

## **Mother Tongues and Global Languages<sup>1</sup> among University Students in Rabat**

**Mariam Bakkali**

*Corresponding Author: Mariam Bakkali*

---

Date of Submission: 11-01-2019

Date of acceptance: 27-01-2019

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

For the last decade the Moroccan language market has witnessed two major developments, among others. First the Moroccan mediascape offer has expanded in number and in language choice. Second the interest in language teaching and the language(s) of instruction has been growing from the part of official-making and educational circles—including the recently launched High Council of Education and Training. Naturally, language use, adaptation and development had to follow the course of these changes. Mother tongues and mother tongue maintenance in particular seem to have gained more popularity in the debate around languages and language policy. Although global languages are emphatically said to enjoy high status and wide use, nowadays, in young educated speakers this is rather an unexplored thus unjustified claim. But historically speaking there has been a tendency to dot global languages with the lion's share in the market of the most used languages in young populations at the expense of mother tongues. To prove or disprove this long-held conception is the core interest of this article. It exposes and analyzes the hierarchy and significance of mother tongues and global languages in a sample of Moroccan university students in Rabat using data gleaned from a survey questionnaire. A preliminary short historical background and a review of the literature will enlighten the current trends.

Facing the high tide of globalization and its potent economic, social and cultural waves, Moroccan citizens have undergone deep linguistic influences. This is mainly due to the use of foreign languages as basic forms that the educational and professional systems build on. Global languages have also gained a local prestige thanks to their perceived importance in the world of economy and business as well as the role they play to gain social recognition and integration. It has been argued that in Morocco, languages have been in conflict with regard to their appropriateness for use in education and government. Marley's study (2005) reveals that young Moroccans are "very conscious of the different languages present in their society" (Marley, 2004, p. 1493). For example, speakers of the three Tamazight dialects have been well aware that their voices are not heard if they utilize their primary language in educational spheres (Marley, 2004). As is the case in many other countries of the world with the language of colonizers, in Morocco, French, for example, has held a prestigious classification, while the dialects of the native people have been assigned less desirable positions (Diyen, 2004). France colonized Morocco between the years 1912 and 1956. During that time, Moroccans were expected to learn French and to be educated in the ways of the French (Ennaji, 2005). The country's leaders became those lucky enough to have been educated in French while many Moroccans went to university in France. Clearly, this education was reserved for the upper socioeconomic levels of society, especially that French was the language of instruction beginning at the elementary school level during the colonization period. In reality, at this time, children were receiving instruction in the content areas in a foreign language and schools were not offering dual instruction (Berdouzzi, 2000). The goal was to learn in French only. French became the official language of government, education, business and the sciences. Even today, some consider French the door that opens opportunities in science, technology and business. French and English are taught as foreign languages with French continuing to be the language of the sciences and technology. Educated middle/upper class families continue to arrange for their children to learn French because they acknowledge its usefulness in academic professional life within today's global economy (Berdouzzi, 2000). Others view the continued use of French as a reminder of colonialism and a denial of Morocco's identity as an Arab, Amazigh, North African, Muslim nation. As for the use of Spanish in Morocco, it has a long history partly due to the geographical proximity of Spain, as well as due to the occupation of the Northern provinces by Spain. For centuries, the two enclaves Ceuta and Melilla in the northern part of Morocco enjoyed Spanish sovereignty and an opportunity for wide use

---

<sup>1</sup>See definitions of key terminology used in this article in the Appendix .

of the language. However, the Spanish language has not played a significant role in the educational realm in the rest of Morocco (with the exception of noticeable interest in the Sahara provinces) due to the fact that it is not normally the first language even for the relatively few who speak it fluently (due to the wide use of Arabic and Tamazight in the northern region). Nevertheless, Morocco's landscape of languages is shifting in a positive direction in response to pressure from socio-political groups who have reacted to the marginalization of Moroccan dialects. While in the past, indigenous tongues have not been considered to merit inclusion in elementary, secondary or higher education institutions, today the use of Moroccan Arabic is increasing and elementary instruction has begun to be offered in the Amazigh dialects. In an effort to ensure a wide offer of language instruction King Mohamed VI instituted the *Charte Nationale d'Education et Formation* (National Education and Training Charter). The charter acknowledged Morocco's linguistic diversity and its challenges in Act 9, Article 110 (COSEF, 2000, p. 41) where the stated goal was "to perfect the teaching and use of Arabic language, strengthen foreign languages and be open to the teaching of Tamazight." It declared the Tamazight languages as important to being a citizen of Morocco as any other language. It is of utmost importance that in the charter, Amazigh culture and dialects were emphasized to be "part of the country's cultural heritage" (COSEF, 2000, p. 43). Such a fact has created a paradoxical situation where the global is in an unfair competition with the local. Yet, despite the huge efforts invested to revive the mother tongues and introduce them in domains from which they were totally excluded (due to educational, professional and integrative pressures), global languages predominance in the linguistic context in Morocco is not a perennial status. Rather, by nature of languages change is often brought about by many social, economic and political factors.

This paper investigates the position of mother tongues and global languages in the linguistic repertoire of a sample of Moroccan students in Mohamed V University by trying to answer the following questions:

- Which language(s) exhibit wide daily use?
- What languages are mastered by students?
- What languages are perceived as important and highly recommended by Moroccan students?

The main objectives of this research are: 1) To determine the languages reported by students as frequently used. 2) To highlight the languages most mastered by students. 3)

To pinpoint the languages perceived as important on the educational, professional, and personal levels. To carry out this research a questionnaire was administered to a sample of students from different departments of the Faculty of Letters in Rabat. The questionnaire was distributed to 200 students with a response rate of 85%. We have attempted to strike a gender balance among students but given the unexpectedly high response rate we ended up having more males than females. We could have controlled this sample but because we aimed to have the most representative number of respondents we kept the sample as is. Four variables (gender, mother tongue, level of study (three levels), and department of study) and different domains of use are included in the survey. The analysis of the data will be based on figures that indicate the hierarchies of the languages among informants.

#### **List of abbreviations used in the graphs**

- FLD: Foreign Language Departments
- HD : Humanities Departments
- SA : Standard Arabic
- MA: Moroccan Arabic
- AM: Amazigh
- H: Hassani
- FR: French
- ENG: English
- SP: Spanish

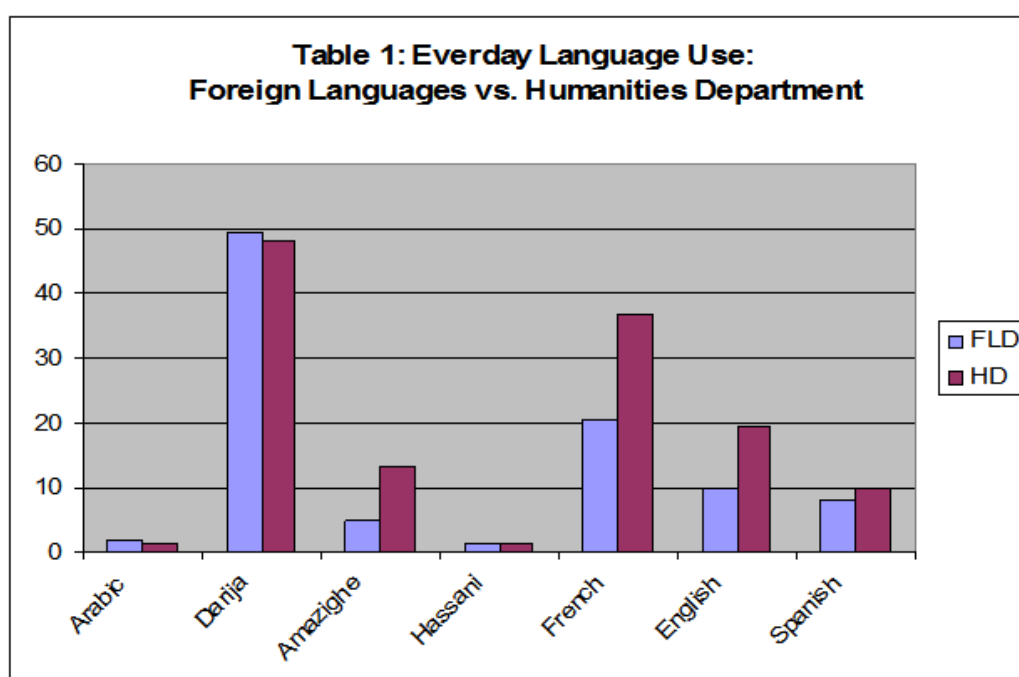
#### **Note on Variables:**

As gender distribution is an important factor in language choice it was hoped that an equal number of male/female respondents would guarantee unbiased results. However it is the other variables that affected the data more significantly than gender. As a university in the capital of Morocco Rabat Mohamed V University is predisposed to welcome students from across all regions and walks of life. This has been a deliberate choice as the number of respondents needed to be high to represent all the different mother tongues; levels of study; departments and domains of use.

The impact of the variables in the results is clearly exposed when dealing with the mother tongue of the respondents (Hassani speakers for example are a minority thus making a generalization unlikely.) But another challenging fact about the variables is the definition of mother tongues: while we assumed that mother tongue is

the "language" first learnt/acquired by a respondent, this definition presupposes that there is agreement on one mother tongue shared by many respondents. For example when we considered that Darija is a mother tongue for many, little did we think that the differences present between Darijas spoken in different parts of Morocco make of them stand-alone languages. The same thing can be perfectly applied to the Amazigh language. In other words the varieties of the different mother tongues are so discrete as to render one definition unable to stand by itself. Another variable that had an impact on our results is the level of study. Regardless of family origins, mother tongue, gender and department of study, there is a general belief that studenthood is a transformative experience and a life changing process. Thus there is little doubt that students might change the way and the extent to which they use mother tongues and global languages over the course of their university life.

The same can be said about the Department of study. Yet the choice of the department of study calls for so many variables in itself. It is widely known that students generally choose to belong to a department they like and where their chances of success are the highest. The linguistic competency is a determinant in this case. In other words students with high linguistic abilities are more likely to go to departments of languages and literature. However this might only have affected the use of global languages but not necessarily the mother tongue.

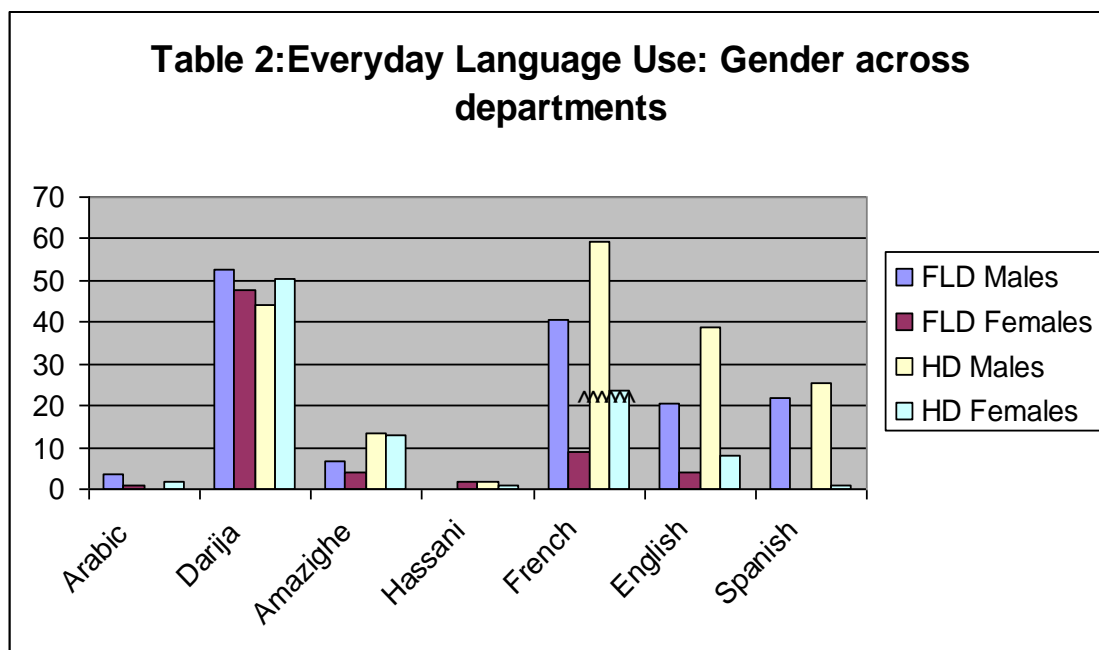


**Hierarchy**

**FLD: MA>FR>ENG>SP>AM>AR>H**

**HD: MA>FR>ENG>AM>SP>AR>H**

This table indicates the languages reported as exhibiting a wide daily use among university students. For both, students who belong to foreign languages departments and humanities departments Moroccan Arabic is dominating. Concerning Amazigh, it does not occupy a significant position while Hassania is almost absent. As for foreign languages we notice that they are very popular among university students; especially French which seems to be competing with Moroccan Arabic which is the mother tongue of the majority of informants.



**Hierarchy**

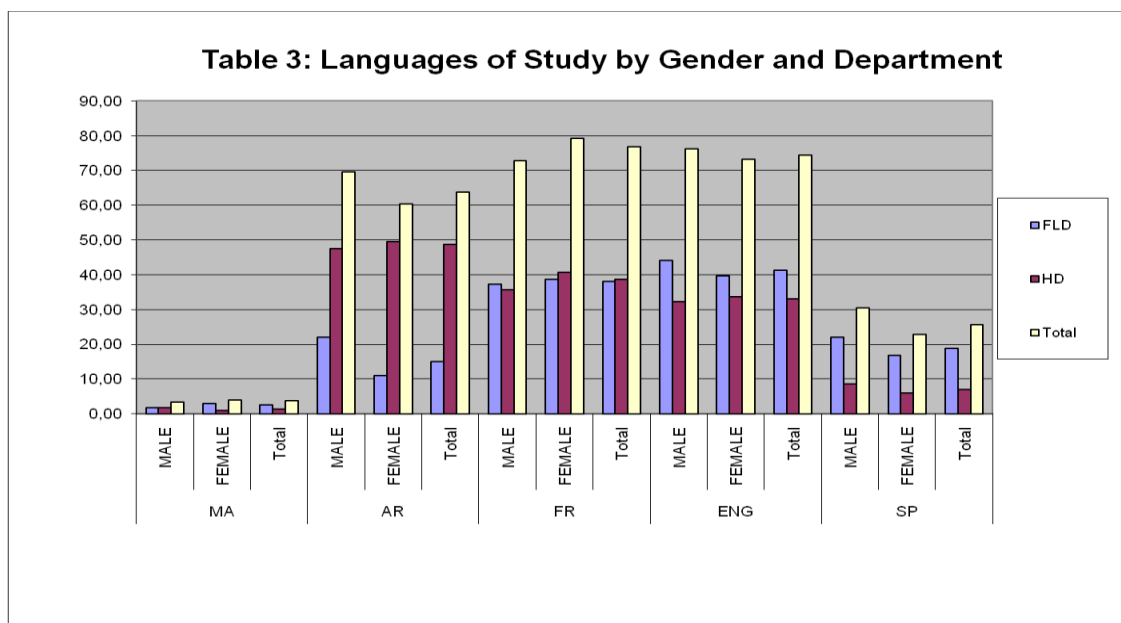
**Males FLD Males:** MA>FR>SP>ENG>AM>AR>H

**HD:** FR>MA>ENG>SP>AM>H

**FLD Females:** MA>FR>AM>ENG>H>AR

**HD Females:** MA>FR>AM>ENG>H>AR

Languages of everyday use are also dealt with from the gender perspective. Generally, we have noticed that when we refer to language use in relation to gender it appears that female language users tend to shift to languages perceived as prestigious such as French or English. Yet, as the graph reveals, while Moroccan Arabic and French are both prevailing among males with competitive percentage, females exhibit a wide daily use of mother tongues at the expense of global languages.



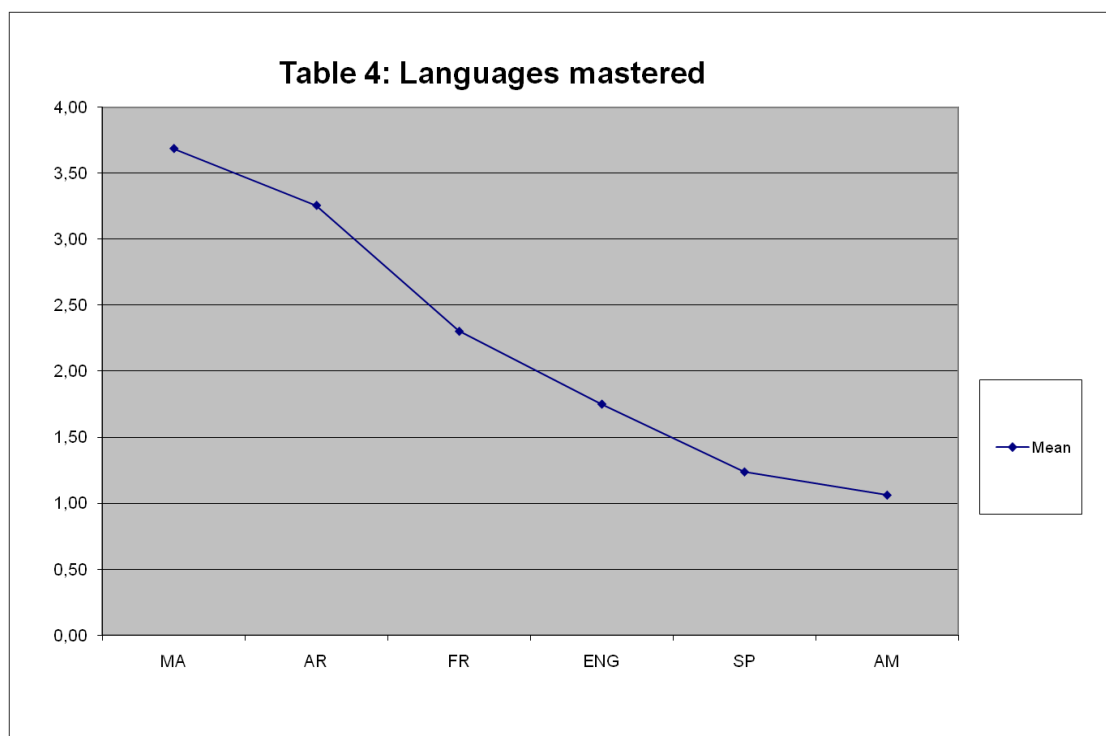
**Hierarchy**

**FLD:** Eng > Fr > Sp > Ar > MA

**HD:** Ar > Fr > Eng > Sp > MA

The above figure highlights the languages used in education. The data indicates that the languages dominating among students of foreign languages and humanities department are the ones that are used as their primary languages of instruction. However, if we consider foreign language students we clearly notice that they do not consider standard Arabic as a significant language of instruction, bearing in mind that, though complementary, Arabic is obligatory for foreign language departments students. That is not the case with global languages which are dominating even among students of humanities departments whose primary language of instruction is standard Arabic. This hints to the importance of foreign languages in the Moroccan society. The use of Moroccan Arabic as a language of instruction in most departments is another equally important information provided in this figure.

The second part of this paper tackles the languages reported by students as highly mastered and the ones perceived as important in education and the job market.

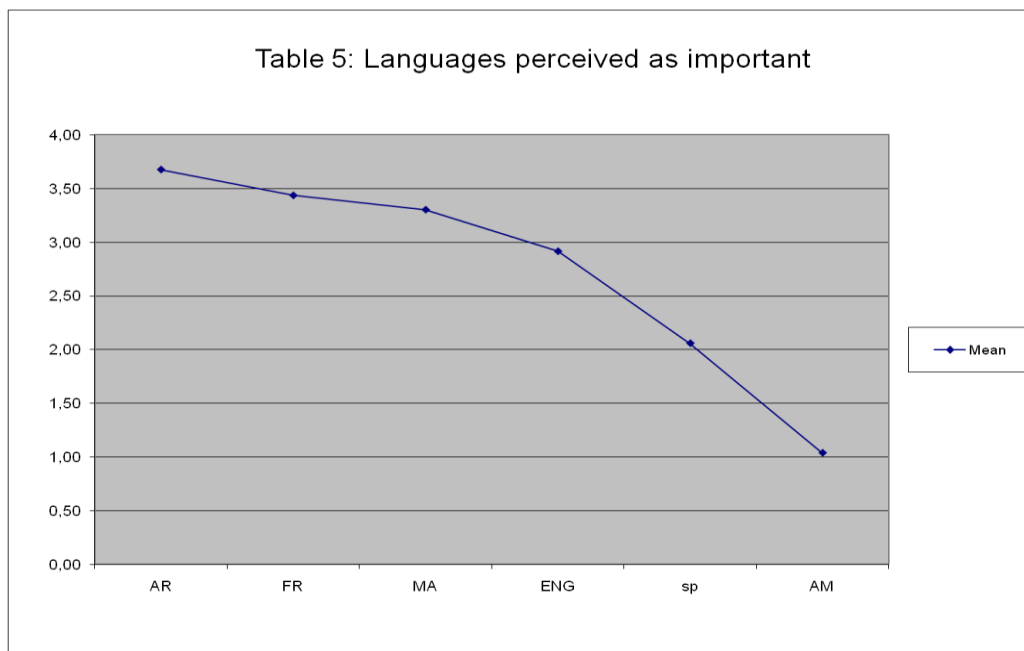


### Hierarchy

**MA>AR>FR>ENG>SP>AM**

When we first look at this graph we notice that the most attention-grasping information is the position that mother tongues occupy. Moroccan Arabic and Amazigh stand in two opposite extremes. At this stage, this can be explained by the fact that the questionnaire did not reach a high number of Amazigh informants, but still we can see that students of Amazigh origins master Moroccan Arabic while students whose mother tongue is Moroccan Arabic do not master Amazigh .

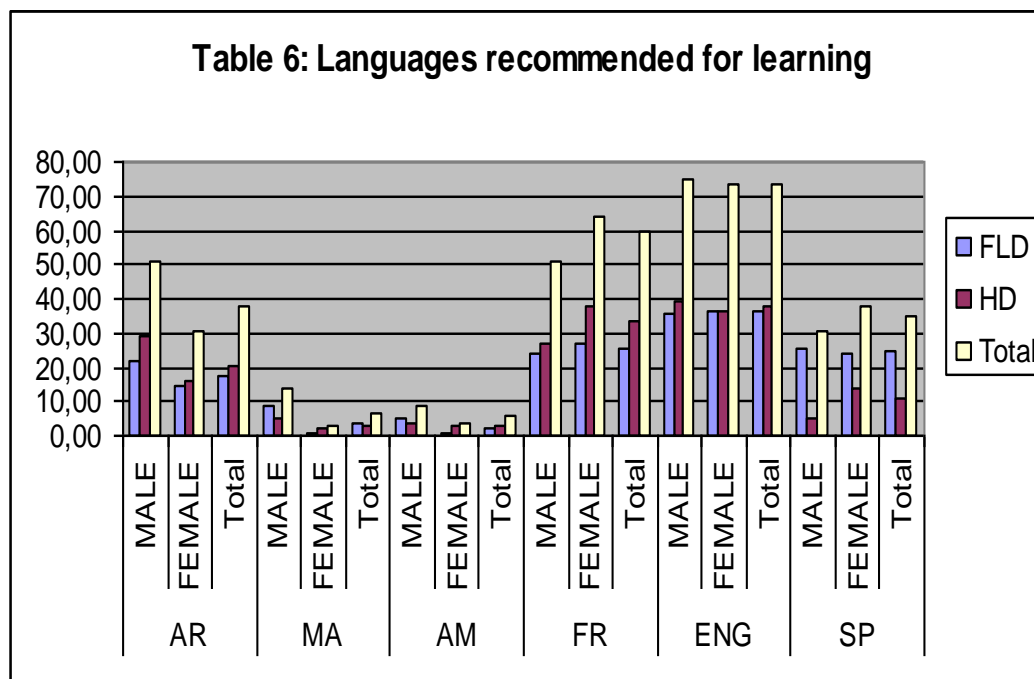
Standard Arabic also ranks high in terms of proficiency. Yet, if we go back to table 1 dealing with everyday use of language, standard Arabic is almost excluded which shows that it is not mastered for communication purposes but for other causes mainly because it is the language of religion, it is widely used in the media, in addition to the fact that it is a basic language of instruction. Concerning foreign languages, French is highly mastered by students of different departments while English and Spanish exhibit a relatively average level of proficiency.



**Hierarchy**

**AR>FR>MA>ENG>SP>AM**

Standard Arabic is at the top of the languages considered as important. As for Amazigh it still occupies the lowest position even in terms of importance. This bespeaks the fact that part of the lack of proficiency of Amazigh is due to its perceived lack of importance in education and in the job market. As for global languages, French wins over foreign languages and mother tongues as well. This hints to the remaining linguistic impact of colonization rather than globalization. The importance of French is also due to its wide integration in the educational and professional systems while English is still perceived as business oriented language. The last part of this paper is concerned with the languages recommended by students on the educational and professional levels.



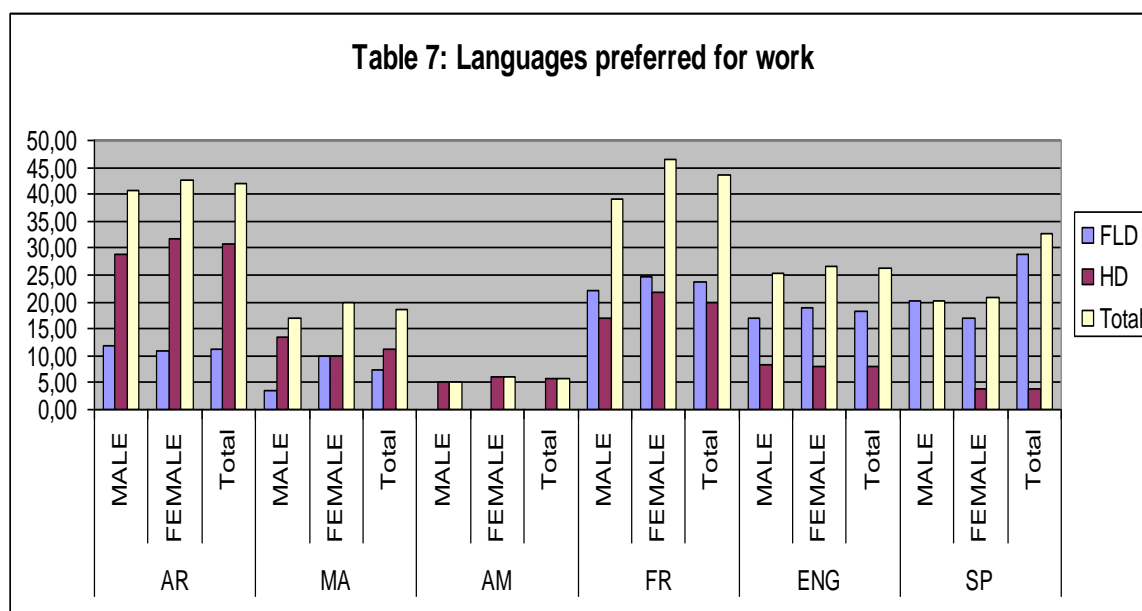
**Hierarchy**

**FLD: ENG>FR>SP>AR>MA>AM**

**HD: ENG>FR>AR>SP>MA>AM**

Global languages are recommended by students of foreign languages departments and humanities departments. The latter seem to be more enthusiastic about global languages, maybe because they are more aware of the handicap caused by their low mastering of foreign languages especially once they embark in the job market.

Mother tongues rank very low compared to foreign languages. Actually, thanks to the perceived importance of communication in the job market in which global languages are prominent, students do not see any benefit in learning mother tongues especially Amazigh due to its restricted domains of use.



**Hierarchy**

**FLD:** FR > SP Eng > AR > MA

**HD:** Ar > Fr > MA > Eng > Am > Sp

Each informant chose the language(s) in which he/she is fluent as the one preferred for work. But again, both students of foreign languages and non-foreign languages department have opted for global languages. This shows that students do not recommend global languages because of educational or professional pressures, but rather because they feel at ease with them even on the personal level.

The following is a brief account on the languages hierarchies as reported by students:

MA: wide daily use in informal domains but almost excluded from formal domains such as education.

AM: very low percentages in all of the domains.

H: Excluded from most domains formal and informal ones.

SA: Restricted to very formal domains.

Eng: Important in the job market and recommended for education.

SP: average percentage on all the levels.

The only exception is French which fiercely competes with all languages in all the domains formal and informal. This fact is a legitimate one since French has historicity mainly because it is the first foreign language used at the time of globalization and colonization. In addition, French is deeply rooted in the Moroccan educational syllabus.

**II. CONCLUSION**

This research paper is an attempt to revisit the claim that global languages are "constantly" dominating the linguistic scene in Morocco. It contributes in shedding light on the linguistic choices made by Moroccan university students. While it highlights the use of mother tongues and global languages, its main contribution remains that mother tongue maintenance is a continuing process that is competing with global language use in a linguistic scene known for its volatility. Tracking the developments and waves of change in the Moroccan linguistic scene requires constant checking on orientations. This paper is a contribution that aimed exactly at doing this. To sum up, the linguistic scene in Morocco is a multilingual one par excellence, where many languages co-exist and compete in some domains and exclusively used in others. Within this variability, the balance mother tongue versus global languages is always in favour of the latter while the former are still dramatically eclipsed.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1]. Berdouzi. (2000). Renover l'enseignement de la charte aux actes. Rabats: Renouveau. Charte Nationale d'Education et Formation, Royaume du Maroc, Commission Spéciale d'Education Formation
- [2]. (COSEF). Retrieved July 28, 2000 from <http://81.192.52.38/NR/rdonlyres/CAF0FEC1-2E4D-4A54-9C6A-9CB26780C33F/0/Chartenationale.htm>
- [3]. Diyen, Hayat. (2004). Reform of secondary education in Morocco: Challenges and prospects. Prospects, 3(2), 211-22
- [4]. Ennaji, M. (2005). Multilingualism, cultural identity, and education in Morocco. New York, NY: Springer.
- [5]. Marley, Dawn. (2004). Language attitudes in Morocco following recent changes in language policy. Language Policy, 3, 25-46.2.

### Appendix 1: key terms

**Global Language:** global language or world language is a language that has reached a world status that it is spoken and learnt as a second language in different parts of the world. This designation mainly applies for example to English French and Spanish

**Arabic:** or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the official language of many countries in the Middle East and North Africa. It is one of six official languages of the United Nations.

**Darija:** Darija or Moroccan Arabic is a variety of colloquial Maghrebi Arabic spoken in most regions in Morocco.

**Tamazight:** Also referred to as Amazigh is widely spoken in many regions in Morocco and in North Africa. In Morocco it has become an official language since 2011.

**Hassani:** or Hassanya Arabic is a variety of Arabic mostly spoken in the Moroccan Sahara provinces and Mauritania.

“  
“!

### Appendix, 2: questionnaire

#### استمارة

تدرج هذه الاستمارة في إطار بحث علمي حول انطباعات الطلبة عن اللغات المتداولة في المغرب. نشكركم جزيل الشكر على مشاركتكم وعلى منح هذه الاستمارة البعض من وقتكم .

1. السن
2. مكان الأزداد
3. الجنس:  ذكر  انثى
4. المستوى الدراسي:
5. الفصل:
6. السنة الدراسية:
7. الشعبة:
8. الكلية:
9. شئو هي لغتك الأم (أول لغة هدرتي بها و انت صغير) :
10. شئو هي اللغة ولا اللغات التي تهدر بها فحياتك اليومية ؟  
 الدارجة المغربية  
 الأمازيغية  
 الفرنسية  
 الإنجليزية  
 الإسبانية  
 أخرى \_\_\_\_\_
11. شئو هي اللغات التي كنت تدرس بها في الكلية ؟  
 العربية الرسمية  
 الفرنسية  
 الإنجليزية  
 الإسبانية  
 أخرى \_\_\_\_\_
12. شئو اللغات التي كتقتنها ؟ (رتبها حسب اتفاقك لها )  
 العربية الرسمية  
 الدارجة المغربية  
 الأمازيغية



الفرنسية

الإنجليزية

الإسبانية

أخرى \_\_\_\_\_

13. رتب هاد اللغات حسب أهميتها بالنسبة لك واعطها رقم في الفراغ

العربية الرسمية

الدارجة المغربية

الأمازيغية

الفرنسية

الإنجليزية

الإسبانية

أخرى \_\_\_\_\_

14. شنو اللغة لتتهدر بها مع هاد الأشخاص :

الأشخاص/اللغة	العربية الرسمية	الدارجة المغربية	الأمازيغية	الفرنسية	الإنجليزية	الإسبانية	أخرى
باباك							
ماماك							
جدودك							
خوتك							
خواتاتك							
خوالك وخواتك							
عمامك وعماماتك							
ولاد وبنات خواتك وعمامك							
صحابك خارج الكلية							
صحابك ديال الكلية							
صحابك داخل القسم							
أساتدة ديالك داخل القسم							
أساتدة ديالك خارج القسم							

15. حدد لغة الي كتفضلتمارس بها هاد الأنشطة ، در علامة فالخانة لتتنطبق عاي الحالة ديالك

الأنشطة / اللغة	العربية الرسمية	الدارجة المغربية	الأمازيغية	الفرنسية	الإنجليزية	الإسبانية	أخرى
تسمع الراديو							
تفرج فالتلفزة							
تقرا الجرائد والمجلات							
تقرا الكتب							
تسمع للموسيقى							
تكتب المدكرات ديالك							
تكتب الرسائل الإلكترونية							
تشاطي							
تكتب الرسائل فلپورطابل							
تجاوب فالتلفون							
تغني							
تسلم							
تسب							
تعبر على الفرح ديالك							
تعبر على المشاعر ديالك							
تحلم							
تحسب							
تناقش المسائل الشخصية							
تهدر فالدين							
تهدر فالرياضة							
تهدر فالأمور المالية							
تهدر فالمشاكل الصحية							

16. الي شي واحد بغا يتعلم شي لغة، شمن لغة تنصحو يتعلم؟

العربية الرسمية

الدارجة المغربية

الأمازيغية

الفرنسية

الإنجليزية

الإسبانية

أخرى \_\_\_\_\_

علاش؟ .....

17. الى عطاوك شي خدمة، باش تفضل تخدم؟

العربية الرسمية

الدارجة المغربية

الأمازيغية

الفرنسية

الإنجليزية

الإسبانية

أخرى \_\_\_\_\_

18. انا لغة كتعطيك فرص ديال الخدمة كتر؟

العربية الرسمية

الدارجة المغربية

الأمازيغية

الفرنسية

الإنجليزية

الإسبانية

أخرى \_\_\_\_\_

19. واش نت شخصيا كتبغي هاد اللغة؟

آه

لا

علاش؟ .....

20. انا لغة عندها هاد الاوصاف؟ (وضع علامة فالخانة اللي كتعبير على رأيك)

الأوصاف / اللغة	العربية الرسمية	الدارجة المغربية	الأمازيغية	الفرنسية	الانجليزية	الإسبانية	أخرى
أجمل؟							
أكثر شاعرية؟							
أكثر موسيقية؟							
سهلة؟							
صعبة؟							
سوقية؟							
متطورة؟							
أقل تطورا؟							
كتفتخر تهدير بها؟							
كتحتاج فالسفر للخارج؟							

Mariam Bakkali. "Mother Tongues and Global Languages among University Students in Rabat". IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 24 no. 1, 2019, pp. 43-52.