



ORIGINAL RESEARCH REVIEW

English Language Use in Social Media among University Students at Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar - Algeria

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English language, nowadays, plays an important role in education in Algeria. The majority of educated people use it to communicate on social media platforms; specifically, the youngest generation tends to use the English language widely in multiple situations. They use it for communication, social media, and playing games. The present study focuses on the language shift among Bechari students in social media. It is based on a descriptive analysis of the language used in social media platforms and groups organized by Bechari students at Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar- Algeria. Besides, an online questionnaire was used to investigate the reasons for such a shift from French or Algerian Arabic to English. The results of the descriptive analysis show that English is the commonly used language in social media by Bechari students of different specialties at Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar. Furthermore, the questionnaire reveals that the majority of the participants prefer the use of English over French or Arabic for they believe that English is more practical and it opens the doors to the world. In addition, they believe that the French language connects them to the colonizer and makes them feel bound and subject to it.

Keywords: English Language, Language Shift, Social Media, Sociolinguistics.

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Introduction

The English language is now used by young people to establish a high social status. Higher-educated people prefer to speak English instead of French, which used to confer more power to the speaker.

Algerians who speak English are increasing by the day. The main cause for this expansion can be linked to the internet's tremendous effect, which attracts a large number of people's attention. Students from universities across Algeria raised their voices in support of English being Algeria's first foreign language. Everyone wants English to become the official language of the country because it is spoken worldwide.

This fact increased what is called 'language shift' among university students, especially in their groups on Facebook where they post their lessons and documents and discuss their study's issues. After observing several Facebook groups organized by university students at Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar (TMUB), it was noticed that English is the most commonly used language. Thus, the main aim of this study is to investigate the language shift among students at TMUB. The purpose of conducting this study is to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the reasons behind the language shift among university students?
- b. To what extent is this shift related to the current situation of the English language in Algeria?

Literature Review

Language shift is the process whereby members of a community in which more than one language is spoken abandon their original vernacular language in favor of another. Especially in language contact situations, people are confronted with choices about which language to speak (Kandler & Steele, 2017). According to Hoffman (1991), language shift is always preceded by multilingualism.

Language shift is different from Language Change. The former is a social phenomenon, whereby one language replaces another in a given society. The latter can be seen as evolution, the transition from older to newer forms of the same language. Language shift causes the adoption of a new language to expand, as well as the endangerment or extinction of the old language. It can be the result of deliberate policy, but it can also be an unintentional and frequently unexplained phenomenon.

Factors Affecting Language Shift

Language shift is the process whereby a speech community of a language shifts to speaking another language. It is also known as language transfer and language replacement. Several factors affect language shift in a given community ranging from economic, social, political and demographic (Holmes, 2008).

1. Economic Factors

The most obvious economic motivation for learning another language is to find job. People, nowadays, learn English in order to gain decent jobs in English-speaking countries. Bilingualism is the effect of this situation (Hoffman, 1991). The strong demand from businesses for personnel who can communicate fluently in English has successfully pushed job searchers to improve their English skills. In reality, being able to communicate well in English leads to higher-paying professions (Bayer, 2005).

2. Social Factors

Language shift occurs when a group perceives no reason to take active steps to preserve their ethnic language. For instance, immigrants who look and sound different are often regarded as threatening by majority group members. In fact, when an immigrant learns the native language of a new country and passes it down to his or her offspring in place of the old country's original tongue, language shift will be unavoidable unless the community takes deliberate steps to prevent it (Kuncha & Hanoku, 2006).

3. Political Factors

Language shift is influenced by political factors. It occurs when people are eager to 'fit in' in a society where knowing a second language is a requirement for success (Bayer, 2005). In a multilingual country, the government normally chooses one language to serve as the lingua franca to bring different ethnic groups together. As a result, the number of people who speak ethnic languages is decreasing (Hoffman, 1991).

4. Demographic Factors

Because rural populations are more distant from political power centers, resistance to language change tends to linger longer in rural areas than in metropolitan areas. The majority of rural people's social needs can be met in their ethnic or minority language. Because of their relative social isolation, Ukrainians who live on farms outside of town in Canada have kept their ethnic language better than those who live in towns (Holmes, 2008).

Language Shift in the Algerian Speech Community

Each country has its own policies and planning for its own language and also for other languages with which the population may be in contact. In most countries, there is at least one language that is acquired from childhood, and another one that is learned at school (Khelf, 2020).

Algeria, like all the other Northwest African countries, was conquered and inhabited by people from various identities and cultures, and this has had certainly a great impact on its linguistic situation. Algeria was conquered in the late 7th century and early 8th century (642AD) by the Arabs (Benali, 2000). Moreover, Algeria

witnessed the longest period of French presence and harbored the largest number of French colons. The situation of Arabic in French Algeria was precarious. There was constant pressure to prohibit instruction in CA, culminating in the edict of 1936 that declared Arabic a foreign language. Whatever education existed in a language other than French was in dialectal Arabic or Berber.

According to Benrabah (2007), although the government adopted a policy of linguistic Arabization of education, the strong position of the French language in Algeria was not deeply affected by this policy. Besides, it is part of the standard school curriculum in all Algerian schools. Even after the political debate in Algeria in the late 1990s regarding the substitution of French by English in the educational system, the government decided to retain French (Mouili, 2012).

Today the linguistic situation in Algeria witnesses the use of multiple codes; Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is still not mastered by all the Algerians, Tamazight, dialectal Arabic which cannot be used in writing, and the contact with French created a profound linguistic alienation (Benrabah, 2007). These languages are given different political, social, and educational positions in society. They have also classified Algeria among the multilingual speech communities.

1. English Language Status in Algeria

The status of English in Algeria is not just determined by cultural choices and educational opportunities. The role of English in the globe has become a contentious subject, leaving little room to discuss the democratic benefits of a shared worldwide language. Because of the power of the people who speak it, English has become a worldwide language. Industrial, scientific, historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural power are all examples of power.

While English is still considered to be the second foreign language in the Algerian Educational System after French, it has received considerable attention within the educational Reform (Khelf, 2020). In spite of the fact that English is not presently the main language of instruction in most public and private educational institutions in Bechar, its status has been changing since the early, 2000s. English is now taught to all university students from their first-year license to their second-year Master. In fact, the goal of teaching English is to allow Algerians to exchange scientific and cultural ideas and experiences with speakers of English.

2. English Language Use in Algeria

Each language in a multilingual society plays a specific purpose and represents a particular identity, and they all work together to meet "the complex communicative demands of a heterogeneous society" (Sridhar, 1996, p. 53). Apart from language teaching, Belmihoub (2018) claims that English is used in numerous fields and areas in Algeria, including industry, government, media, and journalism. Since the study's aim is the use of English in media, the main focus will be on this use mainly.

English is now widely utilized in Algerian media and journalism. Algerian TV channels have begun broadcasting news in English. Furthermore, the emergence of social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube provides an unparalleled opportunity for the Algerian young to express themselves in English and become users of the language.

Moreover, the previous Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Chems Eddine Chitour, declared on April 20th, 2020¹: “Ph.D. theses will now be written and presented in English; to give a more advanced and developed character to Algerian scientific research both internationally and nationally”². Indeed, he added that Ph.D. students are obliged to submit their thesis in English, at the same time calling on academics to make efforts to ensure that final studies should be developed in English. Furthermore, Chitour has opted for a smooth introduction of English into the Algerian university curriculum; the decision to generalize the use of the English language at the university will be applied in a progressive dose taking into account the necessary adaptation to this new situation (Khelf, 2020).

Research Methodology

Sample

The samples of this study were 88 university students at Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar (TMUB) from different specialties namely: Biology, Telecommunication Engineering, Science and Technology, and Media and Communication, and different levels. English as a foreign language students were not used as a sample for one reason mainly; it is believed that EFL students will definitely use the English language when communicating on social media. The choice of the participants was random; the researcher had sent a request to the Facebook groups administered by TMUB students of different specialties and only the above-mentioned specialties’ groups accepted the request so that the researcher could observe, describe and conduct the questionnaire.

Method

In this research, two methods were used to collect the data. First, a descriptive analysis of the language used by Biology, Telecommunication Engineering, Science and Technology, and Media and Communication students in their groups on Facebook. The researcher asked to join the Facebook groups assigned to post lessons and communicate topics related to the student’s studies. Second, an online questionnaire was posted in their groups in order to answer.

¹ Courrier n°253/SPM du 20 février 2020

² « Les thèses de doctorats seront désormais rédigées et présentées en anglais ; afin de donner un caractère plus poussé et plus développé à la recherche scientifique algérienne tant sur le plan international que national ». www.dzairdaily.com

The questionnaire consists of three sections. The first section was about the background information of the participants asking for their age, gender, level of education, and specialty of study. The aim of this section is to categorize the participants and focus on the variables of the study namely: age, gender, and education.

The second section was about language(s) proficiency and competence. It consists of six (6) questions aiming to investigate what language/ languages the participants know and used the most. The first question was about the languages they know; the participants had a list of languages such as French, English, Spanish, German, Turkish, and 'other' in order to pick the ones they know. The second was about their favoured language among the ones they picked. The third question was related to the previous one; the participants were asked about the skill they master the most concerning their favoured language. The fourth question was about whether they take extra courses to improve their proficiency level in that language. The following question is about the language they believe is the most necessary. The last question was a transitional question to the following section. It deals with the language they use the most in social media. If the choice is English, the participant will continue and move to the following section.

The third section consists of four (4) questions focusing on the use of English in social media and the participants' attitudes towards it. The first question was about whether they use English when communicating with other members of social media and the students' group. The second question was about the reason behind using English. This question consists of choices like the language is understood by the members of the group, the language is easy, the language is my favorite, it helps me to express my ideas, besides, 'others' was provided so that the participants can add more options. The third question was whether they believe that university students should use English in communication. The fourth question is whether their use of English is closely knitted to the situation of the language in the world in general and in Algeria specifically. Besides, they were asked to justify their answer for the sake of getting their attitudes towards their use of English.

Results and Discussion

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed and interpreted in tables and percentages. Since it was an online questionnaire, Google Drive provides calculations of the results which makes the process of analysis easier for the researcher.

Results of the Descriptive Analysis

As mentioned earlier, a descriptive analysis was used in this study. After joining the students' groups on Facebook, the researcher started checking the students' posts and comments to see whether English is used or not. Four (4) groups were observed

in this study: Biology, Telecommunication Engineering, Science and Technology, and Media and Communication. In a nutshell, the majority of the students use three languages: Arabic (the colloquial variety), French, and English. However, for French and English, it was noticed that the students switch between the languages; sometimes in one post or comment, they use the two languages interchangeably.

Moreover, during the observation, it was noticed that the students of telecommunication engineering always share YouTube lessons conducted in English in their groups such as *IP Sub-Netting Online Free Short Course* and *OSPF Interview Questions and Answers*. This shows that the students are competent enough to understand lessons related to their field of study conducted in English.

Results of the Questionnaire

The analysis of the questionnaire was done on the basis of percentages obtained from the calculated results of the different questions. The results of the first section are presented in the following table:

Table 1:

Background Information of the Participants

Specialty	Age	Gender Males/Females	Level	Percentages
Biology	21-25	15 / 30	Third-year	51.13%
Telecommunication Engineering	22-35	08 / 04	Master 1	13.63%
Science and Technology	19-23	10 / 05	First-year	17.04%
Media and Communication	23-28	04 / 12	Master 2	18.18%
Total	19-35	37 / 51 (88)		100

Based on the above results, 88 students participated in this study with 57.95% of females and 42.04% of males. The majority of the participants specialized in biology with 51.13%. Different levels participated in this study ranging from first-year students to master 2 students.

Language(s) Proficiency and Competence

The second section deals with the participants' language proficiency and competence. The participants were asked to select the languages they know. Some participants picked more than one language; 73.86% of the participants selected English, 62.5% went to French, 11.36% picked Spanish and the rest selected German (2.27%), Turkish (3.40%), and Korean (2.27%). Then, they were asked about their favourite language from the above-mentioned languages. The majority of

the participants selected English (54.54%), followed by French (39.77%), Turkish got (3.40%), and Korean (2.27%).

Moving further to the skill they master the most in their selected language, the majority of the participants (80.68%) answered speaking, then listening (13.63%) and reading (5.68%). When the participants were asked whether they take extra courses to improve their proficiency level in the language they have selected, 73.85% of the participants answered 'No'.

The fifth question was conducted to see the participants' views about the language they believe is necessary in today's world, 100% of the participants answered 'English'. Finally, English was the most commonly used language by the participants (39.77%) followed by French (34.09%), and then Arabic (26.13%). At the end of this section, the following statement was written: "if you chose English, move to section three. If not, thank you for your collaboration". It was used because the third section focuses on the English language specifically.

English Language Use in Social Media and Attitudes towards it

This section was conducted to focus on the use of English in social media specifically in the students' Facebook groups designed for posting lessons and communicating study issues. It consisted of four (4) questions; the first question was whether they use English when communicating with other members of the group, 51.13% answered 'yes'. For the reason behind this use, answers vary as shown in the figure below:

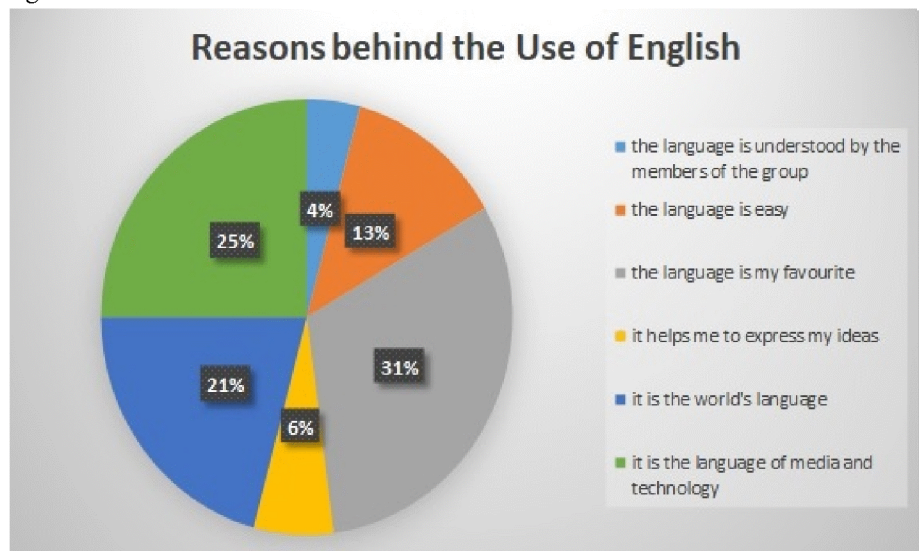


Figure 1: Reasons behind the Use of English in Social Media by the Participants

As can be noticed in the figure above, reasons vary from one participant to another. The majority of the participants agreed on the idea that English is their

favourite language, it is the world's language since it is used in media and technology. Other views such as English is easy and help the participant to express their ideas were also provided.

In the third question, 65% of the participants argued that English should be used by university students. Besides, in the last question, 100% of the participants believe that their use of English is the result of their situation in Algeria.

Discussion

Based on the interpretation of the results, it can be noticed that university students at TMUB, nowadays, are open to other languages in the world apart from the ones they learn in the Algerian schools. This is favoured by the result of the languages they know where some participants mentioned Turkish and Korean. What is more surprising is that these languages have no relationship with their field of study. Besides, the students' most preferable language was English. The students have shifted their attention from French which is the dominant language years ago, especially educated people. University students, years ago, preferred to use French over Arabic; it was more prestigious and powerful.

As for the language skill, they master the most, the participants selected speaking. This is mainly due to the situation of the language in today's world. Nowadays, students care more for the spoken form of the language and the communicative act as well. For this reason, they use English in order to communicate with others on social media.

Previous studies focused on the idea that the use of English in social media has several advantages for students. Desta et al., (2021) Argued that this usage positively affects students' understanding and competence. Moreover, students reported that social media improves their level of understanding and performance in language learning. It also enhances learners' awareness regarding listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary skills, which helps them in their everyday communications (Wang, Chen & Liang, 2011).

Furthermore, when students were asked about the reason behind their use of English in social media, they all agreed on the point that English is the language of the world, it is used in media and technology and it can be understood by the majority. According to Rao (2019), English is the most extensively used language in the realm of science and technology. It has also become the de facto universal language, with significant implications for scientific communication. As a result, scientists from all over the world can access available scientific information and communicate with scientists from different locations, regardless of where they are located. Working knowledge of English is currently a requirement in a variety of professions and activities, including research, medicine, and computer science, among others.

For the above-mentioned reason, 65% of the study's participants recommended the use of English by university students. In addition to that, all the participants said that their use is due to its situation in the Algerian speech community. The Algerian revolution against the French language shifted the attention of Algerians, especially younger educated ones, to the English language.

Conclusion

The Algerian speech community, years ago, was characterized by the use of several varieties and languages namely, MSA, the Algerian Dialects, French, and Tamazight. Educated people, especially university students, preferred to use French as a sign of good education and prestige. However, this situation has changed. A language shift happened at the level of foreign language use; students started to use the second foreign language in Algeria, English, instead of the first foreign language, French. Nowadays, English is the most favoured language by educated people in Bechar speech community specifically by university students, especially in social media.

This shift will be studied in a more precise way if the participants were interviewed since the majority believe that they master the spoken skill. For further research, it is suggested that the participants will be interviewed to get more English language use. It will be evidence of English language shift among university students at TMUB.

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استفاده از زبان انگلیسی در رسانه‌های اجتماعی در میان دانشجویان دانشگاه طاهری محمد بشار - الجزایر

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زبان انگلیسی امروزه نقش مهمی در آموزش در الجزایر ایفا می‌کند. اکثر افراد تحصیل کرده از آن برای برقراری ارتباط در سیستم عامل‌های رسانه‌های اجتماعی استفاده می‌کنند. به طور خاص، نسل جوان تمایل دارد از زبان انگلیسی به طور گسترده در موقعیت‌های مختلف استفاده کند. آنها از آن برای ارتباطات، رسانه‌های اجتماعی و بازی استفاده می‌کنند. مطالعه حاضر بر تغییر زبان در بین دانشجویان بشاری در رسانه‌های اجتماعی متمرکز است. این بر اساس یک تحلیل توصیفی از زبان مورد استفاده در پلتفرم‌ها و گروه‌های رسانه‌های اجتماعی است که توسط دانشجویان بشاری در دانشگاه طاهری محمد بشار-الجزایر سازمان‌دهی شده‌اند. علاوه بر این، از یک پرسشنامه آنلاین برای بررسی دلایل چنین تغییری از عربی فرانسوی یا الجزایری به انگلیسی استفاده شد. نتایج تحلیل توصیفی نشان می‌دهد که زبان انگلیسی زبان رایج در رسانه‌های اجتماعی توسط دانشجویان بشاری در رشته‌های مختلف دانشگاه طاهری محمد بشار است. علاوه بر این، پرسشنامه نشان می‌دهد که اکثر شرکت‌کنندگان استفاده از زبان انگلیسی را به فرانسوی یا عربی ترجیح می‌دهند، زیرا معتقدند انگلیسی کاربردی‌تر است و درها را به روی جهان باز می‌کند. علاوه بر این، آنها معتقدند که زبان فرانسوی آنها را به استعمارگر متصل می‌کند و باعث می‌شود که آنها را مقید و تابع آن کنند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: زبان انگلیسی، تغییر زبان، رسانه‌های اجتماعی، زبان‌شناسی اجتماعی.

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