

Understanding the role of language policy in the construction and maintenance of inequalities in Morocco and Tunisia.

In the globalized capitalist economy, knowledge of languages is a fundamental resource that allows access to the labour market (Heller 2010). The mastery of languages most in demand in the labour market, as well as the mastery of the official language of the country in which one lives, undoubtedly bring socioeconomic advantages. At the same time, the study of a subject in a language other than the mother tongue causes greatest difficulties leading to poorer results. All these language 'mechanisms' are profoundly influenced by language policy (LP) which mainly through education, can therefore determine individuals' socioeconomic status (SES) based on economic and political factors. In multilingual context like Morocco and Tunisia this situation is even more evident because processes such as colonialism, capitalism and globalization have caused a strong hierarchy of languages which is reflected in the education system and in the SES of their citizens.

The mother tongue of the majority of the population of Morocco and Tunisia is Moroccan Arabic and Tunisian Arabic respectively, but neither language has official status within the educational field nor outside of formal education. Rather, Modern Standard Arabic, the official language of Morocco and Tunisia but mother tongue of no one, is used as the major language of public education, followed by French and English, mother tongue of a very small minority, and Berber in Morocco. These LPs are not developed based on sociolinguistic evidence and although they have been modified over the years still led to a highly marked social hierarchy including protected elite groups that had a more prestigious linguistic repertoire and as a result, a higher SES.

This project will employ a mixed methods approach that will analyze the ways in which the socioeconomic status is shaped in and through language policy (LP) in education in the Moroccan and Tunisian post-revolution contexts. The political metamorphosis that took place after the political turmoil of 2010-2011 changed the LP of the two states through the education system and I will identify the political factors influencing the LP and the SES of the two countries' population with a focus on the higher education field. I will investigate the ways in which the LP established by the Moroccan and Tunisian governments influence the language practices of university students and professors and thereby contribute to the construction of their SES. This comparison between Morocco and Tunisia will help us to understand the processes through which two countries with similar historical and language roots lead to form different SES of their citizens through the LP process in the post-revolution period. The final aim of this comparative analysis is to identify new models of language policy that can be adopted by the two countries to reduce the inequalities that have increased since the 2010-2011.

Through the comparative analysis of the political dynamics occurred after the Arab Spring and the language education and SES of students I seek to identify a more egalitarian and efficient LP answering the following questions:

- What are the economic and political factors that have influenced and still influence the language policies of the two countries?
- How do the LP of Morocco and Tunisia contribute to the socioeconomic status SES of their citizens through the education field?
- What language policy can contribute to improve the quality of public education and reduce the socio-economic gap in Morocco and Tunisia?

In order to achieve the intended objectives, the project will employ a mixed methods approach combining historical-structural approach (Tollefson 1991), ethnographic approach (Hornberger & Johnson 2011), empowerment-oriented approach: research on, for and with subjects (Cameron et al. 1992), ‘researching multilingually’ approach (Costley and Reilly 2021).

Keywords: Language policy, education, inequalities, Morocco, Tunisia.

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