From Language Shift to Linguistic Hybridity: The Status and Perceptions of Tamazight in the Algerian Higher Education System

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Abstract

The research examines how Tamazight (the indigenous language of Algeria and the wider North African region) is perceived, used, and hybridised within the Algerian higher education system. It explores how Tamazight intersects with the concepts of indigeneity and hybridity, particularly among the Imazighen in the Chaoui region of eastern Algeria. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach, including survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with university students and faculty members in three public universities in the Chaoui region, an Amazigh-populated area in eastern Algeria. The findings of this research indicate that the Imazighen in the Chaoui region of eastern Algeria do not perceive their indigenous language, Tamazight, very favourably. This is largely due to dominant ideological preferences for Arabic and French, as well as Tamazight's marginalised status and the Imazighen's linguistic adaptability. We argue that such shift has become increasingly hybridised, as younger generations adopt Algerian Arabic (Darja) alongside Arabic, French, and, more recently, English. In contrast, Tamazight continues to be stigmatised and devalued, highlighting the persistent challenges facing the revitalisation of Tamazight in postcolonial Algeria.

Keywords: Tamazight, Indigeneity/Hybridity, Imazighen, Higher Education, Chaoui Region

1.Introduction

The linguistic landscape of postcolonial Algeria is characterised by multiple languages and a plurality of ideological positions with each language trying to define the language, culture, and identity of Algeria. For example, Tamazight is the indigenous language of the Imazighen (singular Amazigh) in the North African region, including Algeria, but it was not until 2002 that it became a 'national language' and 2016 when it

became, alongside Arabic, a 'co-official language' of Algeria. Arabic, however, reached the North African region during the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb in the early Umayyad Caliphate in 670 and gained its official status in 1962, when the Arab nationalist party National Liberation Front (better known by its French name *Front de Libération Nationale* – [FLN]) took control of power and government in post-independence Algeria. Despite the significant impact of Arabic on Tamazight (Kossmann, 2013, pp. 51–85), the Imazighen have not completely switched to Arabic and still primarily speak Tamazight, particularly in rural areas. While Arabic and Tamazight are currently the two official languages of post-independence Algeria, French remains the *de facto* language of scientific higher education and the 'language of upward mobility,' as it is often associated with higher social circles and better job opportunities (Medfouni, 2024).

As a result of over a thousand years of Arabic influence and language contact with French since 1830, the linguistic landscape and cultural productions of the Imazighen in the North African region have become 'hybridised,' leading to code-switching and code-mixing with Arabic and French simultaneously. Benrabah (2013, pp. 1–20) refers to the languages of Algeria as proxies for conflict, explaining how the French colonial legacy marginalised both Tamazight and Arabic in favour of promoting French in Algeria. This has significantly contributed to the decline of Tamazight, following the promotion of Arabic as the unifying language of post-independence Algeria. The profound impact of French on the linguistic landscape of Algeria is now characterised by a negative perception of the French language as the 'problem,' since Algeria became a sovereign state in 1962.

French language and culture were imposed on the Imazighen as a counterforce to Arab nationalism, with Rouighi (2019) noting the strategic role this played in undermining Arab identity. While Amazigh regions are typically peripheral and non-Francophone, the Kabyle region stands out as an exception, where French language and culture are deeply embedded (Medfouni, 2019, p. 118). This distinction is rooted in the colonial construction of Kabyle identity as uniquely compatible with French civilisation, a notion variously described as "Kabyle exceptionalism" (Lazreg, 1983) or the "Kabyle Myth" (Silverstein, 2002). Such narratives were sustained through targeted investments in French-language education and missionary activity in the region (Abi-Mershed, 2010), reinforcing the perceived superiority of the Kabyle over other indigenous populations, particularly Arabs.

In this research, we first examine the history, culture and language of the Imazighen by looking at the historical events and issues surrounding the indigeneity of the Imazighen to the North African region and the current ideological and heterogeneous divisions of the Imazighen in postcolonial Algeria. We focus on the Imazighen as an indigenous population of the Maghreb region – those who pre-dated in their origin the arrival of Maghrebi Arabs during the 7th and 8th centuries CE. We then review some of the most relevant literature on the hybridity theory by asking: What does hybridity mean to the Imazighen and Tamazight in

postcolonial Algeria? What is the status of Tamazight and other languages of instruction in Algerian scientific higher education? What does that say about the larger question of the Imazighen and their marginalisation in post-independence Algeria from 1962? And most importantly, why does such discussion about the Imazighen and Tamazight keep proliferating in postcolonial Algeria?

2. Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

This section outlines the theoretical framework and engages with existing literature on hybridity theory and the politics of resistance in the North African region, particularly in Algeria and Morocco. It also explores the role of language in shaping the cultural and linguistic landscape of the Imazighen in postcolonial Algeria and Morocco.

2.1 Hybridity in Postcolonial Theory

The term 'hybridity' developed its roots from the field of biology and saw a significant surge when postcolonial writings and literature in the second half of the 20th century came to plant themes of racialism, colonisation and hybrid identity firmly at the centre of understanding the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. In the field of cultural theory, the term 'hybridity,' however, is always discussed with reference to the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Homi Bhabha and recently from the perspective of Bridget Violet Lunga, who first conceived the idea of hybridity 'as a survival and resistance strategy' for those who are caught (and often trapped) between the language of their coloniser and their indigenous languages (Lunga, 2004, p. 291). Such a strategy, she argues, can be used as a tool for emancipation or even resistance against current repressors, or their representatives, in the linguistic and cultural spaces of hybridity in Africa.

In the sphere of language and discourse in the 20th century Soviet Union (and indeed Medieval Europe), Bakhtin defines linguistic hybridity (or hybridisation) as a 'mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, within two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 358). Bakhtin's concept of linguistic hybridity was extended to explore various aspects of cultural hybridity (and cultural hybridisation) in societies whose linguistic and cultural identities have been influenced by global trends and globalisation (Marotta 2020; Sanchez-Stockhammer 2012).

According to Barahmeh (2020, p. 212), Bakhtin's definition of hybridity is largely influenced by his two great ideas about language and discourse: dialogism (as an opposite of monologism which asserts the existence of only one voice and no other), and polyphony, which calls for the existence of multiple voices in a discourse. It has also been used, according to Barahmeh (2023, p. 103), in reference to popular politics

of resistance against power and government in the Middle East and North Africa from the start of the Arab uprisings in 2011. This is due, he argues, to the wide applicability of Bakhtin's theories of language and discourse beyond their original context: the Middle Ages and 16th century France.

Dialogism (as Bakhtin conceptualises it) is better explained through the existence of multiplicity of voices within one utterance. In Bakhtin's terms, hybridity is based on active dialogues and dynamic interactions between people and power. It is communal and made by all people in a state, regardless of their origin, language, or social status. Against the state of inertia that best characterises the discourse of monologism in the monologic world, Bakhtin's description of hybridity suggests dynamism and dialogic (and often polyphonic) interactions among all people in society. In his elucidation of dialogism, Bakhtin extends his concept of hybridity to that of heteroglossia, which he defines as 'another's speech in another's language,' as if the 'other' is speaking directly in the text (Bakhtin 1981, p. 324). This definition highlights the diversity of perspectives and voices in communication, not just the author's voice and narrative.

Against linguistic essentialism, which refers to the widespread belief that individuals have an innately predisposed authority to speak their native indigenous languages, Bakhtin disagrees with the view of language as a 'closed system' because such view sees language as a 'static object' with a set of beliefs and factors that could influence language use and contact with others. In Bakhtin's terms, these 'closed system' beliefs about dialogism (and hybridity) serve the interests of the powerful elite and not the subaltern or marginalised people. This is because they show how political elites can view language as a mobilising tool for linguistic cleavage in a nation, in order to achieve their non-linguistic political goals.

In the field of postcolonial theory and the emergence of a 'hybridised form of identity' among the former colonised people at home and in diaspora, Homi Bhabha discusses the term 'hybridity' with special references to the works of Bakhtin on language and discourse. Bhabha (2004, p. 55) describes hybridity through what he calls 'Third Space Theory,' which explains the uniqueness of each person, actor, or [even] context as 'hybrid.' Bhabha relates the processes of hybridisation not only to languages but also to the practices of colonisation. These processes, he considers involves reciprocal and constant processes of appropriation, giving a rise to a hybrid third quality, the 'third space,' belonging to neither the coloniser nor the colonised culture.

Other postcolonial scholars, such as Acheraïou (2011, pp. 179–184) see limits or dangers of the hybridity discourse and its potential for co-optation for oppressive uses, as in the case of ultra-neoliberalist world institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. These novel remarks about hybridity and liminality theory are important because they provide a medium to enhance the applicability of the hybridity theory to the Algerian context and politics after independence. This is evident in the way the new

generation of Imazighen have adapted to the 'new' dynamic and triglossic linguistic landscape of postcolonial Algeria, and second, how they have engaged the profound paradox between holding on to their original language and/or accepting the 'new' culture and language for Algerians after 1962.

2.2 Hybridity as a Tool for Resistance and Political Identity

In the context of the power and resilience of the Imazighen in post-independence Algeria, hybridity as a tool for resistance and political identity provides (in the broader context) a useful and thoughtful lens to think about how many Imazighen in the Kabyle region have fiercely resisted total linguistic Arabisation and at the same time adapted to the dynamic and complex linguistic landscape of postcolonial Algeria. This demonstrates how ordinary people in postcolonial settings often resort to hybridity as a pragmatic strategy to survive and cope with their hard lives under their colonisers and/or current representatives. This is because the legacy of colonialism is profound and continues to shape the linguistic, cultural, and political realities of formerly colonised societies, even after the end of the colonial period (Mbembe, 1992). In the discourse of dissent and popular resistance in postcolonial Algeria, Bhabha's 'Third Space,' we argue, has come to have two interpretations for the Amazigh question: national identities and (dis-) modes of belonging, in reference to followings:

(1) that hybridised space when both the Imazighen and the Arab nationalist party FLN were able to come together during the Algerian War of Independence to call for the liberation of colonial Algeria from France. The Imazighen were therefore free (maybe only momentarily) from France but then faced marginalisation and exclusion under the ruling of the Arab nationalist FLN. The then Imazighen and FLN members have since then developed their hybridised modes of nationalism and belonging to Algerianity, and not particularly to Amazighity.

(2) that hybridised space when the Kabyle people fiercely expressed their concerns for the recognition of Tamazight in the 1980 'Berber Spring' and the 2001 'Black Spring.' These historical events, characterised predominately by protesters and strikes in the Kabyle region and in the capital city Algiers, resulted in the acknowledgement of Tamazight as a 'national language,' in 2002, and as a 'co-official language,' on par with Arabic, in 2016. The hybridity theory thus addresses the political dynamics, regional and global forces, among other local cultural and ideological factors, that have shaped the behaviour of ordinary people and the state in postcolonial Algeria.

2.3 Hybridity in the Politics of Language in Algeria and Morrocco

As far as the question of the Imazighen and Tamazight in the North African region is concerned, the use of Tamazight in countries, such as Algeria and Morocco, illustrates how hybridity is intertwined with the

politics of language, resistance, and the cultural identity of the Imazighen. In the existing literature on the Imazighen and Tamazight as a contact language with Arabic and French, there is a clear connection to the historical and socio-political dynamics that have driven significant changes in language use and policy in each country (e.g., El Aissati et al., 2011; Idhssaine, 2022; Soulaimani, 2016; Twohig, 2017). The state is therefore considered theoretically important for the recognition of French, the promotion of Arabic as a unifying national language, and the standardisation and preservation of Tamazight language and culture following independence from France in the mid-20th century.

To contextualise the theoretical underpinnings of the inclusion of Tamazight in education, it is important to present contrasting views on the cases of Algeria and Morocco. While Tamazight in both countries shares many linguistic similarities – including the role of the state in its standardisation since the late 20th century and the recent adoption of Tifinagh as its official script, there are also key contextual differences when these two countries are put together. Notably, Morocco has taken a more positive stance toward the inclusion and use of Tamazight in education compared to Algeria. This divergence intersects with broader questions of state politics and hybrid forms of belonging of the Imazighen in both countries.

Tamazight in Algerian politics is embedded in long-standing cultural and linguistic marginalisations felt by one powerful group of the Imazighen (the Kabyle people) because they have taken an oppositional stance towards the power of the FLN Arab nationalist party. Tamazight in the Algerian context is also entrenched in regime pragmatism as a tool to stave off an Arab Spring scenario that could have led to regime change (or revolution) in Algeria at the beginning of the wider Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. However, this contrast also yields insights into the wealth of research on the teaching of Tamazight and on the positive attitudes towards the inclusion of Tamazight as a language of instruction in Moroccan schools and universities from 2011. By comparison, there is a lack of scholarly attention on Tamazight and the general unfavorability of its inclusion, particularly in the field of language teaching in Algerian schools and universities. This difference matters, as evidence will show in this research, because of the politically sensitive nature of the Imazighen in the Kabyle region, and in the larger context of Algeria-Morrocco relations, which have been marred by several crises and disagreements since their independence from France in the mid-20th century.

3. Methodology

This section provides a description of the linguistic profile of the participants who took part in this research, the population of the study and the sample and the procedures the researchers took for data collection and analysis.

3.1 The Linguistic Profile of Participants

The participants in this study are primarily located and almost permanently inhabit the Chaoui region in eastern Algeria. They are the indigenous inhabitants of the region, and they are a subgroup of the Imazighen population in Algeria. The participants have a native-like fluency in Arabic and with different levels of proficiency in French. They have been exposed to these two languages, particularly Arabic from birth, or within the critical period of their early language acquisitions. In contrast, they have not been strongly exposed to their original and indigenous language (Tamazight) from birth, nor have they been fully educated in this language at schools or universities, with the exception of those coming from rural areas were Tamazight is still preserved. This may explain their very limited linguistic repertoire in Tamazight, as they have a low level of proficiency. They also often exhibit less linguistic pride or chauvinism in their original language and embrace a sense of inferiority towards their language (Chaker, 1990, pp. 1162-1169). Rather, they have been exposed to the remnants of their language, culture and literature in specific, closed-family settings, depending on the focus of their conversations and discussions. This exposure comes from their older generations or from other Imazighen who speak the 'true' Shawiya language. These individuals often live in rural and isolated areas, where the Tamazight language and Amazigh culture is much more preserved than in urbanised and central areas, such as Annaba and Batna. The new generation of the Imazighen in the Chaoui region can therefore be described as 'language assimilators,' as they tend to prioritise the dominant or official language(s) at the expense of their own, often as a way of integrating with the Arab majority culture that defines postcolonial Algeria.

Many participants who took part in this research have not been taught in Tamazight during their time in schools, nor have they been mindful of preserving their original language, as the Kabyle did in their various socio-political campaigns from 1962. Of greatest importance, perhaps, many Imazighen in the Chaoui region have developed their national and linguistic identity within the framework of Algerianness (and much less Amazighity). This is because the Chaoui region is the home to the grassroots and movements that sparked the Algerian revolution against the French in 1956 (Vince, 2020). There are, of course, several reasons for targeting the Imazighen in the Chaoui region as the population and sample for this current research. The most important reason is the significant dearth of research concerning the Imazighen in the Chaoui region. Additionally, the researchers have direct and easy access to the people in this region. The lead researcher is a member of a minority group and an indigenous native of the Chaoui region in eastern Algeria. This provides valuable insider insights into the research context. It is also important to consider the positionality of the second researcher, who is a native Jordanian but married to an Algerian. This personal connection provides a quasi-insider perspective on the socio-political context of Algeria, particularly the Chaoui region and its people in eastern Algeria.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised students and faculty members in universities the Chaoui region of east Algeria. The sample consisted of university students and academics from three universities in the Chaoui region: the University of Annaba (UA), the University of Batna (UB), and the University of Oum El Bouaghi (UOB). The total number of participants in the questionnaire consisted of 409 university students and 118 faculty members, with the UB representing the highest proportion of participants at 45.2%. There were also 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with academics and 8 focus groups held with university students. This qualitative tool was employed through audio-recorded interviews with the participants' consent to complement the quantitative data elicited from the questionnaires. This research triangulation enhanced the validity and credibility of the results by using different research methods, data sources, and diverse perspectives (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

The participants were classified into various demographic segments, including gender (male, female), age (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45 and over), subject fields (natural sciences, applied sciences), educational attainments (Bachelor's, Master's, Ph.D. or equivalent), place of residence (rural, urban), name of university (UA, UB, or UOM), language proficiency in Tamazight, Arabic and French (self-rated poor, average, good, excellent), languages most often used in the respondent's higher education (Tamazight, Arabic, French, English), languages preferred in teaching in higher education (Tamazight, Arabic, French, English), and most importantly their perceptions of Tamazight, Arabic, and French as languages of instruction in higher education. This has facilitated a more comprehensive view of the data and enabled us to evaluate the participants' language orientations and how such categorisation can impact the results.

The aim of selecting these universities was to capture a wider range of variables, including Amazighophone and Arabophone regions, as well as central and peripheral areas. Although all three universities are located in the Chaoui region, they differ in their linguistic profiles and approaches to Tamazight language preservation. For example, the UA is located primarily in an Arabic-speaking region, where the Chaoui language and culture are much more endangered. The UB and UOB are located in areas with a predominantly Amazigh population, although UOB itself is situated in a more peripheral region. The inclusion of these variables has offered a broader perspective on the Imazighen and Tamazight within the wider Chaoui region.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected for this research is drawn from a larger project that investigates the languages of instruction in scientific higher education in the Chaoui region. The research design comprised three data

collection tools: survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. This research design was used to explore and triangulate data from different perspectives, as well as to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, taking into consideration the centre-periphery polarity model of the three Universities in the Chaoui region. The survey questionnaire was the most powerful tool for data collection because it offered a fast, efficient and cost-effective means of gathering large information from a sizeable sample of the target population. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and carried out using two different modes: paper questionnaire and online questionnaire using Google Forms. The use of focus groups was much effective for collecting data from the same target group (e.g., being students, studying the same major or university), while the one-to-one interviews supported the goals of the faculty members. The focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with faculty members were both conducted using Algerian Arabic (Darja) and analysed using thematic analysis which helps the researchers to identify themes and patterns in the data (Braun et al., 2019). To protect their personal data and identities, the participants were informed about the anonymity of their responses and their right to withdraw without prior notice or consequences. After conducting the pilot study and the full-scale study, the primary researcher extracted all responses that contained perceptions of Tamazight and other languages using the thematic analysis approach. The responses from the university students and faculty members were translated into English, and the results of this research were analysed and interpreted within the hybridity theory and what it means to the Imazighen and Tamazight in the Chaoui region.

4. Perceptions of Tamazight in Higher Education: Insights from the Chaoui Region

In this section we argue that the perceptions of Tamazight relate to hybridity and postcolonial theory because the participants in this research have incorporated elements from other powerful or colonial languages (e.g., Arabic, French or English), reflecting a hybridised form of communication and cultural blending. Their ability to absorb influences from other languages and cultures has negatively impacted their perceptions of their own indigenous language and culture, which is experiencing language loss and decline among the new generation of Imazighen, particularly in the Chaoui region. Such hybridity, we argue, is still a sign of linguistic resilience and adaptability, not a total loss of authenticity and indigeneity.

The findings from questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews have indicated that both university students and faculty members demonstrated a lack of knowledge about Tamazight and this lack of knowledge is often stigmatised. The stigma surrounding the lack of knowledge in Tamazight has manifested in the labelling of Tamazight as a ‘dead’ and ‘extinct’ language. It has also been labelled as a product that belongs only to the Kabyle people and culture. This perception emphasises of Tamazight’s association with the Kabyle people only (being the largest group of Imazighen in Algeria). This association

has perhaps contributed to the widespread belief that Tamazight is not a suitable language for formal education and sometimes is not commonly recognised as a language. Here are the most common themes and sentiments related to the negative perceptions of Tamazight within the scientific community in the Chaoui region, as reflected in the responses of university students and faculty members.

(1) Marginalisation and Limited Recognition of Tamazight in Academic Contexts: This theme emerges from the challenges Tamazight faces in being recognised and understood within the scientific community of higher education in the Chaoui region of eastern Algeria.

- "I do not speak Tamazight because it seems obscure to me. I do not understand it, nor do I acknowledge it as my language." (Student questionnaire)
- "Tamazight is a weird and unknown language. It is a language that has been marginalised by several local and central authorities." (Semi-structured interview with a faculty member).
- "We have no idea about Tamazight as we have not been taught in this language." (Focus group discussion with students).

(2) Challenges in the Use and Effectiveness of Tamazight in Higher Education*:* This theme emerged during the coding and analysis of surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted with university students and faculty members. It highlights the difficulties faced by the Imazighen in maintaining Tamazight as a relevant and functional language for everyday communication, particularly within the context of dominant languages in higher education in postcolonial Algeria. These challenges have contributed to both the erosion of Tamazight and its gradual hybridisation with other dominant languages over time.

- "Tamazight is a difficult language. It is also a poor, unlikable, and very old language." (Student questionnaire).
- "I do not know Tamazight. I am not fluent on it. Although I am Amazigh, I do not I do not use it, and I do not understand it. It is just a difficult language to me." (Semi-structured interview with a faculty member).
- "Tamazight is merely a secondary language. It is not also widely used and holds little significance to me, and perhaps for many Imazighen as well." (Student questionnaire).

(3) Limited Official Status and Recognition of Tamazight Compared to Dominant and Global Languages: This theme emerged through the data collection process and the subsequent analysis of interviews with faculty members. It underscores the limited opportunities available for the use of Tamazight in public life and higher educational contexts,

where speakers often feel pressured to abandon the language in favour of more dominant and globally influential languages, such as Arabic, French, and English.

- "Tamazight is only a dialect. It is not even considered a language to me." (Semi-structured interview with a faculty member).
- "Tamazight is a primitive and outdated language. It is nearly extinct and lacks the status of a scientific language used in scholarly research and communication." (Semi-structured interview with a faculty member).

(4) Hybridity and Regional Specificity in Language and Identity: In the context of the Chaoui region, Tamazight appears to be nearly lost as a spoken language; however, unique cultural practices tied to the language persist. This theme reflects how linguistic identity is perceived as regionally specific, particularly with Tamazight often being associated more closely with the Kabyle people than with the Chaoui. Compared to broader discussions of Amazigh identity, this theme emerged from survey questionnaires with university students highlights the dynamic, localised, and evolving nature of cultural and linguistic hybridity among the Imazighen of eastern Algeria.

- "Tamazight is a language that belongs specifically to the Kabyle people and not to the Chaoui." (Student questionnaire)

By the contrary, the number of participants who have a favourable opinion of Tamazight is low, suggesting that it may not be the widespread belief among many Imazighen in the Chaoui region. The participants who viewed Tamazight positively were mostly from rural areas in the Chaoui region where Tamazight is rigorously maintained there. The Imazighen in these areas viewed Tamazight as merely a reflection of their indigeneity and regional identity. They highlighted their personal connections and deep historical roots associated with Tamazight, but these perceptions did not translate into support for its use in higher education, as expressed in the responses of the participants below.

(5) Cultural Identity and Heritage as Latent Resistance: This theme illustrates how the Imazighen in the Chaoui region maintain a deep emotional and cultural attachment to Tamazight, even as its everyday use has diminished. Despite the language's marginalisation, it continues to symbolise pride, ancestry, and identity for many, revealing a form of 'latent hybridity.' Here, the preservation of cultural memory and heritage through language becomes a subtle yet powerful mode of resistance and identity affirmation. This theme emerged consistently across all data sources collected by the lead researcher. It highlights the idea of latent hybridity and resistance within the research context.

- “Tamazight is my sense of pride and origin.” (Student questionnaire)
- “Tamazight is a wonderful language. It is the language of our great ancestors.” (Focus group discussion with students)
- “Tamazight is the language of my great cultural and linguistic heritage.” (Faculty member questionnaire)

5. Discussion

This section explores and interprets the key findings of this research in relation to the socio-political context of Tamazight in the Chaoui region, while also engaging with existing literature on minority languages and the impact of globalisation on language shift, particularly the spread of English as a global language in scientific higher education. Responses from university students and faculty members reveal a complex and ambivalent relationship with Tamazight, characterised by positive but increasingly negative attitudes.

On the one hand, Tamazight is viewed as a powerful symbol of ethnolinguistic, regional, and cultural identity. It is seen as the language of their ancestors, a source of pride, heritage, and cultural authenticity. These positive associations were especially prominent among participants affiliated with the UB and UOB which are situated in more peripheral areas traditionally known for their preservation of Tamazight and Amazigh culture. As outlined in the methodology, these locations are widely considered the cultural heartland of the 'true' Chaoui identity in eastern Algeria. In contrast, the participants from the UA, located in a more urbanised, coastal, and Arabophone context, revealed more subdued support for Tamazight. Its geographical and socio-economic positioning, marked by greater exposure to international trade and linguistic diversity appears to have influenced a linguistic shift away from Tamazight, reflecting broader trends of urbanisation and Arabisation of postcolonial Algeria.

On the other hand, Tamazight is considered less prestigious and therefore not appropriate for teaching in higher education. Despite this perception, some students agree on the importance of Tamazight because it contributes to their regional cultural identity, past heritages and still holds several historical and socio-cultural values. Given the strong use of French and Arabic (and sometimes English) in teaching scientific subjects at university level, there is a unanimous perception among many university students and faculty members that Tamazight is less useful as a language of instruction in scientific higher education. Many of the students interviewed want to pursue their postgraduate studies or work opportunities outside Algeria in French- or English-speaking countries, hence the Tamazight language is not considered useful for their future life and career.

As highlighted in the analysis section above, negative perceptions on Tamazight as a language of instruction in higher education far outweigh the positive ones. Many of the responses from the student questionnaires show hostility towards Tamazight or studying in Tamazight in higher education. To some participants, Tamazight is almost a 'dead language,' a difficult and an unknown language, and a language that is not commonly used, despite the participants being mostly of Amazigh origins. Some university faculty members see Tamazight as a 'weird language' and a language that was intentionally marginalised by central and local government authorities, making it therefore a useless language to learn and study, especially in the scientific higher education setting. They argue that the focus on teaching in higher education and conducting scientific research should be on more powerful languages, such as French and/or English. However, one member of academic staff, from a small Amazigh-populated town in Batna, prefers Tamazight as a language on instruction in scientific higher education. This is because, he thinks, through that Tamazight could be safeguarded from obsolescence.

In the context of scientific higher education in postcolonial Algeria, university students and faculty members tend to use French out of necessity, despite their preference for English and ideological leaning toward Arabic (Medfouni, 2024). This finding highlights the disconnect between government policies, which are largely aimed at Arabisation and now Englishisation of scientific higher education, and the perspectives of stakeholders (students and faculty members). It also reflects the ongoing tension surrounding language use in postcolonial Algeria, where Tamazight plays a minor role, if any.

The complex interplay between Tamazight and French in urban settings where Tamazight is still mostly spoken have created, according to Guerchouh (2023, pp. 78–86), a sense of alienation among many Imazighen as they try to preserve their own linguistic and cultural heritage in a context that frequently prioritises other languages. The enforcement of French language and culture has largely led to the rise of French language (which still enjoys a prestigious status in postcolonial Algeria), but at the same time contributed to the partial erosion of other languages in Algeria, such as Tamazight.

To this end, the main arguments against Tamazight work in tandem with those in favour of French or English being the languages of instruction used in teaching scientific courses in higher education, not only in Algeria but beyond. Tamazight therefore offers fewer or almost non-workable opportunities for students and faculty members alike to move freely and easily outside Algeria for work or study purposes. Some university students and faculty members expressed extremist or hawkish perceptions of Tamazight as a 'primitive' and 'outdated' language or an 'extinct' language that has no longer has the same privilege as before. These prevailing negative perceptions of Tamazight reflect a broader societal and governmental bias that

undermine its use among the wider Algerian society. As a result, students and faculty members considered Tamazight as an inferior option, maintaining a narrative that diminishes its value and prestige.

The Imazighen in the Chaoui region understand that their language is important for the preservation of their own collective identity and culture, but the daily pressures to use only French, Arabic and now English in higher education are enormous and oftentimes hard to resist. That is possibly why the Imazighen in the Chaoui region have managed to strike a balance between these two latter languages: first through the pragmatic and symbolic means, and second, through means of code-switching and hybridisation with their own language. Some of the challenges that face Tamazight in postcolonial Algeria are internal (such as diglossia and hybridisation), while others are external (such as language contact, language loss, language border and linguistic prestige). Despite this trend, minority languages persist and sometimes gain status and prestige (Abd-el-Jawad, 2006). Such persistence may not necessarily depend on daily use but rather on its role in reinforcing ethnic group identity and heritage within the community, as is the case with Tamazight in the Chaoui region.

Minority languages can be integrated into formal education systems in ways that both respect local identities and engage with broader global trends such as globalisation, standardisation, and international development goals (Gorter et al., 2014). In the Algerian context, while French colonisation has had a lasting impact on linguistic practices, globalisation has further contributed to language shifts, particularly through the spread of English as a global language for scientific instruction, academic research, and international communication (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Crystal, 2003). Saraceni's 2010 concept of the relocation of dominant languages such as English in the global arena offers a compelling lens through which to examine how minority languages, such as Tamazight, are also negotiating their place within the local cultures of the Imazighen in Algeria and the broader regional context of the North African region. This dynamic illustrates how global language ideologies pose an ongoing threat to minority and indigenous languages, diminishing their official status and marginalising their local and linguistic relevance among native speakers.

6. Conclusion

This research has investigated the status and perceptions of Tamazight held by university students and faculty members in the scientific higher education in postcolonial Algeria. It aimed to explore how these perceptions relate to the concepts of indigeneity and hybridity among the Imazighen in the Chaoui region of eastern Algeria. It has also considered the influence of French linguistic imperialism and Arabisation measures on Tamazight, as well as how Tamazight became a marginalised language in some Amazigh-

populated areas while being preserved in others in postcolonial Algeria. In the context of scientific higher education, we have discovered that the Algerian higher educational sphere in the Chaoui region is now replete with aspects of Arabic, French and sometimes English, but not of Tamazight. In this context, Tamazight is often perceived by its speakers as overly negative, stereotyped, and downgraded for its perceived unsuitability as a language of science and education in higher education.

In line with the view of Tamazight as being marginal and marginalised, we have encountered voices that exclude Tamazight and favour more 'powerful' languages, such as Arabic, French and English. These voices considered Tamazight as a language that does not meet the needs of internationalisation of Algeria's scientific higher education and often does not embody the modernity for which the Algerian higher education system has striven following independence from France in 1962. Many university students and faculty members have therefore claimed that Tamazight is a language of the past, a language of heritage and of their original culture only. Others have gone even further by describing it as a primitive or an outdated language that is no longer used. Even those who hold positive perceptions of Tamazight did not regard it as a language appropriate for teaching in higher education. Tamazight was therefore largely ignored and often devalued as a language of instruction for teaching science subjects in higher education in the Chaoui region. Tamazight was only chosen by a few university students or faculty members who live in small rural areas where Tamazight language and culture are highly preserved and largely remained unchanged.

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