

# Some Cultural and Linguistic Issues in the Standardization of Tamazight in Algeria

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Aitsislemi Farid. 2001. Some cultural and linguistic issues in the standardization of Tamazight in Algeria. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal* 9(1). 73-94. The aim of this article is to examine the sociolinguistic situation in Algeria with special reference to Tamazight, the indigenous language spoken in North Africa and to review the factors which led to the decision to use the Roman alphabet to transcribe Tamazight. Tamazight has yet to be recognised as a national language by the Algerian constitution but a number of events in the recent history of the country have resulted in some official recognition of the language and the setting up of institutions in charge of the promotion of Tamazight with a view to introducing it as a medium of education at least in the areas where it is used as a mother tongue. Tamazight being a spoken language its introduction in the educational system requires a process of standardization the first step of which is its codification and the selection of an alphabet to transcribe it. The article examines some cultural and linguistic issues which have to be taken into consideration in the choice of a system to transcribe a language with no previous written tradition, and to explore the problems raised by its transcription once an alphabet has been chosen. (The University of Bradford)

## 1. The Tamazight language

The Tamazight group of languages is traditionally known as Berber. Historically, this term has been used to refer to the first inhabitants of Algeria and originally it meant foreigner, uncivilised or non-Greek/Latin speakers. Therefore this term has been felt to have pejorative connotations because it derives from a Greek root related to Barbarian. Berber-speaking people use regional names (for instance: 'Aqbayli' from

Kabylia in North Western Algeria) or tribal names (for instance: 'Ashawi' on the Saharan Atlas Mountains) to refer to themselves. They do not describe themselves as Berbers. This latter is nowadays perceived as 'a foreign label given to the indigenous population by various invaders of North Africa' (Ferkal, 1996).

Amazigh (where 'gh' represents a voiced uvular fricative) meaning noble or free man is the term which is considered to designate Berbers in general. Its plural is Imazighen (by addition of plural affixes) and its feminine form, Tamazight, (by addition of feminine affixes) refers to the language. It is now accepted as a generic term by all scholars as well as the forty associations gathered under the Amazigh World Congress founded in France in 1995. It is also accepted by the younger generation and can be found in many recent poems and songs as the signal of a sense of belonging to a larger cultural community beyond the tribe or the region, a feeling which was lacking among the older generation.

Linguistically Tamazight is classed in the same group as Semitic languages either as a sub-branch, of a Hamito-semitic or Chamito-semitic family in the French tradition (Chaker, 1993) or next to Semitic in the Afro-Asiatic group (Greenberg, 1955) next to Ancient Egyptian, Chadic and Cushitic. Tamazight is spoken on a very large territory in North Africa, from the oasis of Siwa in the Egyptian western desert through to Morocco and from the Mediterranean coast in the north, to the Sahara into Niger and Mali. The Canary Islands are said to constitute its westernmost limit although the language has been extinct there since the 19th century. This area of over five million squared kilometres spreads over ten countries. But linguistically Tamazight does not constitute a continuous zone; Tamazight-speaking areas are surrounded by Arabic-speaking populations who constitute the linguistic majority in North Africa.

The number of Tamazight speakers ranges from a few thousands (in the oasis of Siwa) to very densely populated areas in Algeria and Morocco. Statistics concerning language speakers vary because in population censuses in Algeria do not take into consideration linguistic

factors. The total number of speakers is estimated between 17 million (Ennaji, 1997) and 30 million (Ferkal, 1996). These groups speak different varieties of Tamazight which are mutually intelligible in the areas which are not discontinuous. The greater the distance between groups, the less phonological and lexical similarity and therefore the less mutual intelligibility. Although the language is still spoken in North Africa, very few written documents exist in ancient Berber to show that it was used more extensively in writings. In Algeria, the movement for the recognition of Tamazight as a national and official language used as medium of education has been very active since the 1960's and it has achieved a degree of official recognition in the last decade. In Algeria Tamazight speakers are estimated to represent 25 to 30% of the total population which amounts to 30 million inhabitants (Chaker, 1997).

The language can be divided into three main varieties: Taqbaylit (or Kabyle) and Tashenwit in the north, Tashawit and Tumzbat in the central Algeria and Tamashaq in the southern Saharan areas. The language considered in this article is the variety spoken in the region of Kabylia situated in northern Algeria to the east of the capital city Algiers. It constitutes the most important concentration of Tamazight speakers in the country who support a strong movement in favour of the preservation and promotion of their language and culture. Until recently, in the official Algerian terminology, Tamazight was referred to as a dialect because it does not have a recognised standardized form. This label changed in 1995 with the creation of a High Commission for Amazighity which was established by the government to standardize the language and promote its use in education.

## **2. The languages of present-day Algeria**

Although constitutionally Arabic is the sole national and official language of Algeria, effectively it is a multilingual country where at least three languages are in competition. Historically, Tamazight is the first language spoken in Algeria; it is the language of the indigenous

people of North Africa but it is mentioned in none of the constitutions of the country. However this language has recently succeeded in achieving a certain degree of official recognition as a result of social pressure - including strikes, riots and demonstrations - by the Tamazight-speaking populations. Chronologically, the second language spoken by Algerians is Arabic, a diglossic language whose High variety has been declared constitutionally the national and official language of the country. It is used in all key domains such as religion, government, education, mass media, law etc. Its Low variety is viewed as a degraded form of a pure language. Therefore it has no official status and like Tamazight, it is classed under the derogatory term of 'dialects' which should, in the long run, disappear from the Algerian linguistic scene. Since its inception, the objective of the language planning policy in Algeria has been to eliminate all dialects and replace them with High Arabic. French, which is the colonial linguistic inheritance, is the third language used by Algerians. It has also been under attack and its status as the main foreign language is under threat. It is nowadays competing not only with Arabic but also with English as the language of access to science, technology and international dealings.

### **3. A brief linguistic history of Algeria**

The origin of the Tamazight-speaking population of North Africa is not clearly established and it varies according to ideological positions. Oriental scholars have placed their origin in Phoenicia in the Middle East but during the colonial period, various French historians attempted to establish a connection between Tamazight speakers and Europe. Ageron (1990) refers to this policy as the Kabyle myth, after the French name of the largest Tamazight-speaking group in Algeria. 'The Kabyles were held to be descendants of the Gauls, the Romans, Christian Berbers of the Roman period or the German Vandals (Ageron, p. 72).' This policy was supported by the work of Christian missionaries who stressed the Christian history of the Tamazight-speaking people

(under the Roman Empire) implying that they should unite with the French against their common enemy represented in Islam, the Arab invaders and their language.

Tamazight speakers consider themselves to be the indigenous population of North Africa, descendants of the independent Carthaginians Kings Massinissa and Jugurtha as well as Takfarinas who led several revolts against the Roman invasion which ended with the destruction of Carthage in 40 A.D. Algeria became then a province of the Roman Empire and with it Latin became the language of written communication. The Roman dominion lasted for five centuries followed by short invasions by Germanic tribes, the Vandals in 455 A.D. and Byzantines from 541 to 642 A.D. But linguistically the most important historical event was the invasion of the country by the Arabs in the 7th century bringing with them their language - Arabic, and the new religion - Islam. This event is of special importance from a cultural and linguistic point of view because it marks the beginning of a language shift from Tamazight to Arabic: Tamazight speakers intermingled with Arabic speakers in the plains and the plateaux gradually abandoning their language and becoming Islamised as well as Arabised. According to Wardhaugh the Islamisation of North Africa 'preceded Arabization and the latter was never completed (Wardhaugh, p. 174).' The populations living in mountainous or Saharan regions escaped this transformation because of the inaccessibility of their areas. However Tamazight-speaking areas receded before the advance of Arabic, and this process is still going on as a result of present-day language policies.

The new conquerors introduced two main varieties of spoken Arabic in Algeria: an urban variety used by the Arab armies who settled in the cities in the 7th century, and a rural variety spoken by the nomadic tribes who settled in the countryside in the 11th century. For written communication Classical Arabic supported by the Koran and a long pre-Islamic literary tradition was normally used. In 1517 Algeria became part of the Ottoman Empire, which contributed to the reinforcement of

the Islamisation of the country and the role of classical Arabic for written communication Arabic. The influence of the Turkish language was relatively minimal since the Ottomans contented themselves with maintaining military garrisons in main urban centres.

The next historical event with a major impact on the linguistic and educational situation of Algeria as well as its economic and political life is the colonisation of the country by France colonisation which lasted from 1830 to 1962. As a colony, Algeria came to be regarded as a territorial extension but as an integral part of France. The French administration undertook a policy of European settlement with a view to suppressing the Arabic language and Islamic culture from the country. From the very beginning, the French insisted that their language would be used as the sole language of administration as it was considered to be the most efficient means to help the progress of French domination in Algeria. This position was made clear by the declaration of the first governor of Algeria (1830- 1832), the Duke of Rovigo for whom the imposition of the French language was the most efficient means to extend their domination of the country. (Benrabah, 44) As part of their policy of assimilation and their administrative tradition of standardization, the French destroyed the existing educational system in Arabic and imposed their own education norms in which French was the sole medium of instruction. The majority of the Algerian population refused to send their children to French schools, which they saw as an instrument of the transformation of their society into not only a French but also a Christian model. Their fears were confirmed by the important role that the Jesuit missionaries were given to play in education. This time French became the normal medium of written communication while Arabic and Tamazight were relegated to the home and familiar conversations.

#### **4. Post-independence language planning**

The main objective of the Algerian nationalist movement was to maintain and preserve national cohesion by insisting on the unity of the nation, of its people and its language. Their motto was: Islam is our religion, Algeria is our fatherland, Arabic is our language. The rise of the nationalist movement at the beginning of the 20th century was based on appeals to revive the Arabic language and the cultural identity of the Algerian people. Fishman points out that together with culture, religion and history, language is a major component of nationalism. 'It serves as a link with the glorious past and authenticity (Fishman, p. 47).' With its prestigious historical past, only classical Arabic could be considered a serious competitor to the French language. Religious groups organised under the Association of Oulémas (religious scholars) saw Algerian identity as rooted in Islamic values. In conformity with the ideals of the movement of Islamic reforms known as the Nahda (Arabic for 'Renaissance') which spread all over the Arab world in the 1930's, 'the oulémas undertook to restore the faith to its original purity while reasserting the Arabic character of a country menaced by the French language and culture (Ageron, p. 94).' No mention was made of the Tamazight language or culture. In 1954 the leaders of the various nationalist movements announced the founding of the FLN (National Liberation Front) whose objective was total independence from France which will be achieved in 1962. Immediately, Algeria launched a series of measures to re-Arabise a country, which was considered to have been de-personalised by colonisation. Owing to the high rate of illiteracy in 1962 education was to become the most important factor for claiming membership in the new elite. This policy of Arabisation which was largely a reaction against the cultural and linguistic domination of France, had three main objectives. Firstly, to reverse the dominance of the French language and expand the use of Arabic to all the sectors that were the exclusive domains of French. Secondly, to replace a foreign language (French) by what is seen as the national language (Arabic). These measures are referred to as the policy of de-Galicization (Ciment, 120) or défrancisation (El Watan, 1999). Thirdly, the policy

aimed to replace all vernaculars, i.e. spoken varieties of Arabic and Tamazight, to ensure national unity around a central government whose working language is Arabic.

Arabic is a diglossic language, i.e. the term Arabic refers to several language varieties, which exist side by side throughout the community, each with a definite functional distribution. They can be divided into three main categories. Firstly, Classical Arabic which is the most prestigious variety. It is the medium of a long literary tradition and as the language in which the Koran is written, it is considered to be a model of linguistic excellence. It is called the High variety by sociolinguists. Secondly, Modern Standard Arabic or literary Arabic is the form that has evolved from efforts to modernise the High variety and to make it more apt to meet the demands of modern life. It is the official language of government, justice, education, science and the media. It is also the medium of oral communication used by educated Arab people across nations with different spoken varieties. Its prestige also stems from the fact that it is recognised as an official language of various international organisations and it is used in all the Arab countries stretching from the Persian gulf eastward to the Atlantic ocean westward. Thirdly, the Low variety which is also known as dialectal, colloquial or Algerian Arabic. It is spoken by the majority of the population for whom it is a mother tongue (except for Tamazight speakers). It consists of a number of regional varieties including rural and urban forms, which are not normally used for written communication.

The following table shows the domains in which each language is normally used in Algeria. It can be seen that Arabic is the only language used in all domains with its L.variety used extensively in the oral medium and its H. variety is used for all written functions. French still remains an important language for written functions but it is being used in fewer oral domains than it used to. Tamazight is mainly a spoken language but it has recently gained some ground both orally and



in writing since 1995 with the presentation of news bulletins on television and the publication in certain newspapers of special pages written in Tamazight devoted to the grammar and vocabulary of the language but also giving limited items of local news. Moreover, although Tamazight is not yet taught in primary or secondary schools the creation of university degrees in Tamazight linguistics and culture indicates that its role will become more important if this trend continues. A number of books are being published in Tamazight including bilingual dictionaries and web sites, thus increasing its visibility nationally and internationally.

Table 1. Domains of language use

<b>Oral medium</b>	<b>L. Arabic</b>	<b>Tamazight</b>	<b>L. Arabic</b>	<b>French</b>
Home	+	+	+	Few
Functional Conversation	+	+	+	+
Mosque	+	+	+	
Political Speeches	+	+	+	
Cinema	+	+	+	Foreign film
Theatre	+	+	+	
Radio Programmes	+	+	+	+
TV Programmes	+	+	News	Foreign program
Education	+	+	soon	As a foreign language
Folk Poetry	+	+	+	+
Written Medium				

Written medium	L. Arabic	Tamazight	L. Arabic	French
Home (letters)			+	+
Religion			+	
Education			+	+
Newspaper		soon	+	+
Literature		recently	+	+
Administration		recently	+	+
Banks			+	+
Post Office			+	
Official Documents			+	+

## 5. The Tamazight cultural movement

The policy of recovering the Algerian identity began in 1965 with the Arabisation of the crucial field of education, i.e. replacing French by Arabic as the sole language of instruction. In 1970, a decree was issued requiring all civil servants to pass an oral and written exam in Arabic. A certificate of proficiency in Arabic was to become necessary for promotion of existing personnel and the recruitment of new staff. In the same year the only Tamazight chair of the country was abolished at the University of Algiers. The Arabisation plan proceeded steadily throughout the years and, in the late eighties, the Arabisation of primary and secondary education was completed. This policy culminated in the law passed in December 1996 which fixed the year 2000 for all education in all disciplines, including medicine, science and technology, to be in Arabic. Although this law is not enforced, recent legislation confirms Tamazight in its place as a marginal language in the official life of the country. For instance in July 1998 the multiparty National Assembly (the Algerian Parliament) voted a set of rules imposing Arabic as the sole language to be used in the Assembly. This law requires all government offices, educational institutions and political parties to conduct their business exclusively in Arabic. Thus it would be an offence for any politician to address a crowd in Tamazight in a

Tamazight-speaking area of Algeria.

The Arab Arabic and Islamic heritage of the Algerian nation is also preserved by constitutional provisions. The various constitutions of Algeria are based on the principle that a nation should have one language only, and that linguistic diversity is a threat to national unity.

All the Algerian constitutions (1963, 1976, 1989 and 1996) reject multiculturalism and multilingualism, stating that Arabic is the sole official and national language. Although an Amazigh component of the national identity is mentioned in the preamble of the latest constitution, Tamazight as a language is ignored. As far as French is concerned, it is never mentioned as such in the official terminology. French is always referred to as 'the foreign language' stressing its alien character as opposed to Arabic which is always referred to as the 'national 'language.'

## **6. The current situation of Tamazight**

A few years after Algeria got its independence, in 1968 a cultural organisation emerged, the MCB (Berber Cultural Movement), whose objective was to demand Tamazight cultural and linguistic recognition. In the early seventies, with the closure of the sole Amazigh language course at the university of Algiers, research into Tamazight language or culture became a subversive activity seen as a threat to national unity. Students caught with copies of the ancient alphabetic transcription system, called Tifinagh, could be arrested and tortured to repress Amazigh aspirations (Le Point, 1998). In April 1980 Mouloud Mammeri, a well known Tamazight scholar and writer, was prevented from giving a lecture on ancient Tamazight poetry at the university of Tizi Ouzou, the capital of Kabylia, one of the main Tamazight-speaking area in the north of Algeria. The students went on strike to protest against the authoritarian nature of such a measure and the movement quickly spread to schools and the population at large when a general strike was called in mid-April. This led to a harsh crackdown by the army and

more than 30 people were killed and 200 were injured in the weeks of unrest which followed. These events have become an important landmark in the Amazigh movement in Algeria where it is referred to as the Amazigh Spring by analogy with the crackdown by the USSR army of the uprising in Prague in the Spring of 1968.

The introduction of political pluralism in Algeria after the October 1988 riots saw the end of the single-party system and with it the recognition or the creation of independent political and cultural associations which were committed to the promotion of the Tamazight language and culture. In 1995 the government agreed to investigate the possibility of introducing Tamazight into state education in response to a school boycott from September 1994 to April 1995 by parents and students demanding the introduction of Tamazight in education. As a result of their actions including demonstrations and strikes, the government appointed an advisory High Commission for Amazighity (Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité,) whose objective is the promotion and development of Tamazight with a view to introducing it in the state educational system. This has not yet happened but some initiatives have been taken privately to teach Tamazight in nursery and primary schools

## **7. The process of standardization**

The use of Tamazight as a language of education requires a process of codification and its transcription since the language has no established written tradition. But in a situation like the one prevailing in Algeria, the question of which alphabet to use is not merely a technical issue. Three possible options can be considered. Firstly, the old Lybico-Berber alphabet or Tifinagh which is an ancient writing system preserved in the Sahara. It can still be found on stone inscriptions and certain types of tools such as shields or pottery. Tifinagh is an old alphabetical system based on the representation of consonants. It is used in the Sahara, and was recently introduced in Northern Algeria as a

symbol of belonging to a pan-Amazigh identity larger than the tribe or the region. Being specific to Tamazight, these symbols, which can now be found written on signposts and shops in Kabylia, have an important symbolic value because they represent an independent Amazigh culture and identity. They refer to a mythical past civilisation when the language was written. However nowadays they are rarely used and, for the purpose of printing, they represent the least economical system. The second option is the Arabic Alphabet. Since Arabic is the medium of instruction in Algeria, all the population is familiar with this script particularly the younger generation who receive their education in Arabic. Moreover it carries an important prestigious function as it is the alphabet used to transcribe the words of God in the Koran. As such these characters establish a clear link with Algeria's oriental, Arab and Islamic past. This is precisely one of the reasons why this transcription is rejected by some scholars who favour a third option: the Latin alphabet, which is seen as the key to accessing universal culture through modern information technology. Moreover in Algeria there has been a long tradition of writing Tamazight in Latin script. (Chaker, 90) The High Commission for Amazighity has now resolved this issue by announcing that

According to Quandt, 'there are no separatist movements in Algeria and Arabic and Tamazight speakers 'share a sense of common identity' (Quandt, 1998).' In spite of being accused of constituting a threat to national unity, separatism was never a dominant element in the Amazigh movement. The final declaration of the Amazigh World Congress, at the end of their second congress in Brussels in August 2000, bears no mention of the word separatism. The congress decided to make Tamazight its official language, but it reaffirms its determination to continue to fight for the official and national recognition of Tamazight (Ferkal, 2000). However recent events such as the killing of Matoub Lounes, one of the most popular singers in Kabylia in June 1998, have exacerbated the demands of the Amazigh movement and pushed some of its members into more radical positions. Similarly a

statement made by President Bouteflika fuelled the general sense of frustration and anger of Tamazight speakers. In September 1999, while campaigning in Tizi ousou, the city where the Amazigh Spring started, the president declared that Tamazight would never become an official language and for it to acquire national status, it would be necessary to organise a national referendum. (El Watan, 1999) In a country where Arabic speakers constitute a large majority, the result of a countrywide referendum is bound to be detrimental to Tamazight. The declaration angered the Tamazight-speaking community and, several organisations sent a message to the president expressing their consternation at his statement. Since the institutional framework is biased negatively towards Tamazight, Chaker (1998) has recently argued for a change of strategy. He claims that the future of Tamazight should be decided by Tamazight speakers and the population who live in Tamazight-speaking areas. These, he goes on, should be recognised as separate entities with specific linguistic and cultural right. Comparing the situation with that of Catalonia or the Basque country in Spain, he argu

The organisation of a referendum to decide on the status of Tamazight may in fact be more divisive than any other measures taken so far by pitting Arabic-speaking and Tamazight-speaking Algerians against each other. At the moment, Tamazight is not institutionally recognised nor is it protected by an article in a constitution which has been democratically established, and unless this situation changes, its future will depend on the unilateral decisions taken by whoever is in power at any given time.

## **8. Codification issues**

In Algeria, a large number of transcriptions have been used since the beginning of the 20th century. But since there was no standard writing system, most were based on impressionistic transcriptions of the language using the French alphabetical system. Recent transcriptions are based on the system devised in the Berber Documentation Files (Fichier

de Documentation Berbère) compiled by French missionaries and later developed in Mammeri (1987). In 1993 a workshop was organised in France to examine the morphological and phonological problems raised by the transcription of Tamazight, and to try and find coherent and practical solutions that would apply to all the varieties spoken in North Africa. The writing system should be easily decoded by readers, avoiding hesitations and ambiguity.

The transcription of a spoken language such as Tamazight, with its dialectal variation, cannot be a phonetic transcription. It would not be realistic to expect the writing system to be an exact representation of pronunciation. This can only be true on a small scale and can only be representative of one dialectal variety, be it regional or social. Therefore it should be accepted that, whichever writing system is used, it cannot be an accurate representation of actual sounds but rather the representation of an analysis of the morphological and phonological processes at work in the language. The transcription should be a stable representation of segments and thus it should not take into account allophones and other contextual variations. It would be tedious to review here all the problems that need to be solved in finding an adequate transcription of Tamazight. I would simply take the examples of the spirantisation and pharyngealisation of consonants and the basic system of vowels to illustrate the complexity of the issues.

### 8.1 Spirantisation

Tamazight exhibits a double series of consonants: geminate versus non geminate. A process of spirantisation applies to any non geminate stop consonant which is then realised as a continuant sound. This process can be seen in operation in the morpho-phonemic changes between the unmarked forms of verbs (Infinitive) and the intensive form (used to express habitual actions) in which simple consonants are geminated. (In the examples the phonetic transcription is given between square brackets.)

(1) xdem [xðem] = to work

(2) ixeddem [ixeddem] = he normally/usually works

Spirantisation is also a phonetically conditioned process. Single consonant are realised as stops when they occur in after labial or alveolar sounds.

(3) eldi [eldi] = open, is not pronounced [elði] after [l]

(4) enda = where, is not pronounced [enða] after [n]

Moreover spirantisation of consonants is a general phenomenon which distinguishes northern varieties of Tamazight (spirantisating) from southern ones (non spirantisating). Therefore, spirantisation should not be represented and that the appropriate letter of the alphabet (b, t, d, g, k,) should be used without any diacritics.

## 8.2 Pharyngealisation

Tamazight also exhibits an opposition between simple consonants and pharyngealised (also called emphatic) consonants. Let's take for instance the pharyngealised voiced alveolar fricative written ( $z^\circ$ ):

(5) (izi) = a fly, is phonetically different from (iz<sup>°</sup>i) = gall bladder

(6) (azrem) = a snake, is phonetically different from (az<sup>°</sup>rem) = intestine

These are distinctive sounds in the language and therefore they must be represented in the writing system. A number of propositions have been made including using capital letters or diacritics below or above the letter. The use of capital letters must be avoided because they already have an orthographic value as markers of proper nouns or new sentences. I am using here Chaker's notation (1995) a little circle ( $^\circ$ ) next to the relevant letters but there does not yet seem to be a



consensus as to which diacritic to use.

### 8.3 The vowel system

Indicating pharyngealised consonants is also important because they have an effect on the pronunciation of vowels which occur in their environment. Like other Afro-Asiatic languages, the vowel system of Tamazight consists of three vowel qualities: open [a], front [i] and lip rounded [u]. These cover a wide range of phonetic realisations which do not serve by themselves the phonemic function of distinguishing one word from another. They are positionally determined and can be successfully predicted. The open quality vowel ranges from a front [æ] to a back sound [a] in the environment of a pharyngealised consonant, e.g. (8) and word finally, e.g. (7):

(7) tasa [tza] = liver

(8) ad<sup>°</sup>ar [adar] = foot

Compare (8) with e.g. (9):

(9) adrar [adrar] = mountain

The front vowel ranges from a front sound [i] to a mid low sound [e],

(10) izi [izi] = fly

(11) ize [eze] = gall bladder

The lip rounded quality ranges from [u] (cardinal vowel 4) to [o] (cardinal vowel 5).

(12) ul [ul] = heart

(13) z<sup>°</sup>ul [zol] = pray

In addition to these three basic vowel phonemes, a central sound must also be considered in the description of Tamazight phonology. Like other vocalic sounds its realisation is subject to contextual variations. It is realized as schwa sound [ə] in non pharyngealised contexts as in (14), and it is lowered and retracted in pharyngealised environments (as in (15)).

(14) azrem [azrəm] = snake

(15) az<sup>o</sup>rem [azrem] = intestine

The central vowel is an unstable epenthetic sound used to break clusters of consonants. In (16) it breaks the tri-consonantal stem (zgr):

(16) zger [zgEr] = to cross

(17) zegren [zEgrEn] = they -masculine- crossed

(18) tzeგრemt [tzEgrEmt] = you -feminine- crossed.

Tamazight writers accept the use of letters (a, i, u,) for the basic vowels and (e) for the fourth sound although its occurrence can be predicted. The use of a fourth vowel (e) has the advantage of breaking sequences into more familiar graphemes especially for those readers who are used to French and other European languages.

There does not seem to be an agreement about the letters used to transcribe some sounds characteristic of Tamazight such as the velar and pharyngeal fricative consonants. For example the voice velar [V] is generally written (gh) as in Amazigh but the voiceless velar [x] is sometimes written (kh) but is more often written (x). There is less agreement on the pharyngeal consonants. Chaker (1996) recommends using the Greek letter epsilon for the voiced and a dot below letter (h) for the voiceless.

#### 8.4 Morpho-syntax

On the phrasal level the transcription of Tamazight may require a morpho-syntactic analysis of phrases and utterances. Tamazight

nominals have two forms: one called the citation form and the other referred to as the construct state. A noun is said to be in the construct state when it occurs in certain structures such as a subject of a preceding verb or as the object of a preposition, among others. In these structures, masculine nouns are marked by an initial (w), e.g.(20) or (y), e.g. (22) with the deletion of their initial vowel (a) or (i) respectively:

(19) argaz = man (citation form)

(20) yeqim w-rgaz = the man sat down (construct state)

(21) irgazen = men (citation form)

(22) qimen y-rgazen = the men sat down (construct state)

Feminine nouns are marked by the deletion of their initial vowel:

(23) taxxamt = the room (citation form)

(24) si t-xxamt form the house (construct state)

These are but a few instances of the more complex situation of Tamazight nominals, its phonology and morphology and there is still no total agreement as to what solution to adopt for these cases let alone for the whole of the language. These examples show the difficulty of making decisions in the codification of the language.

## 9. Conclusion

Since independence, a constant goal of linguistic planning in Algeria has been the Arabisation of Tamazight and French-speaking Algerians. However, the pace at which the Arabisation of Algeria will proceed is hard to predict given the political situation of the country which is far from stable. The tension between various lobbies is due to a dead-end in Algeria's political system where problems cannot find a solution and where decisions are taken unilaterally without consensus. Granguillaume

(1997) argues that the only solution for Algeria would be for the government to promote free debate and democracy by allowing citizens to express themselves freely. This should begin with abrogating the Arabisation laws which constitute an obstacle on the way to democracy. 'La seule manière de faire reconnaître sa légitimité ce serait, pour les dirigeants algériens, de développer la démocratie, à commencer par la libre expression de la population. Or la loi sur l'Arabisation constitue, au contraire, un obstacle à cette évolution (Granguillaume, p. 5).' The election in May 1999 of president, Bouteflika, seems to have put the Arabisation programme on hold for a while. The President does not hesitate to address his audiences in French effectively ignoring the 1996 law which makes it a punishable offence for politicians to use any other language apart from Arabic in their public speeches or declarations.

Concerning Tamazight, it appears that Algeria is trapped in the logic of its nationalist movement. The Arabic and Islamic character of the Algerian nation has been preserved through constitutional provisions as a tool for ensuring national sovereignty. Having decided to opt for a single official and national language, Algeria is obliged to deny any status the indigenous language pushing members of the Tamazight-speaking community into more radical positions including calls for regional autonomy. If Algeria is to achieve long-term stability, it must have a constitution, which guarantees the linguistics and cultural rights of all the Algerians incorporating all the dimensions of the Algerian identity rather than excluding them. This is not the case at present since apart from Arabic the other languages spoken by Algerians have always been ignored in all the constitutions.

This article has also focussed on some of the problems that Tamazight scholars have to face in order to transcribe successfully their language using the Roman alphabet. However because the language has not been written for many centuries, similar problems would be encountered independently of the alphabet chosen. Now that an alphabet has been accepted as the transcription system the work that remains to be done shows that it is vital to associate linguists to the decision

making in all transcription matters in order to formulate an orthographic code which not only describes the language but also captures the internalized knowledge of its native speakers. A number of solutions have been proposed to account for the phonological and morphological processes of Tamazight but the final decision must be made on criteria such as simplicity, economy and generality i.e. the system should be easy to decode, it must use the smallest possible number of letters and it should represent the underlying morpho-phonological processes rather than the pronunciation of a given group. The sooner this is done the better for the production of printed materials of all kind beginning with textbooks for schools and literary and scientific work which are being published rather regularly but also to be used on the internet to ensure that the exchanges between the Tamazight migrant community around the world are written in a standardized language.

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