

# TEACHING ENGLISH IN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT: THE ALGERIAN CASE

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**Abstract** – *In Algeria, the educational system, as much as the use of languages (foreign and national) are the preserve of politicians. Thus, these thorny domains are rarely dealt with in a way that avoids increasing the level of sensitivity about them, leading to a deepening social fracture. If the debates, more often than not, verge on partisanship rather than objectivity, it is because of the scramble for power between French- and Arabic-speaking intellectual communities. Politics rules even when the concern is that of the technicians or the experts in education or didactics. In a situation where the French language has lost much of its ground in the sociocultural and educational environments of the country, the introduction of English is being heralded as the magic solution to all possible ills—including economic, technological and educational ones. The whole process is being implemented with an immediate result: the popular vernaculars are outlawed, French is being compartmentalised in domains which are decreasing in number, while foreign languages are being called upon to supposedly help Arabic come to terms with the demands of a globalised and technological world. Language policy is not planned according to objective and realistic criteria. It is mostly the outcome of individual or group political take-over. The educational system is also taken hostage by jingoistic attitudes expressed in hasty and unrealistic educational reforms. This is no less the case of English teaching and its early introduction in the primary level, a roundabout way to end the influence of French inside and outside the school system.*

## Introduction

**L**anguages live and die naturally. However, it is man's narrow interests, miscalculations and lack of logic which, at times, precipitate the fate of these languages, and not always for the better. A quick overview of the Algerian sociolinguistic landscape from 1962, the date of the Independence, shows a constant denial of existence of the popular vernaculars in favour of a language not used by the majority. The likely outcome of such a progressive process is a monolingual, and monocultural society synonymous with intellectual underdevelopment, in a global village that is more than ever multidimensional and multicultural. In fact, such an environment could rather allow considerations that

can underline the multilingual characteristics of the society. On the contrary, all decisions and policies in this domain show the way to a linguistic impoverishment. As for foreign languages, they are more often than not solicited, more by ambient mimicry than by true conviction or real goals to reach. From the intrinsic linguistic wealth of the country, the national authorities (educational and/or political) have contributed through a host of decrees and laws to jeopardise the very existence of these vernaculars. The aim was to create something that is utopian if not unthinkable: a homogeneous country. This can be achieved, it is thought, through the cultural lamination of all idiosyncrasies and distinctive features, which constituted, and still define the personality of the Algerian. However, a potential prosthesis has been thought of in the form of foreign languages. It is in the midst of this cultural slimming down that the teaching of English has been introduced to help plaster the cracks in the educational system.

The problem raised in this paper centres mainly round the introduction of the English language from the 4<sup>th</sup> year primary school in the very particular educational and sociolinguistic background of the country. This educational enterprise has rendered language planning and the elaboration of a sound school system that much more sensitive. The last two processes have always been dealt with in ways that have increased the social malaise around key issues. Language (foreign and national) planning, as well as teaching, has always responded to considerations or policies imbued with partisanship far from the sociolinguistic reality of the country. The debate between national and foreign languages is more than ever closed, and made more complex by school policies undertaken quickly and in a non-integrated fashion, because imposed on all partners of the pedagogical act. The educational system itself is characterised by a chronic instability: the ministry of higher education and scientific research had seven ministers from 1985 to 1992.

Normally, in a situation where cultural harmony prevails, linguistic planning is often the outcome of a systemic and well-thought language policy. However, in Algeria, the politicians have rarely managed to establish a sound and serene climate for languages to develop naturally without conflict. Besides, the absence of an intellectual, scientific and/or moral authority capable of legislating or suggesting a philosophy that could manage the national languages, i.e. Classical Arabic and Berber (not yet given such a status by the politicians, despite the fact that one-fifth of the population speak it), and the vernaculars (regional dialects of Arabic and Berber) in a multilingual context has worsened the already explosive state of things.

The constant focus on one given language (Classical Arabic) simultaneously with the forbidding of other languages has reduced the place and status of certain so-called 'minority' languages. In addition, it has led to a strong decline of these

languages. However, language planning cannot proceed by elimination or rejection because it is advised, '*Qu'une langue, quelle qu'elle soit, n'en réprime pas une autre*' (Barthes, 1978).

Generally speaking, language planning is synonymous with the rehabilitation of minority languages through a system of maintenance and preservation. That is not the case of Algeria where decision-makers have neither promoted the use, nor allowed the standardisation of the languages and dialects used (cf. 'corpus planning'—Kloss, 1969). The coding and modernisation of the latter have never been on the politicians' agenda. The asphyxia of these vernaculars has been progressively undertaken through reforms that were more eradicating than constructive in nature. The logical outcome of such a policy has been the reduction of these languages' social and cultural impact, leading to a true cultural and identity *hara-kiri*. Thus, the constant ostracism of the mother tongues (Berber and dialectal Arabic), that have not witnessed any modernisation process for their own prestige—and thus their own permanence—has impoverished them. School has been the best means for the decision-makers to fight against the languages in use, in order to regain, through Classical Arabic alone, our lost identity (!). The vernaculars in use might have known a different development had they been employed in the public life (in the media) or even in the educational system.

Furthermore, the diglossic situation of the country (simultaneous use of a high and low variety of Arabic) has exacerbated further the sociolinguistic situation of the country. It has also made the situation of learners whether at school or university level, less comfortable because they often feel trapped between their language of communication and that of the school:

*'La langue du Maghreb étant son dialectal, l'arabe classique en est totalement exclu. Nous nous trouvons donc confrontés à une cruelle distorsion entre une langue bien vivante que nous tenons pour morte, et une langue morte que nous voulons vivante.'* (Ben Achour, 1992: 45)

No status planning (Kloss, 1969) has been undertaken to settle the problem of languages in a way that will take into consideration the Algerian sociocultural reality. Past and present policies have been characterised diachronically by paradigms of progress and backing down of one or another language (national or foreign) which responded to political and/or economic conjectures. Judged as being unworthy of interest, the popular languages have been disparaged, fought or declared outlaws, whether at school or on the national TV network. This had, as a first consequence, the de-structuring of the personalities of the children who are torn between the language of their mother and the medium of the school

perceived as an alien vernacular. The rejection of the mother tongues is leading to a monolingual learner with nearly no cultural system of reference:

'The ethos of monolingualism implies the rejection of the experience of other languages, meaning the exclusion of the child's most intense existential experience.' (Phillipson, 1992: 189).

In such a state, one can even speak of language schizophrenia that the child experiences everyday when s/he goes to school and where s/he is forced to drop the only language that offers him or her psychological shelter. The child is forced to use a language for which there is no personal resonance. The absence of what, in Vygotskian terms, can be referred to as the 'feel' for that language does not allow the child to function better than in any other vernacular.

Language planning in a multilingual context requires the decision-makers to proceed according to long-term intentions, not to conjectures. The latter have often led to reforms developing paradigms of convergence in their apprehension of the future and of tomorrow's society in a world celebrating diversity. Today's events in Algeria can be read as a logical consequence of decades of ideological bludgeoning that has increased people's intolerance and loss of social values. In Algeria, status planning of languages has never been programmed to monitor the interaction between languages and other dialects in an unstable sociocultural environment. The awkward intervention of politicians into matters that respond essentially to smooth mechanisms any society develops inwardly has increased the level of instability characterising the latter. In fact, putting the whole problem of languages in the Algerian context boils down to answer the following questions: which language(s) should be used as a medium for teaching? Which language(s) should be used for science? Which languages should be used for progress and development? The hierarchy between languages will, in this way, impose itself on all citizens. Any attempt to avoid answering these questions will end up developing narrow views and actions that will not respond sociolinguistically to the language practices in Algeria.

As for French-Arabic historical bilingualism, which is more than ever unbalanced (i.e. always in favour of Arabic), it is still being fought against by the proponents of a monolingual, 'authentic' country. It is as if the latter is victim of a cultural plague they have to eradicate even if that means doing away with idiosyncratic traits of society. These language-eradicators are forgetful that this language heritage is a characteristic of the country not chosen freely, but an integral part of the identity of Algerians. However, French is being perceived ambiguously by both its opponents and defenders. Its adoption-rejection is never

an easy choice because of the impact on the psychology of the users. Very often, in the case of the youth, it is a matter of attraction-rejection made more sensitive by the harangues of the politicians and the leaders. The latter do not contribute to reduce the tensions about domestic and foreign languages or make this matter look like a plain and natural mechanism societies experience in their history. No Algerian is advocating the ruling of French alone (in education or politics) in their country because of some francophilia, or even the abandonment of one's own sovereignty or mother tongues. However, one has to understand that French language should really be what the late Kateb Yacine (an Algerian writer) has declared: '*un butin de guerre*'—a war booty. Therefore, French is no longer the property of the old enemy: French as a world language is a tool (linguistic, cultural, social, economic and technical) for humanity, beyond the political borders.

Yielding to these new crusaders' pressure, successive governments have undertaken reforms that are in total opposition to the sociolinguistic reality of the country. The introduction of English at primary level is the outcome of such abandonment in the face of those who consider French as a taboo subject. Such a decision has made room for the temporary resolution to the detriment of the long-lasting consideration.

Language planning is inevitably political, but its impact is social, psychological and cultural. Considering only one facet of a multi-sided dimension like the identity of Algerians means judging an entity that is truncated, therefore misjudged. Social coherence dictates a non-partisan stand when judging the languages used in Algeria. Very often, parochial mentality has led to open conflicts:

'... French-Arabic opposition (and the élites behind each language) has warped the debate over the relation between language and politics (only Arabic is controlling the political agenda) [which could be understandable], language and culture (culture of the vacuum: e.g. 'raï' music), finally language and freedom (where is freedom when languages are planned through decrees and laws?).' (Miliani, 1997: 58–59)

Furthermore, a number of fallacies have to be corrected. Among the latter is the very widely held idea that it needs only decreeing that a language is foreign (in the case of French) to make it so, when the social practice decides otherwise. Besides, adopting a language (as in the case of English) in order to allow technology to be transferred into a country where pre-industrial mentalities are still dominant is also a myth maintained by certain politicians.

## Foreign languages and the educational system

Foreign languages are seen by a majority of the decision-makers—and users alike—as the most adequate way to face the demands of a world constantly shrinking and evolving. The motives of each group are, however, different if not, at times, opposed. The most recurrent leitmotiv is that foreign languages are thought of as the panacea to the main ills the country is witnessing in the fields of economy and technology. Some believe that these languages prepare the future generations to the challenges of the third millennium. Others put forward the idea that it is a way to get rid of the curse of failure that seems to plague the educational system in the form of:

- The large ratio of unsuccessful pupils at the baccalaureate level (70%) and the Middle School exam, the '*Brevet d'Enseignement Fondamental*' (the BEF allows students to proceed to the secondary school studies).
- The problem of drop-outs (5000 each year).
- The repetition of school years—mostly at the '*Terminale*' level, the year of the 'Bac', where the repetition rate is as high as 43%.
- The problem of orientation at the university level (repeating the same year 3 or 4 times is not unusual).

Parallel to this, educational reforms looked frequently, and continue to look, very much like political manoeuvres rather than educational enterprises. Besides, decisions at one level had inevitable repercussions on others. Thus, in 1986, the teaching of Russian, German and Spanish was stopped at the level of Middle School (age group: 12–15). This has led first to the unemployment of many teachers; others were redeployed as French language teachers, librarians, or extra-curricular activity organisers. If this is socially understandable, educationally it spells catastrophe. At the university level, this has led to the weaning of the departments of these languages that were then labelled 'minority languages', because of the rather ridiculously small numbers of students who registered in these departments. The impact of such a decision taken by one ministry led to further problems in another. As a way to survive, and in the absence of a national coherent language policy for at least the schools, these departments started to accept perfect beginners in the languages studied. Russian, which was devalued after the end of the communism, got numbers it had never got before. This was so because registration facilities elsewhere were scarce if not non-existent, while language beginners easily obtained a university registration.

Another decision at the level of the lycée concerned the introduction of 'optional subjects'. The pupils had to choose between these languages, music and

painting. That meant the end of certain subjects which were non-existent in the perceptions of the decision-makers who had a particular political colour. The height of irony was reached when the latter announced that such a reform allowed:

*'...la prise en charge de l'objectif de développement personnel des élèves et la promotion de leurs talents.'* (Circular of the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1986)

This is highly unbelievable when, in fact, young pupils are put in an educational straitjacket where they will progress with difficulty. Such a promise stands rather as an alibi than a pedagogical argument. As for the pupils' talents, they have to wait until the school days are over for the pupils to find other arenas for their expression.

Despite these unconsidered decisions, the real debate is still the one that opposes *language of knowledge* and *medium of instruction*. This concern is beyond the sterile debates that are often put forward as excuses to unpopular decisions. Beyond partisan discourse, practitioners generally admit that in certain domains of knowledge, particularly sciences and technology, the language of knowledge is not the same as the medium of instruction. The language of knowledge is the one that is capable of building new learning contents and new types of discourse. On the other hand, the medium of instruction is a linguistic tool that is used to transmit a pedagogical discourse and content not necessarily built in this language, but which it tries to (re)structure. The paradox in the educational system, not taken into consideration by those who develop unrealistic attitudes, is linked to the fact that:

*'...la réalité du système éducatif en Algérie se cristallise principalement autour de la recherche de correspondance entre contenus scolaires et moyens linguistiques de les dispenser, c'est-à-dire comment enseigner au moyen d'une langue des contenus qui lui sont extérieurs.'* (Sebaa, 1996)

As a logical consequence, translation is a key problem that has been overlooked, up till now, by educators and the educational authorities. These very contents are frequently rendered in very approximate technical terms which are, at times, miles away from the original terms built in a different cultural referent difficult to seize for many apprentices in translation. Bilingual (French-Arabic), even trilingual (with English) dictionaries or glossaries are entering, each year, the book market without the scientific approval of a given educational authority. It is not rare to see different terminologies co-existing at all levels and in all subjects,

mainly the scientific ones. Critical situations like these have mushroomed in the absence of educational or scientific authorities. However, at university level, in scientific streams, the majority of students prefer to face language problems, and follow lectures given in French by teachers who have better competencies and higher degrees, than study in groups led by newly-appointed teachers with nearly no experience in research. Furthermore, students have become aware that their future careers depend on the language they choose. 95% of postgraduate studies in the scientific fields are conducted in French. Besides, the opportunities offered by the job-market very frequently demand competence in French. This certainly justifies the view held by some experts that French is still making up for a very important linguistic deficit (Addi, 1995). We would say that this deficit is even pedagogical.

The other debate that seems to elude the hard-liners of a monolingual approach to learning/teaching—which is upstream of the previous discussion about the binary opposition, language of knowledge and medium of instruction—concerns knowledge itself. Is our country going to remain only a consumer of knowledge? Is it not about time to start producing knowledge? Or are we going to watch the train bound for development and progress pass us by? Becoming producers of knowledge might even help Arabic establish itself as a language of creation not just of translation. Up to now, the hard-liners of Arabic have only succeeded in finding a dead-end because of their tendency to use incantations and compensation rituals instead of more energetic, more daring enterprises for developing the genius of the language in domains it seems not to occupy, like the one of sciences and technological creation.

The challenges awaiting all Algerians seem not only to concern the 'how-to-express' science but also how to do it. To our knowledge, 'how to express' science seems not to pose problems in the Arab world. This allows us to raise the issue to which we are likely to get more opposing views: why not create a unified academy for Arabic? This will settle for good the problem of terminologies and discourse in certain registers. At the other end of the spectrum, young people are definitely on the information highway. Far away from the counterproductive discourses developed by their elders, the generation of the multimedia is less keen on splitting hairs (to use or not to use a foreign language?), but rather on increasing their capacities for creation in an environment more inclined to imitate (badly).

We also witness in schools, as much as the universities, a *double incompleteness* (Sebaa, 1996) at the level of language mastery (of Arabic and French) and knowledge. Proficiency levels are getting lower and lower. Pupils', as well as students', language mastery is appalling. People even speak of *bilingual illiterates* getting their degrees. As for knowledge, which may be a world problem,



the basics seem to be lacking after years of instruction. A given hypothesis puts forward the idea that this double incompleteness is due to a linguistic cleavage (between French and Arabic) which ends up with *a break of the frame of reference* (Madi, 1997). This explains partly why pupils or students have difficulties creating meaning out of the pedagogical input provided to them in their studies, though it is generally admitted that 'learners are engaged in actively making sense of the information provided to them.' (Williams and Burden, 1999).

It is true, however, that the pedagogical trends show more a concern for regurgitation of knowledge than an active re-appropriation of the latter. Furthermore, the inability to succeed in language and knowledge can also be explained by the passive attitude of the learners developed by non-participatory pedagogies. Learners are often made to repeat in a mechanical way even at university level:

*'...les étudiants ont bien intériorisé ce que l'on attend d'eux puisque très souvent beaucoup d'étudiants parlent de la nécessité de recracher le cours lors d'un examen. Les séances de cours étant pour la plupart des séances de dictée, il n'est pas étonnant dès lors de constater que les séances d'examen sont trop souvent des séances de transcription de parties de discours mémorisées.'*  
(Maïri, 1994: 203)

Furthermore, at school level, the child is subjected to pressures on the part of his teachers to use (very often just Classical Arabic) or not to use certain languages (dialectal Arabic or Berber). This is often done even if that means going counter more natural inclinations or personal perceptions of what constitutes his closest and more intimate system of reference. To make it worse, he is even forced to 'ingurgitate' a body of knowledge he does not understand, and which he will therefore fail to internalise in order to become a more autonomous user of such knowledge, or an independent judge of its worth. The types of examinations in use, emphasising as they do the 'regurgitative' aspect of learning, only make matters worse.

## **Teaching English as a foreign language: the great expectations**

In Algerian society, English has benefited a lot from very favourable attitudes of a majority of users and non-users as well. However, this is also the result, in many cases, of a systematic attack against French, and indirectly against the users of the language, accused of being members of a utopian francophile party:

*Hizb frança*, the party of France. The attacks against French have helped English occupy the educational (English has been introduced from the 4<sup>th</sup> year primary school from 1993) and environmental landscape (welcome signs at airports and certain road-signs).

The main element in the argumentation of those who want to replace French by English is that the latter is the language of technology and science so vital for the country. This argument, to explain some educational choices, seems rather like an alibi when one knows that it needs more than a simple incantation to introduce technology and develop a scientific mentality with the sole presence of the English language.

From the outset, it is highly difficult to find reasons (psychological, pedagogical or social) for the inclusion of English as the first foreign language in the primary school. The reasons given above are rather alibis whose essence is mostly political. English has thus benefited from the clash between francophone and arabophone élites to occupy the space emptied by the latter who have managed, through laws and decrees, to diminish the spheres of influence of the francophone élites (mostly in education and administration). Thus, access to power is made inaccessible. The 1997 law on Arabisation is simply the indictment of the French-speaking élite. In 1993, the introduction of English in the primary level belonged to the same category of decisions that are political rather than educational. However, such a decree has not envisaged the long-term impact of its decisions:

*'Nous nous dirigeons—avec ce qui vient d'être décidé (introduction of English in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Foundation School) et avec le système (éducatif) en place—vers un imbroglio linguistique, une exacerbation des tensions sociales, des crises identitaires plus aiguës, une perte de cohésion' martèle M. Miliani qui dit sa crainte de la créolisation et de la pidginisation des langues.'* (Miliani, quoted in El Watan, Tuesday October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993)

This poses the acute problem of the type of education needed by the country and in the long-term the kind of future project it intends to achieve for its society:

*'... l'échec de l'université algérienne est d'abord imputable au fait que le pouvoir politique impose un modèle de société et, par voie de conséquence, un modèle d'université, beaucoup plus intéressé par la formation d'un type de citoyen caractérisé par la médiocrité, le conformisme, la docilité, voire la servilité, au lieu et place de la rigueur, la rationalité et la créativité.'* (Maïri, 1994: 11–12)

In fact, what seems to be targeted is a closed educational system mirroring narrow visions developing alibis and responding to conjectures or personal views and interests. Generations of Algerians have been subjected to educational reforms that did not always have the social adhesion behind them. These reforms were mostly lived as expressions of violence to them. Because of the frequency of the reforms, it is not rare to hear school-goers compare themselves to guinea pigs. This is true in the sense that successive reforms have shown a deep incoherence between the decisions taken and the existing educational structure. If the choices seem, at times, 'normal' for the level they manage, they rarely satisfy the ecological validity of the educational system. For instance, if the process of Arabisation is a natural objective to achieve, the processes used to reach it are managed in a way that shows subjectivity at its highest. Decision-makers frequently use pseudo-scientific discourses to justify their choices, but are never accountable for the catastrophes they generate. Thus, the proponents of an Arabisation process taken to extremes in the first levels of education have never solved the problem of the specialisms still taught in French at the other levels: e.g. medicine and technology. This poses problems to students who are monolingual.

The educational system is still taken hostage by the defenders of the '*constantes nationales*' rarely defined, but always held up against more realistic and suitable reforms. These permanent features—which always refer to the triptych 'Algeria is our land, Arabic our language and Islam our religion'—are the first shield held against possible protests or idiosyncratic views of the world. But this has led to expressions of several decision-makers' lack of intellectual boldness or even their partisan views. This may become a curse on the educational system because:

'...education will always suffer from a primary monolithism of the decision-makers, which is the expression of the fear of the alien, the other.' (Miliani, 1996:9)

Statistically, English in the primary schools has not been a success, which shows the gap between the decisions taken and the expectations of the people. In 1995–96, there were 3197 pupils who registered in classes of English as a first foreign language, and 834 in 1997–98. In 1996, three years after the decision to establish English as an alternative choice to French, there were 60,000 registered over 4 years against 2 million pupils (i.e. 0,33% of the population concerned) in other streams. This shows that despite the arguments of the proponents of an early teaching of English used to play on the nationalistic feeling of the population, things have gone counter the official discourse. In fact, what the latter has not succeeded in hiding is the political nature of such a choice: the tough struggle for power.

Psycho-pedagogically speaking, the inclusion of a new language (i.e. English) is not discouraged. The early introduction of foreign languages is indeed of utmost importance though the arguments do not necessarily justify the choice of English to the detriment of French. Thus, it is admitted that the introduction of languages parallel to Arabic improves the learners' intellectual capacities (through the verbal and the non-verbal), his mental flexibility (increased efficiency of thought), his building of concepts (to create meaning and develop his own idiosyncratic views about the world), his intellectual gains (other people's cultures will look less alien, and the understanding of the 'Other' less problematic). One can even speak of the improvement of his mastery of the mother tongue when in contact with another language (Lambert, 1974; Weinrich, 1974).

The aforementioned advantages do not hold in the same way for English as they do for French. One can put forward the problem of discontinuity for the young learner between on the one hand, the real and tangible world (in his society) in which French has a share even if it is minimal, and on the other hand, the virtual world created by the teachers (if they succeed), but which the learner never (or rarely) enters. A school-approach to language learning can never replace, for the language user, the language awareness he develops in a real context of language use, and which is so vital before and during learning. In the first case, success can only be partial because of the development of cold knowledge without the thickness of personal experiences and the warmth of real human interaction, even if it is said that the child's awareness of what he talks about normally takes precedence over his awareness of what he talks with (Donalson, 1978).

Comparative studies show more language efficiency in a milieu where the language exists than in a situation where the language is not anchored in the social life of the user. At the university of Oran, students of French seem, in general, far more competent than their counterparts in the English department. Besides, in the former case, both the learner and the teacher develop a natural discourse (Kramch, 1985) made of interactional patterns and negotiations of meaning as is the case for French. In the second case, English classroom discourse is based on a metalanguage (not always made comprehensible) and a knowledge considered just as a product for memorisation, not as a process of reconstruction as well. Linguistic accuracy is always more highly considered than the re-appropriation of knowledge. This is no less the case at the secondary and tertiary levels. Authentic interactions are few and far between. Such a remark may call upon a possible hypothesis: Classical Arabic seems not to be internalised as a system that may serve in its turn as a system of reference to other language systems. This 'exteriority' is lived as a strange identity feature by the young who are not helped to solve this 'alienness'.

Pedagogically, the early inclusion of English in the primary school responds in no way to any educational, didactic or psychological logic. However, even if

the education officials underline the importance of foreign languages, practice tells a different story. In fact, what that decision reveals is: reforms are devised to consider only one level of the educational system with no interaction with the others. This micro-level approach is potentially prone to failure. The feasibility of these reforms seems not to be taken into consideration. Thus, in the '*fiche de synthèse*' (record of pupils' marks in their final year of secondary level, taken into consideration for the baccalaureate exam), it is mentioned: '*matières essentielles*' for subjects like sciences, philosophy, Arabic, but never foreign languages. The consequence of this is the creation, in the pupils' minds, of a hierarchy between subjects (the 'essential' and the 'useless'). Foreign languages are often in bad company. This in turn makes the learner develop negative attitudes towards these languages, though it is generally admitted that positive perceptions of the latter are a key factor in the success of the learning process (Ellis, 1995). Worse, in the literary or languages streams at the baccalaureate level, philosophy, geography and history have higher coefficients: 5 and 4 respectively, while foreign languages have 3 or 2 in either stream.

At the level of learning theories—whether it is Schumann's (1986) *Acculturation Model*, Giles and Byrne's (1982) *Intergroup Approach*, Gardner's (1988) *Socio-Educational Model*, Appel and Muysken's (1987) *Imperfect Second Language Learning Theory*—they all put the emphasis on the central role of the learner, his decisions, perceptions and attitudes, which is contrary to mainstream education. The theories also put forward the necessity to avoid cultural shocks (*cultural congruence*). Therefore, there is a need to respect social distance (connection with the group of the target language) while increasing the exposure (favourable to French language) to the language in order to improve the approximate system of the learner towards a more balanced interlanguage. In addition, contexts where learners are acquiring language are given primacy over learning situations, to the advantage of French:

'Young children are acquirers. Acquisition takes place sub-consciously in situations where speakers communicate naturally. In these situations, speakers are more concerned with the use of language to convey meaning than with correct usage.'  
(Schinkel-Llano, 1990)

The contexts of acquisition are legion in the case of French outside the premises of the schools, while those for English are non-existent. Furthermore, the situation is near ideal if acquisition and learning help each other, because the learners get fluency in the language while improving gradually the level of accuracy of their utterances:

'...fluency comes unconsciously from what a learner has acquired in interpersonal communication, whilst formal knowledge of rules has to be learned consciously.' (Dunn, 1983)

English learners, at all levels of the educational system, do not benefit from the favourable conditions offered by the real life contexts available for French. The other important variable is the notion of *Input*. If the type and density of the exposure to the linguistic input is of some import, the comprehensibility of the latter is no less essential. The more the exposure to the language, the better its understanding by the learner. French is, thus, in a better position than English. Its contexts of learning are by far more conducive to successful learning. It is in no way the purpose of this paper to take side with French. The core of the present reflection is constituted by the aberration introduced in the school system. The other aim was to explain to what extent failure at school level is often due to a lack of long-term planning, the mis-implementation of educational reforms as much as the launching of reforms, at times inadequate and unpopular.

Despite favourable speeches by the authorities, foreign languages are often caught in politicking with the help of 'educationalists' who have no other motivation than to please the politicians, have no reluctance to wring the neck of well-established theories of learning to express the unthinkable, the unachievable by developing a pedagogy of failure signalling future catastrophes not only educational but also social and personal.

In spite of its inherent strength, not to mention the linguistic imperialism that is the vector of its world dominance, English has been instrumentalised to excess. Even if Algeria is experimenting with a multiple-party regime, the political orientations of the old one-party system are still being translated into narrow educational measures. Thus, it has been 'advised' in some textbooks to teach the language without its culture: an intellectual exercise known only by a handful of decision-makers and textbook-writers. These views are not rare, but are more utopian or partisan procedures, when one knows that such a command is not realistic: language is culture. In fact, foreign languages, and mainly English, are often called upon to do work as subcontractors in domains Arabic has never tackled or is not ready to. The utilitarian aspect of the language has become practically a religion in front of which intelligence steps aside. Such a policy is bound to end up with a limited linguistic competence in both languages (Lambert, 1974) by large populations of pupils and students. Besides, it has also plunged the latter in the most devastating anomie possible, rather than creating the best conditions for them to reach social and personal success. Indeed, language attrition is such that the linguistic competencies rarely go beyond the embryonic stage, hence, the extreme poverty of the learners' personal lexis, and the high level of grammatical inaccuracies characterising their interlanguage.

To our hypothesis that explains partly why we need to go back to having French as the first foreign language, some may answer that the results attained until now with English are satisfactory. However, one should not be impressed at the young learners' linguistic exploits in English at the primary level. Long-term consequences should be of a more urgent concern for all authorities rather than short-term ones that may seem impressive but will spell catastrophe when the early enthusiasm dies down. The learners of English will get lost in their own milieu because of the loss of society's bearings, which will need, on its part, some readjustment in order to be in harmony with the environment. The process of socialisation of the young individual is more important than the efforts of individualisation which may transform him into an alien being in his own society. An object of curiosity.

The teaching of English in Algeria has witnessed transformations that were not an urgency, nor an answer to a social demand. English will remain forever a foreign language. Its place and status are socially determined despite the intellectual suicide programmed by some political and educational authorities. On the other hand, school cannot be always cut from its natural social environment. Common sense dictates such a view away from the decision-makers' blinkered attitudes. The problem of languages is still a potential breaking point because of the emotional involvement of all parties.

In our global village, it is high time people saved their own cultural traits. The people's linguistic rights must be on the government's future agenda. Berber and dialectal Arabic must also be given their due place in a society that has lost its points of reference. Today's events are but the consequence of years of identity problems worsened by language and cultural deprivation.

Arabic can re-occupy its once lost domains of knowledge. However, it cannot do it alone. Foreign languages have to contribute to the overall development of the country. For this, void slogans and petty manoeuvres should be abandoned for long-term and planned reforms. Besides, linguistic ostracism cannot be an approach to adopt in the building of a strong state. The stakes are elsewhere. What needs to be done in the planning of languages is to find the point of equilibrium between all languages in contact (in the society or at school), without bias. In the planning of languages, realism and the *real-linguistik* of society must guide the choices in education, as far as foreign languages are concerned, even if the Algerian is in no way a new Prometheus. The politicians seem to favour a quixotic image of the Algerian by depriving him of his most natural linguistic means and make him run after mirages. Algeria cannot go into the third millennium without its entire linguistic potential because of the variety of challenges it has to face. The educational system it is trying to build is but one key to the problems of development. Besides, the linguistic wealth it has is the necessary accompanying means. From there, everything is but a question of common sense and citizenship.

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