'Back to the *futur*' ? English, globalisation and authenticity in Algeria

Camille Jacob | University of Portsmouth

This paper explores how global discourses of English as the 'international language' and the 'language of development' are reproduced, read and reconstructed in a dynamic multilingual linguistic context often defined as 'conflictual', and where languages are used to index identity and authenticity. Bringing together content analysis, corpus linguistics, geosemiotics and ethnography, I question the impact of uncritical academic discourses about 'languages in Algeria' and 'English in the world' on the maintenance of socio-political stratification in postcolonial settings. I argue that users' contradictory discourses and practices both need to be examined and taken into account in order to understand how mobility and change (both real and imagined) are interpreted and narrated by actors.

Most studies on the Algeria linguistic context focus on the notions of rivalry, hierarchy and what counts as 'authentic', with each language considered as a separate entity imbued with heavy symbolism. English is therefore described as an external and 'neutral' language, and seen as being used as a proxy battleground by proponents of Standard Arabic to reduce the importance of French, as it is "a language without connotations of domination, without a political past and [...] a convenient way of getting the job done" (Ager 2001:21, quoted in Benrabah 2013: 87). Across Africa, even though English has historically been 'absent' from many former French colonies, policy-makers and academics have suggested that there is an exponential growth in interest in the language, from increased demand for English tuition and bilateral partnerships (Algeria) to changes in the education system (Cameroon, Madagascar) and a linguistic shift from French to English in the public sphere (Rwanda). These processes are explained as driven in part by a rhetoric of rebelling against French linguistic and cultural (neo)colonialism and existing mechanisms of elite closure, and moving towards a language which has been 'de-colonised' and truly 'internationalised' (see for example Benrabah 2013 & 2014, Dyers & Abongdia 2010, Higgins 2009, Lefevre 2015, Ounis 2012, Pearson 2014). In addition, the promotion of English over French is also expressed as symbol and catalyst of the dismantling of monolithic,

authoritarian, closed systems, not only linguistically but also by extension politically and economically (e.g. Benstead & Reif 2013, Education First 2015, Euromonitor International 2012, Mostari 2004, Taleb Ibrahimi 2006). The 'international language' is thus heralded as breaking down socio-economic barriers and helping to create new categories of belonging and participation. Discourses around language are intermeshed with hopes and concerns around perceived changing patterns of emigration (to Anglophone countries rather than Francophone) and immigration (from China and sub-Saharan Africa).

Nonetheless, research and my own current year-long fieldwork show that use of the language and perceptions of its presence in Algeria remain relatively minimal (Atmane 2013, Davies & Bentahila 2006, Sebaa 2015) and that interest for and use of English does not follow this 'global movement' explanatory frame in any straightforward way. This paper therefore raises the question of the impact of the global discourses of the 'empowering' and 'developmental' effects of English (cf. Gargesh 2006, Seargeant 2012, Tupas 2006) on linguistic practices and conceptualisations of belonging, and the responsibility of academics (cf. Abbes-Kara, Kebbas & Cortier 2013, Blanchet 2016, Kubota 2015).

References:

Abbes-Kara, A., Kebbas, M., Cortier, C. (2013) Aborder autrement les pratiques langagières plurilingues en Algérie ? Vers une approche de la compléxité, in Colonna, R., Becetti, A. & Blanchet, P. (eds) *Politiques linguistiques et plurilinguismes : Du terrain à l'action glottopolitique* (pp. 177-195). Paris : L'Harmattan.

Atmane Y. (2013) 'Analyse des catégorisations des langues auprès des apprenants universitaires de Sidi-Bel-Abbès', in *Synergies Algérie* 20: 51-66.

Blanchet, P. (2016) *Discriminations: combattre la glottophobie*. Paris: Textuel.

Benrabah, M. (2013) *Language conflict in Algeria: From Colonialism to Post-Independence*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Benrabah, M. (2014) Competition between four "world" languages in Algeria. *Journal of World Languages* 1, 38-59.

Benstead, L. & Reif, M. (2013) Polarization or Pluralism? Language, Identity, and Attitudes toward American Culture among Algeria's Youth. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Commmunication 6*, 75-106.

Davies, E. & Bentahila, A. (2006) Code switching and the globalisation of popular music: the case of North African rai and rap. *Multilingua 25*, 367-392.

Dyers C. & Abongdia J-F. (2010) 'An exploration of the relationship between language attitudes and ideologies in a study of Francophone students of English in Cameroon', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 31(2): 119-134.

Education First (2015) *EF English Profiency Index 2015*. London: EF.

Euromonitor International (2012) *English Language Quantitative Indicators : Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen*.

Gargesh, R. (2006) South Asian Englishes, in Kachru, B., Kachru, Y. & Nelson, C. (eds) *The Handbook of World Englishes* (pp. 90-113). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Higgins C. (2009) *English as a local language. Post-colonial identities and multilingual practices.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Kubota, R. (2015) Inequalities of Englishes, English Speakers, and Languages: A Critical Perspective on Pluralist Approaches to English, in Tupas, R. (ed.) *Unequal Englishes: The Politics of Englishes Today* (pp. 21-41). Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lefevre, R. (2015) The coming of North Africa's 'language wars', *The Journal of North African Studies* 20(4), 499-502.

Mostari, H. (2004) A sociolinguistic perspective on Arabisation and language use in Algeria. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 28(1), 25-44.

Ounis, F. (2012) Rivalité entre le français et l'anglais: mythe ou réalité?, *Synergies Algérie* 17, 87-92.

Pearson, P. (2014) Policy without a plan: English as a medium of instruction in Rwanda, *Current Issues in Language Planning* 15(1), 39-56.

Seargeant, P. (2012) *Exploring World Englishes: Language in a Global Context*. Oxon & New York: Routledge.

Sebaa, R. (2015) *L'Algérie et la langue française ou l'altérité en partage*. Editions Frantz Fanon: Tizi-Ouzou.

Taleb Ibrahimi, K. (2006) L'Algérie: coexistence et concurrence des langues, *L'Année du Maghreb* 1, 207-218.

Tupas, R. (2006) Standard Englishes, Pedagogical Paradigms and their Conditions of (Im)possibility, in Rudby, R. & Saraceni, M. (eds) *English in the World: Global Rules, Global Roles* (pp. 169-185). London: Continuum.