the French one. At last, the final statement addressed their children identity and 72% of them would prefer their children to identify to both French and Algerian communities and cultures at the same rate.

Discussion of the Results

The obtained results suggest that most of Algerian immigrants in France have positive attitudes towards both SA and AD. However, there is a general disagreement over the importance of learning the Standard Arabic. This is shown in the extremely limited use of this language in the daily life interactions and activities of these individuals. In addition, most of the participants confess having limited knowledge and are hardly able to express themselves in SA but would like their children to have a minimum mastery of this language. However, the results are different as far as Algerian dialect is concerned. They show that almost all informants refer to this code as their mother tongue and as the language variety that represents them the most. They still use it in their daily life interactions although a large majority of them prefer listening and watching programs in French language.

Nevertheless, they wish their children to learn AD and would contribute to the transmission of that linguistic heritage. Another major conclusion is that a large majority of participants still assume an Algerian identity regardless of the generation they are part of. However, when they are in

contact with French people, in the way they dress up, the way they eat, and the religious celebrations, they rather identify to both cultures at the same time.

Interestingly, many of those individuals who claimed identifying most to the Algerian community and culture especially when being in contact with other Algerian people, feel more French when they spend some time in the Algerian country. This shows that these immigrants are assuming two identities simultaneously. Their Algerian identity is mostly emphasized in the French country while their French identity is revealed in the Algerian setting. This condition of bicultural identity is one of the major effects that immigration has on the process of identity formation. It can be concluded that Algerian immigrants in France are stuck in between their language and culture of origin that they can only keep at a certain extent, and the French language and culture to which they are daily exposed to. La Barbera (2015) argues that in reality, those minority groups will constantly live in between both countries with a feeling of belonging to both societies at the same time but will hardly ever identify completely with one of the two.

Conclusion

This research is an exploratory investigation among the community of Algerian immigrants in France. It aimed at investigating their attitudes towards the two varieties of the Arabic language: the Algerian dialect representing their heritage language and Standard Arabic representing the language of the Islamic religion and the official language of the Algerian country. Moreover, it attempted to explore their identity when their Algerian identity is confronted with another dominant culture that is the French one. The results showed that most immigrants maintain positive attitudes towards both AD and SA. This confirms the first hypothesis of this research. Besides, it was revealed that in terms of their usage, the dialect is still used on a daily basis mostly at home or with other Algerian individuals while SA use is restricted. Concerning their identity, these informants explicitly show their ties with their heritage language and culture. While many of the participants identify to both Algerian and French cultures, most of them present identity issues assuming a different

identity in different life situations and contexts. This refutes the second hypothesis of the researcher which suggest that these people assume both identities equally.

Limitations

Among the limitations of this study is that the Covid-19 Pandemic made the contact with the population under study impossible. The consequences are that the sample could not be selected according to special variables like Age, place of birth or the length of time living in France. With the consideration of such variables, the results would have been more detailed, precise and more valuable.

Nevertheless, the results of this study with the collaboration of other studies about immigrant minority groups, hopes to contribute in the preservation of their heritage language and identity when these are put under pressure by another dominant language and culture which would result in an effective integration and would have a positive impact on their self-reconstruction.

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