

## **Attitudes towards Diglossia in an Algerian Educational Context: An Investigation of the Primary Level in Tlemcen**

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### **Abstract**

Since diglossia has an immense impact on formal instruction, the present paper aims to detect teachers' as well as pupils' attitudes towards the forms of Arabic at play, Modern Standard Arabic on the one hand and Algerian Arabic on the other. To achieve the aims of this study, and try to find an answer as to the way teachers and learners react to Modern Standard Arabic and Algerian Arabic in attitudinal terms inside the school context, two instruments were utilized to collect data. First, a questionnaire was administered to a sample consisting of 12 teachers and then, the matched-guise technique was designed to 72 pupils from two different primary schools. Based on both a quantitative and qualitative approaches, the findings of this empirical study reveal that both teachers and pupils display positive attitudes towards Modern Standard Arabic since it is granted an outstanding predominance and prestige in the community, especially because of its tight association with the Qur'an. However, the findings also reveal that pre-school grade pupils hold a less positive attitude towards Modern Standard Arabic and favour Algerian Arabic instead.

**Keywords:** Algerian arabic, attitudes, diglossia, modern standard arabic, pupils, teachers

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## Introduction

Ferguson, (1959) stated that Arabic is often considered a ‘diglossic’ language designating the existence of a High variety (H) and a low variety (L). These varieties are kept separate and used in distinct settings and for distinct purposes. This sociolinguistic situation stands as an obstacle as far as formal instruction is concerned since Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the form that is standardized and taught in schools whereas the vernaculars used primarily for daily concerns and spoken communication, are not taught formally in schools.

This study was inspired by the following quotations brought by the daughter’s author and her classmate whose age is eight. The conversation took place at home using a mobile phone via *viber* application.

[ʔana nkrafi lʔarbiya ʔlayatər menfhemfi ʔsaħ nhebfia ʔlayatər hiya taz ʔalafi wkajna felqurʔan] meaning, *I hate Arabic (with special reference to MSA) because I do not understand it, but I like it belongs to Allah and it is found in the Qur’an.*

Thereafter, my daughter replied [ʔana nhebfia ʔla ʔater hna ʔarəb we msəlmin] meaning, *I like it because we are Arabs and Muslims.*

This small conversation triggered off a serious discussion among the author’s family members as to the current attitudes towards MSA. As a result, she wondered the kind of attitudes displayed by both pupils and teachers towards the Arabic language with its discrepant forms - MSA and Algerian Arabic (AA) at primary level.

To explore the attitudes displayed by teachers and pupils towards MSA and AA, this study was conducted in two different primary schools in Tlemcen, a town located in the northwest of Algeria.

### 1. Diglossia as a sociolinguistic phenomenon

Ferguson (1959) explains that diglossia is “a relatively stable situation” involving the existence of a superposed, highly codified variety “largely acquired by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes” (Ferguson, 1959, p.336), but alternating in the community with a ‘low’ variety, the real mother tongue used for daily activities.

However, Ferguson’s original version of diglossia has been subject to criticism and discussed extensively even by Ferguson himself who has admitted some flaws in a much more new article called ‘Diglossia revisited’ (1991). Indeed, the emergence of Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), a new intermediate variety of Arabic, is usually cited as evidence that diglossia is undergoing a considerable change, and as Mahmoud (1986) correctly mentions,

Diglossia is not an unchanging, stable phenomenon as it may have appeared to Ferguson, and ESA is a definite harbinger of change in the Arabic speech community since it seems to be bridging successfully the gap between the two

forms of Arabic and increasingly satisfying the communicative needs of its elite. (p. 247)

The present paper is concerned with Arabic diglossia, which strongly affects the learning and teaching processes, and consequently, pupils and teachers may display different attitudes towards MSA and colloquial Arabic.

## 2. Arabic Diglossia

It is presumed that Arab people have been acquainted with 'diglossia' since the pre-Islamic period during which every tribe owned its proper dialect, and a common standard dialect (Cordoba, 2007, p. 143). Yet, it was only later that the colloquial forms became established and their phonology and syntax matured.

If the structural and functional criteria are applied to the language situation in Arabic, we evidently notice that Arabic entails "two or more varieties which exist side by side with each other and have specific kinds of structural and functional relationships" (Nuri, 2013, p. 341). In fact, one of the most significant peculiarities of diglossia -which is directly implicated for the acquisition of literacy skills-, is the establishment of rigid and complementary functional separation of two linguistic codes: the written and the spoken (Ferguson, 1959). Before they attain school age, some Arab children may learn a small amount of H, but many have relatively little or no contact with it. Therefore, the two forms are conceived as possessing a different degree of prestige, as is the case, for example, in Algeria where both MSA and AA are used.

Maamouri (1998) believes that the standardization of Arabic which began in the 8th and 9th centuries AD, has produced a set of norms that the early grammarians called *fusha*. Arab people perceive *fusha* as 'pure' and 'real' Arabic and the vernaculars as 'corrupt' forms. Moreover, Arabs' attitudes towards the state of their language adhere to a generally unconcerned pattern: "the only language whose existence is socially acknowledged is the prestigious MSA, whereas dialectal Arabic has historically never been given much importance or recognition, since it has always been considered a bastardization of the original, 'pure' language" (Horn, 2015, p. 2). For most Algerians, MSA is perceived as the 'real' and 'correct' form used in formal contexts, while AA is the mother tongue of most people, for it only conveys social and cultural feelings.

## 3. Language attitudes

Attitude is a central state of mind that develops certain reactions towards the object/person which may lead to anticipate either a negative or positive behaviour.

The study of language attitudes entails various methods such as the analysis of societal treatment of language varieties, direct assessment with interviews or questionnaires, in addition to indirect assessment with the speaker evaluation paradigm (Hamzaoui, 2017, p.67).

The ‘matched-guise’ technique has been promoted by Lambert (1967) and his colleagues; it sets an example of the indirect assessment method based on mentalist conceptions which was introduced to measure language attitudes in a French-Canadian bilingual context.

The principal purpose of this technique is to extract information from the informants by making them listen to a piece of speech performed by the same interlocutor in different guises while the informants in question do not realize that the interlocutor is the same for all guises. The subjects will assuredly demonstrate feelings and different attitudes towards ‘each interlocutor’.

The prestige of H in the Arab communities remains homogeneous and incontestable even when sometimes people do not possess the capacity to comprehend it efficiently, by contrast to the western world where language attitudes are broadly affected by language policies commonly advocating the variety of the capital city as the national and official language of the country. Indeed, the attitudes of Arabs towards MSA “seem to be unanimously positive not only among Arabic speakers but also among large numbers of non-Arab Muslims as a result of its association with the Qur’an and its religious significance as a whole.”, as Dendane (2007, p.266) writes, in addition to the huge bulk of Arabic literature.

In Algeria, just like in the rest of the Arab countries, MSA is highly appreciated because it is considered the ‘supra-language’ exceptionally for its irrefutable status as the language of the Holy Qur’an and *the Hadeeth* (traditions) of Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him). Dendane (2007) says in this respect

the fact that a number of Qur’anic verses insist on bringing up this inextricable link between Arabic and the Holy Book makes people believe that the language of the Qur’an cannot be surpassed, and thereby hold it in the highest regard, though in practice it is a lower-status variety that people use in everyday speech interaction (pp,263-264).

Evidently, Arab children may display either positive or negative attitudes towards this prestigious variety once entering school, as they do not acquire it natively, but for Arabs in general, MSA enjoys prestige and power unlike the various colloquial forms, which are assumed to be socially disapproved and stigmatized. “In Arabic, people talk about the high variety as being ‘pure’ Arabic and the dialects as being ‘corrupt’ forms” (Hamzaoui, 2013, p. 28).

As already stated, this study aims to detect pupils’ and teachers’ attitudes towards Algerian Arabic and MSA at primary school level. The assessment of the pupils’ personalities and the form of Arabic is based on traits such as pleasantness and cleverness.

#### 4. Sample, method and results

The sample population of this study has been chosen randomly from two different primary schools situated in Tlemcen (a town located in the north west of Algeria). It

includes 72 pupils (six pupils from each grade and from two distinct primary schools) and 12 teachers (six teachers from each selected primary school). The rate of the pupils' group as compared to the rate of the teachers' group is adroitly higher since the present study focuses on the learners' rather than on the teachers' attitudes towards diglossia and the number of pupils neatly exceeds that of teachers at schools. One particular concern that relates to the fieldwork is that the learners under investigation necessitate cautious attention and consideration from the part of the investigator since they are too young and their age does not go beyond ten. It is also worth mentioning that the native language of these pupils is AA.

#### 4.1 Diglossia and pupils' attitudes

The matched-guise technique was outlined to evoke the informants' attitudes towards the Arabic forms at play by making them listen to a text passage performed in two forms (MSA/AA) by the same person, which might make them feel they are listening to two persons. Thereafter, the informants were asked to reply to a set of questions that disclose their attitudes towards the language forms tested. A text composed of two passages from 'Cinderella' story was read at a natural speed rate by the same person. It was first narrated in MSA, and then in AA (see Appendix A). In order to obtain different attitudes, we have divided the 72 informants into six different groups studying in different primary schools from pre-school grade until the fifth grade. The tables and graphs below will demonstrate the evaluations of the whole group of judges on two dimensions, namely, the assessment of the speakers' personalities and the form of Arabic in terms of pleasantness and cleverness traits.

#### -Pleasantness and attitude

*Question n° 1: Who is more pleasant?*

When this question was posed, the respondents provided the data mentioned in table 1 where the results in a 'pleasantness degree' are shown in contrasting views of those who declared pupil1 as opposed to pupil2/ 'I do not know'. Indeed, the majority of the pupils from different grades to the exception of pre-school grade clearly favoured pupil1, and considered him 'more pleasant' than pupil 2, as clearly shown in table 1.

Table 1 Pupils' assertion of guises' pleasantness.

Pleasantness	Pupil1		Pupil 2		I do not know	
Pre-school grade N=12	2	16.66%	10	83.34%	0	0%
1 <sup>st</sup> grade N=12	8	66.66%	4	33.34%	0	0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade N=12	8	66.66%	4	33.34%	0	0%
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade N=12	10	83.34%	1	8.33%	1	8.33%
4 <sup>th</sup> grade N=12	12	100%	0	0%	0	0%
5 <sup>th</sup> grade N=12	31	100%	0	0%	0	0%

Most pupil respondents revealed that the performer in the first guise (G1- MSA) is the most pleasant except for pre-school pupils. This means that the pupils from first up to the fifth grade hold MSA speech in high esteem and consider the performer using AA as quite unpleasant, mainly because the speech in this guise (G2- AA) is characterized by the glottal stop ( specific to Tlemcenian speech), and the majority of the informants consider this as erroneous for the learning process.

*Question n°2:* How would you judge these pupils if they were your classmates?

Here, the informants were asked to express their attitudes towards G1 and G2 by putting a cross in the square blanks they think convenient for the trait suggested.

**-Cleverness and attitude**

Clever.....Less clever

*Guise 1 (MSA)*

Table 2. Pupils' evaluation of cleverness (G1)

Cleverness (G1, MSA)	Clever		Less clever	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Pre-school grade	1	8.33%	11	91.67%
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	7	58.33%	5	41.67%
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	9	75%	3	25%
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	10	83.34%	2	16.66%
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	11	91.66%	1	8.34%
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	11	91.66%	1	8.34%

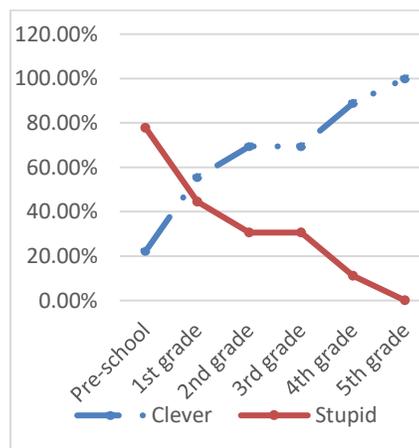


Figure.1Pupils' evaluation of cleverness (G1)

Similarly, the findings on the characteristic of 'cleverness' reveal a clearly upgrading scores ranging from 8.33% for the pre-school grade to 91.66% for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. First, lower scores are ascribed to the pre-school pupils who claimed that G1 is clever, then, as far as we moved gradually to the other grades, we noticed that higher scores are attributed to those who considered G1 as the 'cleverest'.

However, the scores obtained on which guise sounds cleverer for G2 seem to contradict with those above, i.e., to the exception of the pre-school grade pupils, most pupils from the other grades found G2 as 'less clever'. Consider the table below and its equivalent graph.

*Guise2 (AA)*

Table 3. Pupils' evaluation of cleverness (G2)

Cleverness (G2, AA)	Clever		Less clever	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Pre-school grade	11	91.66%	1	8.34%
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	7	58.34%	5	41.67%
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	7	58.34%	5	41.66%

3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	5	41.66%	7	58.34%
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	10	83.34%	2	16.66%
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	12	100%	0	0%

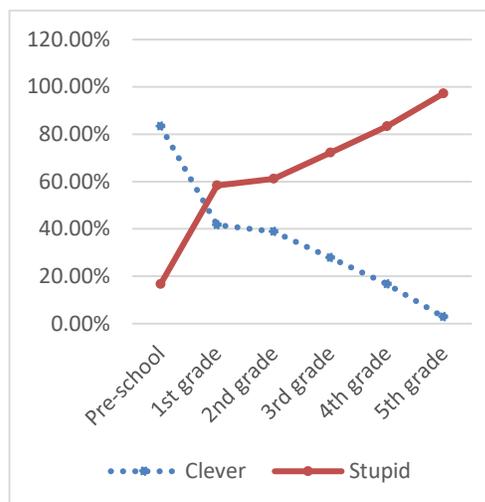


Figure. 2 Pupils' evaluation of cleverness (G2)

Positive attitudes are obvious and apparent in the data collected as regards 'cleverness' trait in G1, and negative attitudes about the speaker using AA who was considered as 'less clever' are also clear-cut. For the majority of the informants, the performer using AA in class does not adhere and is breaking the rule of conversation. Nevertheless, pupils from pre-school grade perceived performer 1 using MSA as 'less clever' and performer 2 using AA as clever. This might be explained that this particular category of pupil respondents has relatively no acquaintance with MSA outside the school context, and that they are still unfamiliar with this variety and unaware about its importance in the learning process.

#### 4.2 Diglossia and teachers' attitudes

On another front, and in order to evaluate the teachers' reactions towards MSA and AA, a questionnaire based on a psychological factor was administered to 12 teachers from different primary schools who teach at different grades and having different skills and experiences. The respondents were asked to reveal their attitudes towards MSA/ AA on the basis of three questions (see Appendix B).

Question n°1: In which form of Arabic do you prefer explaining your lessons?

Table 4 Teachers' variety preference in class

Responses	Teachers' variety preference in lesson explanation	
	Freq.	Rate
MSA	10	83.33%
AA	0	0%
MSA/AA	2	16.67%

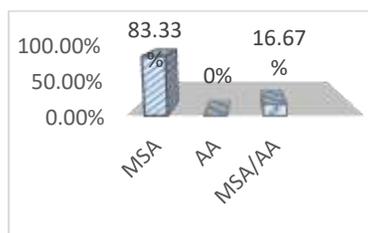


Figure. 3 Teachers' variety preference in class

The discernible findings gathered from the variety by which the teachers prefer explaining their lessons was MSA. Ostensibly, most teacher respondents (83.33%) affirmed their preference and inclination towards MSA use in class, despite the reality, which reveals that most of them use a mixture of both MSA and AA in the teaching process, believing that this strategy may help pupils' assimilation.

*Question n°2: Which form do you think is more beautiful?*

All the respondents confirmed the beauty of MSA as well as their high appreciation towards it, for they consider MSA as the real and correct variety used as a medium of instruction.

*Question n° 3: Which form of Arabic do you think more appropriate for the teaching/ learning process?*

Table 5. Teachers' assumption of variety's appropriateness

Responses	Teachers' assumption of variety's appropriateness	
	Freq.	Rate
MSA	10	83.33%
AA	0	0%
MSA/AA	2	16.67%

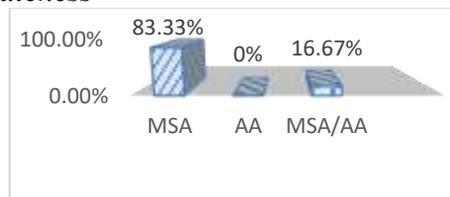


Figure 4. Teachers' assumption of variety appropriateness

When asked about the most appropriate variety for the teaching/learning process, similar results as those mentioned in question n°1 were obtained, that is, most teachers agreed on the appropriateness of MSA in the teaching/ learning process. The high rate of the informants' replies echoes their extensive recognition of MSA significance as a medium of instruction and their consciousness of its high status amongst the whole Arab and Muslim nations.

#### 4.3 Discussion

In their highly acclaimed responses about their attitudes towards MSA/AA, the pupils from first up to the fifth grade revealed their abundant appreciation towards MSA and felt proud of it owing to its sacred status and relation to Classical Arabic, the language of the Holy Qur'an. This feeling emerges from the Arab society perspective to MSA and the conservative nature of the Algerian society in which they live. Maamouri (1998, p.37) says in this respect, "there is a prevailing feeling among Arabs that their language is imbued with a natural superiority".

In spite of this high value, the pupils from pre-school grade held MSA in low esteem and favoured AA instead. However, taking into account their small age, we cannot deduce that this particular category of learners show negative attitudes towards MSA because they do not find it beautiful, correct or expressive. However, the reasons range from their perception that MSA is quite difficult to learn and understand, and that it is not their mother tongue. This lack of security comes from a general feeling of low understanding of MSA and of low identification of its norms (Maamouri, 1998, p. 37).

Similarly, the teachers' responses reflected their homogeneous attitudes towards MSA/AA. Indeed, all the teachers feel proud and show positive attitudes towards MSA that might contribute to various reasons such as linguistic awareness, realization of MSA high significance in the teaching/ learning process, and most importantly as the language of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, in spite of the acknowledged high esteem towards MSA, we firmly believe that the maintenance of AA in the teaching process will remain, unless there will be a general agreement amongst all teachers of the Arabic course concerning its avoidance.

## 5. Conclusion

The conclusions for this study can be summarised under the following points. First, the present paper reveals high appreciation in attitudinal terms towards MSA from the part of both teachers and learners, for they perceive it as the 'pure', 'real' 'and 'correct' form used in formal education, and more importantly as the language of the Qur'an. Second, negative reactions displayed by pre-school grade pupils relate to their perception that learning Standard Arabic is a strenuous process. This can relate to the fact that this particular category of pupils have relatively little or no contact with the official language of instruction outside the school milieu. They also perceive the standard variety as an 'unfamiliar' language and they are still unaware about the importance of this variety of Arabic in their learning strategies. Arab children's regular exposure to this variety before school age might facilitate its use and comprehension years later.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: The matched-guise technique (translated version)

**Pupil 1:** The passages below were read in MSA.

*Passage1:* Once upon time a girl named Cinderella lived with her stepmother and two stepsisters. Poor Cinderella had to work hard all day long so the others could rest. It was she who had to wake up each morning when it was still dark and cold to start the fire. The poor girl could not stay clean, from all the ashes and cinders by the fire

*Passage2:* One day, big news came to town. The King and Queen were going to have a ball! It was time for the Prince to find a bride. All of the young ladies in the land were invited to come. They were wild with joy! They would wear their most beautiful gown and fix their hair extra nice. Maybe the prince would like them!

**Pupil 2:** The same passages were read in AA.

Answer the following questions by putting a tick in the right in front of the right answer or the right selected adjective.

1-Who is more pleasant? Pupil1  pupil2  I do not know

2-How would you judge these pupils in case they were your classmates?

<i>Variety1 (pupil1) G1:</i>	pleasant <input type="checkbox"/>	stupid <input type="checkbox"/>
	clever <input type="checkbox"/>	less clever <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Variety2 (pupil2) G2:</i>	pleasant <input type="checkbox"/>	stupid <input type="checkbox"/>
	Clever <input type="checkbox"/>	less clever <input type="checkbox"/>

### Appendix B: Questionnaire to teachers

Question n°1: In which form of Arabic do you prefer explaining your lessons?

MSA  AA  MSA/AA

Question n°2: Which form do you think is more beautiful?

MSA  AA  MSA/AA

Question n° 3: Which form of Arabic do you think more appropriate for the teaching/ learning process?

MSA  AA  MSA/AA