



Multilingualism In Algeria Tamazight Through Media: A Reading In The Language And Its Cultural Dimensions

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Abstract:

Algeria is among the states that embrace languages and distinct dialects that characterize each of its regions and imbed a deeply rooted cultural wealth that expresses the originality of Algeria and its civilizational extension. In addition to the official language that is Arabic, Tamazight is the 2nd official one. Despite the late recognition of Tamazight as an official language, it has been vivid and used by different Algerian races such as Chaouis, Shelouhs, Mizabs, Touaregs, and Kabyles...etc.

Since the language is the carrier of culture and heritage, it reflects the identity of the individual and his affiliation. Moreover, it preserves his originality and existence mainly in the light of the irrational international openness on the other cultures thanks to the revolution in communication. Hence, the national and local media must set a strategy that aims at preserving the Arabic and Tamazight languages and their cultural dimensions.

Therefore, this analytical study aims at tracking the contents of Tamazight as a language that is “rich” with the cultural connotations through the different Algerian media outlets in order to know the professional media bases used to show its patrimonial elements and dimensions that fused to form the national unity in the light of diversity and difference. In addition, we shall cover the social media and how they tackle the contents of the Tamazight language and culture.

As a result, the main question that arises here is: how do media, regardless their traditional or modern outlets, show Tamazight and its cultural loads? And what are the professional and media bases used for that sake?

Main findings show that Tamazight reflects many cultural dimensions that represent a cultural diversity that can be used and taken advantage of in touristic promotion and in installing the Algerian national identity. Moreover, the temporal space of the Tamazight programs in the Algerian public and private TV channels is very limited and lack creativity and modernity. It is limited to showing the tangible side of the Tamazight culture, not the intangible cultural and literary side. Furthermore, as for social media, there are many Facebook pages that speak about the Tamazight culture; however, they use the Latin or Arabic transcriptions to express Tamazight words. Their posts are limited primarily to the tangible side of the Tamazight culture.

Keywords: Tamazight language; Tamazight culture; TV; radio; Social media.

Introduction:

Multilingualism and bilingualism have so long been the focal point of many researches in various disciplines including sociolinguistics, linguistics, translation, anthropology, communication...etc.

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Language is a social phenomenon that is acquired through the socialization means and is a communicative process to exchange ideas, feelings, knowledge etc. It carries many symbols and cultural connotations and is subject to the societal transformations and changes in all the levels and sides mainly the technical. Consequently, we hear about vivid languages, ancient ones that vanished, and others fighting to survive.

Multilingualism and bilingualism are among the features of the human societies mainly those that have an ethnic diversity, had witnessed colonization, or their political system imposes another international language to cope with the international system and what the political, economic, and technological forces impose. Each language has its intellectual, cultural, and epistemological balance. Algeria is among the states where many languages and dialects exist because, in addition to the official national language that is Arabic, there are Tamazight that is the 2nd official national language as provided for in the Algerian Constitution and the foreign language French that has been inherited from the colonizer.

Each of the two languages, Arabic and Tamazight, have different dialects which create a linguistic dictionary that is full of words and expressions that have cultural meanings and connotations which reflect the lifestyle and traditions of the ancestors and tell their stories and beliefs. Language is a carrier of heritage and culture, which are among the important components of the human identity and the most prominent elements in shaping the character of the individual inside his social environment. Preserving the heritage is an important step in preserving the components of the society and its sovereign symbols. On the other hand, valorizing and commemorating the heritage is a touristic and civilizational gain that attracts tourists in order to gain the hard currency mainly for the states that rely on gaz and oil revenues.

As previously mentioned, Algeria is among the states that are characterized with a cultural wealth made by the diversity of its human heritage (tangible and intangible). In this context, Tamazight is one of the main components of this heritage because no language can be separated from its cultural balance. Hence, it is important to question the importance given by the Algerian media outlets to Tamazight and its culture since Tamazight is part of the whole Algerian cultural diversity. We also cover the Algerian social media to know their users' perceptions of Tamazight and their use of digitalization to show and help Tamazight survive.

We relied in this study on a brief analytical reading of the contents that focus on Tamazight culture and heritage in the Algerian classical media (Radio and TV) and focused more on the analysis of one of the Facebook pages that focuses on Tamazight and its culture. Thus, the main question of the study is:

How do media, regardless their traditional or modern outlets, show Tamazight and its cultural loads? And what are the professional and media bases used for that sake?

In this regard, some sub-questions arise such as:

- How do the Algerian TV (private and public) perceive Tamazight and its culture?
- What is the size of the importance (temporal space and the used style) given by the Algerian private and public TV to Tamazight and its culture?
- What are the main cultural sides the Algerian TV tries to show either through Tamazight or through tackling its cultural dimensions?
- How do the social media users perceive Tamazight and its culture?
- Is Tamazight used in social media? Is it used for preserving the Tamazight culture?

To answer these questions, we relied on analyzing the content of the private and public TV programs in order to find programs that use Tamazight and aim at showing its culture. Moreover, we analyzed the content of a Facebook page that focuses on Tamazight and the Chaoui Tamazight heritage.

Tamazight: language, writing, and culture

1.1 Tamazight the language

It is one of the African languages spoken by the Tamazight people who live in North Africa. There some researchers who believe it to be Hamitic as the Ancient Egyptian. According to Dr. Mohamed al Madlaoui, Tamazight has Semitic origins. The mother Semitic language can be built starting from a comparison between

the ancient Arabic and Tamazight. However, the researches proved that the Semitic languages appeared in the 3rd millennium B.C. In this context, Tamazight appeared with the Capsian man between the 7th and the 9th millennium B.C. Hence, Tamazight is 4000 years older than the Semitic languages.

On the other hand, Dr. Ahmed Boukous sees that Tamazight is not a language that is impacted by the Afro-Asian languages, i.e. the Hamito-Semitic. Rather, it is much older than Arabic. This belief is supported by the discovery of a Tamazight city in South Morocco that refers to 1500 years B.C or 9000 years B.C according to the archaeologists mainly Mr. Mustafa al Aacha. Nevertheless, the interaction between Arabic and Tamazight happened during the Islamic conquests.

This language has around 11 dialects that have common linguistic rules. The speaker of one of these dialects can learn another in few days according to Andrea Parcet. These dialects represent the cultural diversity and the diversity of its speakers. In addition, they go with the geographic distribution of the speakers. From another side, Tamazight represents the pot that carries the Tamazight culture. It is written in Latin, Arabic, or Tafiñagh transcription.

2. Tamazight writing:

Tamazight has its own transcription that is Tafiñagh, or the primitive Libyan transcription which was believed to be Phoenician. It appeared in the 02nd century B.C thanks to Masinissa. Nevertheless, researcher Malika Hachoud managed to find boards that include Tafiñagh and date back to 1500 years B.C. This made us believe that Tafiñagh is among the oldest vocal transcriptions humanity had known. In the same vein, many say that it dates back to the Capsian man whose ruins are found in North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and in the Caribbean by the Guanches (Tamazight people who live in the Caribbean). Tafiñagh is written from the right to the left except the older Libyan engravings that are written from down to up¹.

3. Tamazight the language of the programs of the public Algerian TV:

One of the main reasons behind the integration of Tamazight as a language and culture in the Algerian TV is the “Tamazight issue” whose events prevailed the Algerian political scene in the last decade. It had many effects in many domains. In 1980, the issue appeared clearly in the Algerian political scene mainly in the Kabyle region, in Tizi Ouzou exactly, and took the form of violent protests asking for Tamazight as a national language.

On 20 April 1980, a date that is known as the Tamazight Spring, the city of Tizi Ouzou witnessed massive protests that resulted in the arrest of 24 leaders of the Tamazight movement and, eventually, the acceptance of Tamazight by the Algerian authorities as a language to be taught in universities under the supervision of the researcher Mouloud Maameri, increasing the number of the Tamazight TV programs, and the appearance of the political song². However, due to the complex internal affairs in the 1990s, the issue shrank and started to disappear. Later, it reappeared in 1998. In 1994, the Algerian authority took many decisions including:

- Integrating Tamazight in the educational programs in the Kabyle region.
- Establishing the higher commission of Tamazight.
- Night news in Tamazight on the Algerian TV³.
- Constitutional recognition of Tamazight as a national language in April 2002.
- Officializing Tamazight in the constitutional amendment of 06 March 2016⁴.

2.1 Tamazight in the Public Algerian TV:

The beginning was with news briefings in Tamazight and a religious program called (al-Hadith al-Dini). Then, the TV programmed a news program everyday in one of the Tamazight dialects (Chaoui, Mizab, Tergui, Kabyle...), other programs that show the Tamazight heritage and culture such as “**Thamurt Ingh**” and “**Touiza**”, and the weather forecast. Then, in 2009, the Algerian TV Company launched its fourth channel in Tamazight that had been characterized with rich programs that tackled all what interested the audience. For instance, there were the program “**Telouith**” which means the health, “**Tazizaouth**” which means the

environment, and “**Isswi**” which means sport. Moreover, culture had the lion’s share with many programs such as “**Thnalth, Thimlilith, Ishwala, Neldhzayer, Thamurt Ingh, Touiza**”, in addition to the distinct dramatic production despite the humble potentials⁵. Nevertheless, the fourth channel knows a recession currently regarding the decrease of the production because most of them are old and the subtitled programs are technically poor (audio, montage, and voice selection) etc. In addition, the cultural programs disappeared save for some which are broadcast in specific times to fill in the gaps and the artistic programs that broadcast songs in Tamazight such as the program “**Tirga Ou Fenan...**” etc.

2.2 Tamazight in the private Algerian TV:

After the official Decree to open the audiovisual field for the privates in 2011, and before the parliament’s ratification of the new Media Law that provided for opening the audiovisual sector, about 45 names of new Algerian channels appeared in the Algerian media scene. However, these channels did not bring any new for Tamazight and its culture because the temporal space was very limited as there was only one news program broadcast by Annahar TV in Tamazight for no more than 08 minutes which is a set of headings accompanied with the most important components of the new which are the answers to the who, what, why, where, when, and how. In addition, the channel broadcast a program entitled “**Thamurth Imazighen**” in Tamazight which attempts to depict the Tamazight culture with all diverse components as part of the Algerian culture and identity. It focuses on the Tamazight cultural wealth, its deeply rooted traditions, and the solidarity societal values that are still struggling for continuity. In addition, this program insists on the role of the woman in preserving the cultural wealth through practicing it or teaching and passing it down to the next generations. Besides, it shows the efforts made by the craftsmen to protect this “**tangible “cultural heritage”**”, the traditional clothes, how to find modern ways to promote for it such as on social media, and how to update it so that it keeps up in pace with modernity.

2.3 Tamazight in the Algerian radio:

Most of the national radio channels devote occasional programs to commemorate specific Tamazight events such as the new Tamazight year through devoting open days and hosting famous figures related to the Tamazight cultural heritage. The Algerian radio devoted in all its channels a set of diverse programs to celebrate the new Tamazight year 2971 which corresponds to 2021 of the Christian calendar through shedding light on the Algerian Tamazight heritage from 10 to 14 January. These programs discussed many topics related to the cultural diversity and the national identity and insisted on valorizing this heritage and taking advantage of it in the touristic promotion⁶.

Moreover, the local radio channels show the Tamazight cultural characteristics of some Algerian regions mainly where the Chaouis, Kabyles, Shelouhs, Mizabs, and Touaregs exist. Moreover, they work to focus on their different components mainly the folklore (idioms, poetry, legends ... etc).

Our findings show:

- There is a lack of the Tamazight programs in the private Algerian TV channels save for Annahar TV, which devotes a daily news program in Tamazight and a weekly program entitled “**Thamurth Imazighen**”. On the other hand, the rest of the channels devote occasional dialogues and programs in Tamazight.
- The public TV still preserves the news briefing in one of the Tamazight dialects and the weather forecast. As for the fourth channel that speaks in Tamazight, it broadcasts its diverse programs (health, religion, sport, education etc). However, the cultural ones are no more strongly present as they were in 2008 when the channel was inaugurated; except some occasional programs related to some events such as the new Tamazight year. Nevertheless, the language still carries the culture mainly that it is characterized with the diversity of the dialects, and that each dialect has its own culture and heritage that fuse in the Tamazight culture and melts in Algerian mother culture.
- As for Tamazight in the Algeria radio channels, the 2nd Algerian radio, the local one, in addition to those of Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia, and the Tamazight radio of Ghardaia (speaking in Mizab and Kabyle dialects) play their communicative and media role through getting the local citizen closer to the authorities, informing him about

the local and national events and news, raising his awareness, and telling him about the heritage of the region...etc.

The rest of the radio channels devote unstable programs with certain occasions such as the celebration of the new Tamazight year.

3. Tamazight in social media:

We relied here on analyzing the content of the Facebook page **Tigemmi n icawiyen imaziyen**, literally (the Chaoui Tamazight heritage) which focuses on this heritage (customs and traditions, folklore, idioms and enigmas, art, history...etc). The page has 6723 followers⁷. We analyzed 62 of its posts posted in January, February, March, and April 2021 and relied on the analysis of the categories (categories of the form and categories of the content). As for the content categories, we relied on the categories of the topic, nature of the content, interaction (sharing, commenting, and liking), the attitude (positive or negative), the source (of the information), the aims...etc. As for the categories of the form, we relied on the categories of the used expressive language (standard Arabic, French, and Tamazight), the transcription (Arabic, Tafiagh, Latin), the topographic elements used (video, photo, text), ...etc.

Findings show:

- The page focuses mainly on the Chaoui Tamazight heritage and the Tamazight in general.
- The page tries through its posts to show the elements of the Chaoui Tamazight cultural heritage in Algeria (Tangible and intangible heritage).
- The page posts at random times. It may take days with no posts.
- 90% of the posts focus on the archaeological sites in Aures (Batna, Biskra, Khenchla...etc) which are sites left by the Tamazight ancestors. The page tries to show their originality and deep roots (**the Aures citadels: Qalaat Baloul, Hukhribt, Ath Soltan, Hiza, Haghrit/ the region of Khiran, al mahmal, Taqasrit, Thisqifen, Thizilt...etc**).
- The page sheds light on the Tamazight origins of many names of the regions and districts in the Aures (**Aghil Ouzemour** or the city of the palms) ...etc.
- The page tries to preserve Tamazight through reminding people of many words and expressions related to ancient tools that are still used by the Chaouis and Tamazight people and which are considered from the tangible cultural heritage of the region such as the mill which is called "**Tasirt... Takerkurt**", a big bowl "**Tarbut**", a mug for drinking water "**aqerw**", a case for shaking milk "**tagcult**", milk shaking "**aserugel**"...etc.
- The page focuses on the traditional tools related to traditional crafts that may extinct and are, at the same time, an important element of the Tamazight tangible cultural heritage such as "**aqardhach, afjajen, thijbadhin, ikhlal, and thadhantcha**." They are all tools used for knitting, tapestry, and Tamazight Bernous making. Moreover, it speaks also about "**Aserugel**" which is a case for milk shaking and the other necessary tools to extract butter or cream from the milk. The page calls for valorizing these tools.
- the page cares about the traditional dishes of the Tamazight, mainly the Chaouis, and sheds light on their history, the occasions of the preparation, and their cultural meaning such as the dish Irishmen which is related to the new Tamazight year celebrations.
- The page focuses on the creativity of the youngsters related to promoting the Tamazight Chaoui cultural heritage through posting about it in the page and encouraging it such as the book of "**Tisuyar**" that contains many sayings, idioms, and two poems in Tamazight (Chaoui). This book is a window on the Tamazight popular literature.
- The page focuses also on the patrimonial songs that speak about the Tamazight (Chaoui) heritage such as the song of "**Akham Ochaoui**" which literally means the house of the Chaoui man of the singer Amnay. The song shows the originality of the Chaoui man, the traditions of the region, and the lifestyle of its inhabitants. Moreover, the page sheds light on the interaction of children with the authentic Tamazight (Chaoui) patrimonial songs such as sharing a video of kindergarteners performing patrimonial songs such as "**Sussem Amemi**" or "**Quk Amemi Quk**"

- The page celebrates events and dates that have a direct relation with Tamazight and its heritage such as the international day of Tafinagh, the new Tamazight year...etc. It focuses on children because they are the carriers and protectors of the Tamazight cultural heritage and incites on installing the patrimony in their hearts and minds by the elderly.
- The legend or myth are among the interests of the page through a post about the story of “**Azghough**” or “**the ghost**” which was a mythical character related to the traditional socialization of the child told by the grandmothers to the children in order to scare them and let them learn the morale. The aim of this post is showing the position of the legend and myth in the collective sub-consciousness and in raising the child in a sane traditional manner.
- The page shows through its posts the beauty and virginity of the nature in the centers where Chaouis live and focuses on the agricultural and mountainous beauty.
- The page introduces its posts in Arabic and Tamazight and writes down the Tamazight words with the Latin transcription.
- The page interacts with its followers through posts that call for installing contents related to the Chaoui or Tamazight cultural heritage in Algeria or North Africa.
- The page interacts with its followers through paving the way for debate and exchanging experiences and information about the names of some tools, manufactories, and dishes according to the region they belong to such as the dish “**Arshmen**” which is called in other regions, as the followers tell, “**Shershem, Berkouks, Thimekhlal**”...etc.
- The followers interact with most of the posts of the page through sharing them which is an important reaction because it widens the audience interested in the Tamazight (Chaoui) cultural heritage.
- Subscription and following the page under study is not limited to the Tamazight people of Algeria only as there are Tamazight followers from Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt according to their comments and interactions with the posts of the page.
- The most common attitude of the page followers is being honored towards the Tamazight cultural heritage and interested in promoting for its elements and components. This is clearly seen in the comments and posts sharing.
- The comments and reactions of the followers show their knowledge about many sides of the Tamazight cultural heritage.
- As for the goals of the page, the most prominent is shedding light on the most important components of the Tamazight cultural heritage, promoting for it, and giving it its merits because it is part of the identity.

Conclusion:

Theoretically, media with their modern and classical outlets play a vital role in revitalizing the Algerian cultural heritage in general, and the Tamazight cultural heritage with its various dialects and speakers in particular (Chaouis, Kabyles, Mizabs, Touaregs, Shelouhs...etc). This is through employing Tamazight in the programs and devoting temporal spaces, even insufficient, to show the dimensions of the cultural heritage which are vital parts of the Algerian cultural diversity. Nevertheless, we notice the absence of a clear and common strategy by the media to valorize this heritage and take advantage of it economically.

This redoubled the importance of the modern media mainly the social media which became among the effective tools in revitalizing Tamazight with its diverse dialects and the cultural balance they carry thanks to the communicative features of these media and their wide audience and users.

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