

LANGUES ET STIGMATISATION SOCIALE
AU MAGHREB
Peuples Méditerranéens n° 79
Avril-Juin 1997
pp. 35-53

SOME CAUSES OF THE BENI IZNASSEN BERBER LANGUAGE LOSS

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Languages are seldom admired to death but are frequently despised to death... It's fairly common for a language to become so exclusively associated with low-prestige people and their socially disfavored identities that its own potential speakers prefer to distance themselves from it and adopt some other language. Parents in these circumstances will make a conscious or unconscious decision not to transmit the ancestral language to their children, and yet another language will be lost...

Nancy C. Darian (1998)

The aim of the present paper¹ is to discuss some of the causes lying behind the progressive process of the loss of the Beni Iznassen Berber,² (hereafter BZ) variety. What is contended here is the following: it is language shift in progress that is leading to language loss (Fasold

¹ This paper is drawn from a Ph.D dissertation in preparation, under the title: "The lexical and Morphological structure of the Beni Iznassen dialect in a context of language loss"; at the University M^{ed} V Rabat.

² We use the term "Berber" for ease of reference. The BZ people actually refer to their native language as Tamazight [qmazigq] and to themselves as Imazighen. The term "Berber" here is devoid of all its negative connotations.

1984). The BZ case provides evidence for the assumptions that the political, social and economical factors are among the major ones exercising the kind of pressures that lead a speech community to develop attitudes -in this case negative- towards the languages in use.

What concerns us here is the elicitation of the causes behind the gradual reduction in use-and probably the disappearance- of the BZ variety from the BZ urban community where it used to be widely spoken until the 1960's.

The factors that seem to have had the greatest impact on the BZ variety are more or less the same as those reported in the literature on language loss. We have (a) the socio-political factors (b) The socio-economic factors and (c) the linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-psychological factors. Before dealing with them in turn, it is of relevance to give a brief account of the major causes of language loss reported in the literature.

The causes of language loss A brief review of literature

The available investigations on language loss all insist on one common element: namely, the presence of socio-economic, socio-political, and/or socio-psychological pressure phenomena which force an economically weaker or minority speech community to give its language (Dorian (1981); Sasse (1991); Day (1985); Fase et al (1992); Brenzinger (1992 among others).

Sasse (1991) claims that every case of language loss is embedded in a bilingual situation which involves two languages; one which is being lost and one which continues. This also happens in extensive language contact areas with unstable bilingual or multilingual speech communities as a result of language shift. This latter process involves the gradual displacement of one language (a regressive minority language) by another (a dominant language) in the lives of the community members. This is triggered by the decision of a speech community to cease to transmit their language to their descendants. The result is an interruption in language transmission.

Although the motives of such a decision vary (e.g restrictive policy, economical reasons etc...), this mostly happens as a result of the development of a negative attitude which leads to collective doubts about the usefulness of the language and hence a gradual abandonment of language loyalty. Fase, Jaspaert and Kroon (1992) also insist on the fact that the main cause of the process of loss is not to be located in the individual forgetting or losing some elements (or rules) of a language, *but in an incomplete and/or a non-transfer of a language from one generation to the next* (emphasis is mine). This happens, in fact, as

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a result of lasting cultural contact between two unequal societies-unequal in terms of economic resources, political strength and prestige. In what follows we will examine the causes of the BZ language loss.

The socio-political causes

Among the major causes of the progressive loss of the BZ variety the socio-political factors reveal to be of great importance. The impact of Islam on the BZ community, the Arab settlement in the area, the geographical distribution of the North-Eastern tribes, the weakening of the BZ community, the French occupation and the Moroccan nationalism have set the context for the BZ language loss.

The impact of religion (here Islam) on the BZ community

El Quartassi (1985) claims that the BZ community was among the first inhabitants of Morocco to have been converted to Islam in the year 641 AD. They have since then considered themselves as real Moslems and have followed the precepts of this religion. He adds that they never thought of imposing their language (i.e the BZ Berber) on the Arabs because they used to believe that to so do would mean a return to ignorance (Al Jahiliyya) and a reneging and denial of Islam.

They didn't even consider Morocco Arabic as a competing language with their mother tongue. They viewed it-and still do consider it- as the link with Classical Arabic -The language of the Coran. And this was a sufficient argument for being the legitimate language of Moslems. This explains, in fact, the actual total linguistic and cultural assimilation that the BZ community has been subject to. This would not have been possible without the long, direct and close contact with the Arabs.

The Arab settlement in the area.

The Arab settlement in the area started mainly during the Almohads' (specifically under Yacoub El Mansour's reign). So many Arab tribes were, then brought to Morocco by the Sultan to act as his allies and support him against the people of the mountains (i.e the Berbers). According to Voinot (1912), the Beni Hilal and Beni Jachm were pillagers who were causing too much trouble to the Sultan in the East (Present day Tunisia). Therefore, he transported them to Morocco to keep a close watch over them.

Most of the tribes that populated the neighboring areas of the BZ community were the descendants of these tribes or of the Beni Maakil. They settled there at different periods. Ahl Angad, for instance, come

from the Beni Maakil tribe- the Dawi Oubeid Allah group. They were brought to the area between Tlemcen and Oujda in 1358 (A.D.) by the Sultan of Tlemcen Abou Hammou II, to be his allies and so as to protect him from the attacks of the kingdom of Fès. As for the Mehaya, who are descendants of the Beni Hilal, they were brought to Tlemcen by another Sultan, Adbelwadite Yarmorcacene Beni Zain in the Middle of the XIIIth Century.

Bernard (1911) claims that the BZ tribes have originally settled in the Ghriss plain near Mascara, but the Arabs expelled them and forced them to abandon their land and take refuge in the mountains. These mountains which are named after them, are the location where they have ever lived until recently.

Given the importance of the impact that the contact with the Arabs had and is still having on the BZ Speech community, it is of great relevance to give a brief account of the distribution of the North-Eastern tribes of Morocco.

The geographical distribution of the North-Eastern tribes

The Beni Iznassen area is located in the North-Eastern part of Morocco. It is limited by the plain of Trifa in the North, Angad in the South, The Moulouya river in the West and Algeria in the East. This whole area was under the control of the BZ tribes before the Arab invasion.

Though it is no longer possible nowadays to give much weight to the distinction between the Berbers and the Arabs of the area because the two ethnic groups got so mixed, the examination of the local traditions and the historical indications lead us to conclude that the plains were inhabited by the Arabs while the mountains were the domains of the Berbers. Thus, the two groups used to stand apart not only linguistically but also geographically.

The Berber group includes, in addition to the Beni Iznassen -the most important tribe- the Beni Bou Zeggou, The Zekkara and the Beni Yala. They were all living in mountains which are named after them. The Arab group is composed of Ahl Angad, The Mehaya, The Chedjaa, and Ahl Trifa. The BZ tribes were surrounded by the Arabs (e.g Trifa to the North, Ahl Angad, Chedjaa and Ahlaf to the south). This could not have been without consequences when we consider the state of affairs of the BZ community and its language now. The two ethnic and linguistic groups have been very much in contact. True, there was no fusion with the Arabs but there was too much impact of the religion and its linguistic vehicle - Arabic- of these latters.

As far as language is concerned, most BZ Berbers had to learn Arabic because its use was widespread in the domains of religion and economic transactions). Voinot (1912), Bernard (1911) and Berrahab

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(1989) all report that some Berber tribes have been totally arabized and have completely lost the use of their native language (e.g Houara).

Thought there seems to be some opposition and animosity between the Arabs and Berbers of the area, as it appears from the continual wars and fights between them, the two ethnic and linguistic groups have always been in contact. the Arab and Berber tribes were often allies against either some other Arab or Berber tribes in the context of what is called the "leff¹" (i.e Assembling") or "Saff" (i.e "rank") war. These punctual leagues or confederacies were based on material and economic interests. The two major "leffs" in the area were the Angad and the BZ. The BZ "leff" managed to impose its supremacy on the area for a number of years. Its weakening led to the division of the BZ tribes -another factor with impact on language loss.

The division of the BZ confederation

The BZ were for long one of the strongest and most important tribes of the North-Eastern part of Morocco. This importance started when Ziri Ibn Attiya made Oujda the capital of his kingdom in 994 (A.D). Berrahab (1989) reports, in fact, that the legal documents do not consider the BZ as one tribe but a collection or group of four tribes. ².

On the same basis, the French references considered BZ a confederation of four tribes. They are from East to west: The Beni Khaled, The Beni Mengouch, The Beni Attigue and the Beni Ouriemeck. Each tribe is, in turn, composed of different clans. It is of relevance to state that some BZ tribes, mainly the Beni Khaled, included with them some Arab groups- hence use of Arabic.

The Beni Ouriemeck was the strongest and most important tribe of the BZ confederation. Its leading figures, Oulad El Bachir, managed to impose their supremacy not only on the BZ confederation but on the entire region since the mid of the XIXth century, from 1851 to 1876. One of them was even appointed "Amel" of Oujda by the Sultan Mly El Hassan in 1874. His nomination was, however, not appreciated by the

¹ The "leff" is a type of organization common to most Moroccan tribes. It refers to "alliance, factionalism, factiousness and partisanship". Berrahab (1989) reports that the BZ's leff was a kind of alliance during the periods of war and nothing more. The fighting tribes ask other tribes to ally to them because of their weakness or because of the large number of their enemies. All the neighboring tribes end up supporting one of the fighting tribes depending on their interests. At the end, the defeated group or "leff" has to give the winner an amount of money and a number of horses; sheep, etc..

² Another group, the Beni Mahiou, can be added to these. It used to belong to the Beni Ouriemeck tribe. It lives totally apart and stands as a separate tribe

Mehaya and Ahl Angad, the two important Arab tribes in the area. They considered their being ruled by a member of a "defeated race"¹ (i.e a Berber) a real insult. Because of the ensuing civil strife, the Sultan discharged Ould El Bachir of his office, but the latter did not want to obey. He was arrested in 1876 and sent to prison².

This misfortune had a very negative impact on the BZ confederation. It was divided into three "Qiyyada:t" (meaning "administrative districts"); namely, the Beni Khaled, The Beni Mengouch and the Beni Attigue. The Beni Ouriemeche, Ould El Bachir's tribe, was not assigned any caïd until later. This fact led to (a) the political undermining and destruction³ of the BZ confederation and (b) the rise to supremacy of the Mehaya (Arabs). As more conflicts for power increased within the BZ tribes, other "Qiyyada:t" were added. There were exactly eight for the BZ; precisely two caïds for each tribe. This was highly criticized by the French authorities in Algeria who claimed that the Makhzen (Moroccan Administration) was dividing the BZ to weaken them in order to rule and control them.

There is some truth in this claim, for though they recognized the authority of the Sultan as a religious leader, in the name of Islam, The BZ did not use to tolerate any representatives of the Makhzen. The BZ ruled themselves for so long, making use of their community laws institutions (e.g. leff, Djmaa, Miaad⁴), without any effective or close control of the Makhzen. The Makhzen never tried to organize or impose the regular payment of the taxes or their amounts. On this basis, the French references considered the BZ area a "Bled ES Siba"⁵.

¹ The Arabs used to consider the Berbers of the area -a defeated race- because the latters took refuge in the mountains when the formers invaded the area. This is based on an ethnographic principle that the defeated always give up the plains to the victorious and take refuge in the mountains (Bernard 1911).

² For more details about the history of the Beni Iznassen and this event in particular see Bernard (1911), Voinot (1912) and Berrahab (1989).

³ The weakening of the BZ confederation started in 1871 with the conflict for power between the Beni Khaled and the Beni Ouriemeche, two Beni Iznassen tribes

⁴ The system of "Miaad" was used during the periods of peace. It means "appointment, time and place". It is composed of the wisest and most honorable people from each tribe. It was like a council that settles all kind of problems in the confederation (e.g theft, aggression, conflict etc...). "Djmaa" concerns the tribe. Each tribe used to have a kind of council composed of the wisest and most prestigious people of the tribe. They had the role to select and appoint the leader of the tribe i.e the Caïd.

⁵ We used to distinguish between "Bled El Makhzen" and "Bled Es Siba". Bled El Makhzen was ruled and controlled by the Makhzen (Moroccan

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The rejection of the authority of the Makhzen kept the BZ community away from any foreign influence. This had a positive impact on their language. The preservation or maintenance of the BZ language over all these centuries could be attributed to the geographical isolation of the BZ community, the vitality of its local institutions, their group cohesion their rejection of all forms of foreign authority. Their being far from the political, economic and cultural decision making centers (Boukous 1998) was an additional factor.

This semi-independence came to an end with the advent of French occupation of Morocco. This latter, which took place at the beginning of the XIXth century brought the Berbers and Arabs close administratively. Another factor leading to their closeness has to do with the development of the Moroccan nationalism against the French.

The French occupation and the Moroccan Nationalism

The French colonization of Morocco and the intrusion of the Westerns was the starting point for the present state of affairs because of the numerous changes that were brought to the Moroccan society in general, and the BZ community in particular (Boukous 1998). The Westerns introduced a new notion and form of state. A "State" that excludes all the forms of the former community life and insists on its monopoly and control over both the economical and human resources. A state with a centralizing power (i.e the modern state). A state that sought to control even the individual's sense of identity while rejecting all the anterior forms of the community institutions. This policy succeeded, in fact, to undermine the BZ's institutions, economy and culture. Regarding language use, it accelerated the abandonment of the BZ variety and the increasing use of Moroccan Arabic and even French.

Another element in French Berber policy is the so-called "Berber Dahir". Calling for the use of tribal jurisprudence and French laws in Berber areas", it aimed to divide between the Arabs and the Berbers; yet it had the total opposite result. It rather succeeded to unify them because the Berbers perceived it as an attack against Islam.

Another element in this policy is the learning of Berber by the colonists and its use to communicate with Berbers. Around the 1930's many Berbers in general -and BZ people in particular- felt somehow offended and demeaned to hear the French speak their native language (i.e Berber) and decided to abandon it as a defiance to France's Policy. Since the French, a non-Moslem nation, were using their Berber language, it was better to get arabized and join forces with the Moslem Moroccan Arabs so as to oppose them. This consolidated the

Administration), but Bled Es Siba was not. This latter does not tolerate any representatives of the Makhzen.

relationship between the Arabs and Berbers and encouraged the development of the Moroccan nationalism and the promotion of Arabic as a unifying language.

The French Berber policy proved to be a real failure. The feelings of nationalism are still very strong among the BZ speakers. Their Moroccan national identity proves to be more important than even their Berber ethnic identity. This had a great impact on BZ, in terms of loss of prestige and usefulness - two causes of language loss.

There might be other socio-political factors, but they are of minor importance. We have concentrated on the most important ones. In what follows we will discuss the socio-economic causes.

The socio-economic causes

Researchers who have studied language loss stress the importance of the socio-economic factors because they create a situation of pressure that forces the speech community to give up its language and adopt a new one (Boyd (1986), Brenzinger (1992), Day (1985), Kuo (1985), Wolfson & Manes (1985) and others). The BZ case is no exception, for there are a number of such factors (e.g the destructuring of the BZ economy, migration, urbanization, intermarriage and Elite role). These have, in fact, led the BZ speech community to shift from its BZ variety to Moroccan Arabic (Henceforth MA).

The Arabic dialect is in contact and competition with BZ in almost all of this latter domains of use. The BZ variety, which was widely spoken up till the early 1960's, has lost and is still losing its usefulness and prestige while MA is gaining ground and status among the BZ speakers.

The destructuring of the BZ economy

The French presence in the BZ nearby areas had, to a great extent, destabilized the economy of the North-Eastern part of Morocco in general and that of the BZ tribes in particular. The Treaty of Maghnia between France and Morocco in 1844 reduced the BZ' grazing lands and plowing areas. In addition, the BZ community was the target of repetitive attacks of the French. During the year 1852, three punitive expeditions were sent to the BZ: 10th April, 15th May and 24th June. The French army destroyed many "Dechras"¹, robbed the BZ' silos and ravaged their fields, crops and fruit trees. In 1859, a military expedition

¹ "Dechras" means a group of houses. Most of the time a "Dechra" is populated by the members of the same family (e.g grand parents, parents brothers, cousins, uncles etc...)

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was again sent against the BZ so as to serve as an example for all the other tribes. The French used to consider the BZ tribes as turbulent and unruly. They subjugated them and imposed on them high taxes: A thousand Franc per fighter. All these events could not have been without any economical consequences on the BZ community.

After the international economic crisis-The Wall Street Crash -which influenced the economy of the colonists in Algeria, so many of them left Algeria for the plain of Trifa where they introduced new methods of irrigation. This led, in fact, to a change in the agricultural production both in quantity and variety. the BZ tribes were then still leading a stagnant life and left to the mercy of the weather. The repetitive periods of drought, dryness, locusts invasions and famine made the BZ people realize that they could not count on their agricultural activities for survival. In addition, the economic, technical and agricultural transformations brought by the French attracted the BZ and the other tribes and led to migration. This latter took them away from their environment (dominated by the BZ dialect) to one dominated by the use of Moroccan Arabic and French. This, then is an important cause for the BZ language loss.

Migration

The hard conditions of life in the BZ mountains together with the demographic pressure forced the BZ to migrate to Oujda and Algeria especially, to Berkane and Ahfir later and even to some European countries. Algeria used to attract the BZ because it was economically more stable. The presence of the French made the opportunities of work more available.

After the colonists settlement in Trifa, many of the BZ people left their homeland and became workers in the colonists' domains or estates. Many of them settled in Berkane which was very small, then.

The 1960's are the starting point for an important wave of emigration towards the industrial European countries (e.g France mainly, Italy...) in search of work for the survival of the whole group. As it was easy, then to find jobs because of the need of these countries for the cheap labor, all the male members of the same family used to emigrate leaving behind only the old people, the women and the children. They would soon come back, buy a house in the urban centre, Berkane and move their families there, leaving the mountains to those who did not have other alternatives.

The dispersal of the BZ community together with its abandonment of the homeland made its language and culture an easy prey to loss especially in the urban environment which is the ideal setting for such process.

Urbanization

The development of the new small urban center -Berkane- in 1904 in the area did not attract many BZ people at the beginning. There were only few families, about ninety. Its central position made of it a meeting point and an obligatory way for all the tribes of the area. Its weekly market ("Souq"), held on Thursday, used to attract all the people of the region. The BZ tribes used to sell most of their goods there. Yet, in spite of its strategic position, it remained a "Douar" ("hamlet") without much importance until 1930.

The increase of the irrigated areas and the building of Mechraa Hammadi dam in 1956 made of Berkane a dynamic agricultural center which was growing very quickly since then. Its population kept increasing in spite of the departure of many colonists¹: 3600 people in 1936, 7545 in 1947, 20496 in 1960.

The administrative reform made of Berkane a small district under the control of Oujda. It included the biggest part of the BZ mountains and the whole plain of Trifa. In 1971 45% of the population of Berkane were born in these areas.

Starting from 1947, Berkane was in the first position in the region with respect to its size, its agricultural activities and the number of the colonist settlers. The rate of growth of this urban center kept increasing until 1982. The causes of the rapid advancement and urbanization of the area were not due to the industrialization which resulted from the growth of the irrigated agriculture or any other activities as much as it was due to the weakening of the traditional rural economic structures.

The urban life was not favorable to Berber because of the presence of another ethnic and linguistic "group" whose language was more widespread than Berber. This situation encouraged Berber- Dialectal Arabic bilingualism. This bilingualism was, however, present mainly on the BZ side. The Arabs did not feel the need or see the use to learn Berber.

As the contact with the Arabs increased, the BZ people had to speak more Arabic than their native language for communicative purposes because MA was the language of daily activities. This fact made some BZ people question the utility of the language and of its transmission to the future generation.

This situation was encouraged by the institutional marginalization of the Berber language, the role of the elite and intermarriage. The Berber language was used nowhere but at home. It was strictly excluded as it was considered by the nationalist government not worthy of study. This is one of the important factors that led the BZ parents not to transmit their

¹ There were 1650 Europeans in Berkane in 1936. There were only 1057 in 1952 and 555 in 1959. (Maalamat El Maghrib? vol. 4).

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native language to their children. They considered their mother tongue as an obstacle to the educational success and social promotion.

Intermarriage and the elite role

The contact between the Arabs and the Berbers did also have a great deal of social impact on the BZ community and its language. The intermarriage between the two groups was very common. In all these cases (i.e mixed marriage) the BZ variety has never been transmitted. It did not matter who was Berber: the father or the mother. MA became, without any contest, the mother tongue of the children and the language of all the daily interactions at home. Even when the Berber grand parents are living with the family, the use of Berber is reduced to the minimum out of respect for the Arab member of the family. Some of these Arabs managed, with time, to learn the Berber language and speak it fluently, but their children never did. This was, in fact, widespread among the BZ elite.

A typical feature of the BZ area is the negative attitude that its elite has towards the BZ language. This class of people do not accept and even deny their Berber origins. They identify with the Arabs and associate with them. They view the Berber language and identity as a stigma. If you speak Berber, you are a rural and primitive person with no education and no social status. This is, in fact, why the BZ people nearly never say they are from Berkane. They rather claim to be from Oujda. This is mainly motivated by linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-psychological factors. These are the main concern of the following section.

The linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-psychological causes

The socio-political and socio-economic factors discussed above have imposed on the BZ community pressures that forced its members to shift to MA, the language it is in contact and competition with. This shift has led to the weakening of the linguistic and communicative competence of the BZ speakers, and to the reduction of the domains of use of the BZ variety. In what follows, we will discuss some of the linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-psychological factors that have been instrumental in leading to the progressive disappearance of the BZ variety.

The linguistic factors

As was pointed out above, the centuries of contact and intermarriage between the BZ and the Arab communities has had and is still having a great impact on the BZ language. All the references about the area report that the BZ speakers were bilinguals. They had to learn MA because it was the language of communication with the outside. As the use of AM gradually increased, the domains of use of BZ and the proficiency of its speakers decreased, two important causes of the BZ loss.

The reduction of the domains of use of the BZ language

The domains of use of BZ and MA were initially clear and separate. MA was the language of the street, trade business and the interaction between the BZ and the Arabs. It managed, however, to impose itself in the domains that were confined only to the BZ language. This is, in fact, a sign of language shift in progress (Fasold 1984). MA is still gaining in prestige and status among the BZ speakers while BZ is losing its usefulness.

BZ is actually losing its status as the language first acquired by children mainly in the urban area but also in some rural areas that are close and where a school is present. The interruption in language transmission has made of MA a legitimate language for the home as it is the only language used in parents' interactions with children. The BZ variety is, thus, losing its "critical mass". It is ceasing to be the main vehicle of communication. It is spoken mainly by older people. The young have almost ceased to speak it apart from a few words or phrases.

At this stage, the BZ variety is in steep decline. MA is actually used in all the domains that were previously restricted to BZ (eg. the home, the group intimacy...). Its loss of value and utility within the BZ community is speeding up its demise. The rôle of children, teenagers and young adults in language maintenance is essential, for they continue to bring new words into the language or change meaning of the existing ones. The loss of the BZ young mass means that the transmission link to the subsequent generations is broken. A fact that will automatically lead to the loss of the BZ language.

Decrease of the language proficiency of the BZ speakers

As most of the daily communication in the BZ community is undertaken in MA, this language is progressively becoming the community' language. This has as a consequence the decrease of the proficiency of the BZ speakers. The lack of opportunity to use the

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language causes the erosion (i.e decrease) of the language competence [Fase, Jaspaert and Kroon (1992)]. The decrease of the communicative and even grammatical competence of the BZ speakers is so important that it is hard for most of them -even the most fluent ones- to engage in a conversation in their mother tongue (BZ Berber) for even the shortest periods of time without shifting to MA.

In our investigation of this phenomenon, we asked a direct question to our informants. They almost all agreed about the same explanation. In what follows, we provide the translation of three answers given by some of these fluent BZ speakers of different age groups.

A sixty eight years old woman said:

"...It's not that I've lost my proficiency in BZ, but it's a question of habit. I'm more used to MA. It's spoken every where. The use of Berber is very limited. It's unconscious. You hear Arabic everywhere..."

A seventy six years old man answered:

I can speak both languages perfectly well. I have been using them all my life. I used to shift from one language to the other without any problem. Nowadays, however, the use of Berber got so reduced. So many BZ people cannot speak their native language. Arabic is more widely used. So, we are more used to MA than BZ..."

A forty five years old woman replied:

"It's true that I find it sometimes difficult to express myself only in Berber. I'am so much used to Arabic. The opportunity to use Berber is very rare. Everybody speaks Arabic. It has become a habit. The words come more everybody easily in Arabic

The above statements reveal the importance of the frequency of use. What our informants meant by "*habit*" or "*more used*" is language use and the degree of use.

In order to test the proficiency of the BZ speakers, we made use of different and complementary research instruments including: participant-observation, free discussion, direct response requests and translation. The data was collected during the summers 1996 and 1998. The number of informants is thirty five. The age group is from seven to seventy six. We tried to establish a continuum of proficiency from full fluency to a passive knowledge of the language.

Our investigation helped to conclude that there are considerable differences between the language of the oldest speakers and that of the youngest. We were able to realize that the different age groups correspond to different levels of proficiency. At the extreme upper end (i.e the oldest people from 60 to 76 years) the speakers were more comfortable and proficient in Berber than in MA. In the upper middle

group, we have skilled bilinguals (i.e people who are fluent in both MA and BZ). This group represents, in fact, the second generation. In the lower middle group, the informants could make themselves understood but in imperfect Berber. Most of these speakers did not acquire Berber as their first language but learned it mainly through exposure or from grand parents. Some even acquired it in childhood but abandoned it and stopped using it later at the age of school. This group is, in fact, much more at ease in MA. They represent Dorian's (1977) "Semi speakers". At the lower end, we have the youngest generation (i.e people below 20 years) who knows only few words and phrases.

To check the validity of the above conclusions we used the translation test. This will, however, be discussed with the sociolinguistic causes, for the test had as an aim to test both the speakers' proficiency and their degree of bilingualism.

The sociolinguistic factors

Among the sociolinguistic factors that have speeded up the BZ language loss bilingualism and language shift are of primary importance. They are discussed below.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism and/or multilingualism is a natural setting for the unraveling of the native language abilities (Seliger & Vago 1991). The beginning of first language loss can, in fact, be traced back to advanced stages of bilingualism. As it is the case for all Berbers, the BZ community is bilingual. Some of its members had, in fact, to go through different linguistic stages. They moved from the exclusive use of their native language (i.e Berber monolingualism) to the exclusive use of MA (i.e MA monolingualism). This was due to a number of factors, some of which have already been mentioned.

In order to test the degree of bilingualism in the BZ community, we used a translation test, from both MA to BZ and BZ to MA, with the same group of informants. There were a hundred sentences, which were made natural and include a fair sampling of the BZ grammatical signals.

This led us to conclude that the fluent bilingual speakers are all beyond forty. An individual in his thirties can still be a fluent bilingual depending on how much contact he has with the language and his attitude towards it. An individual in his forties and above can be less fluent given the lack of contact and opportunities of use and also his attitude towards the language. People below twenty have a very low proficiency and degree of bilingualism in BZ. It was very hard for them to translate from MA to BZ. The translation from BZ to MA was preferred. Even the people between twenty and thirty five were not very fluent in

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the BZ to MA translation because of the grammatical and pronunciation mistakes they made.

This test also allowed us to conclude that the degree of active bilingualism (i.e the active use of more than one language in everyday interaction) is high only among people aged fifty and above. It is very unstable among those aged between forty and twenty. It is nearly absent among those aged twenty and less. The low degree of active bilingualism among the BZ young people and the decrease in the community's proficiency in its native language confirms our claim that a rapid shift is in progress among the second BZ generation. This is leading to the BZ language loss as it will appear in the following subsection.

Language shift

Language shift in the BZ community appears from the gradual disappearance of the BZ language in a community where it used to be widely spoken. The members of the BZ community seem to have collectively chosen an outside language (i.e MA) where their language (i.e BZ Berber) used to be used.

There are a number of indications that a shift is in progress in the BZ community. The extensive use of MA in the domains that were previously restricted to the BZ language (e.g the home, intimacy, group, etc...) is the most important evidence. The decrease in the BZ speakers' proficiency in their native language is also relevant, for a reduction in use leads to a reduction of proficiency and vice versa. Though bilingualism is not a sufficient condition for shift, it is a necessary one. Language maintenance in a bilingual community requires a stable form of bilingualism. Stability does not mean that the amount of the two languages should be the same. It rather means that the functional distribution between the two languages -here MA and Berber- should remain intact. The domains of configuration of the BZ variety and MA are actually so blurred that it is very difficult to establish any domain separation. This great domain overlap (Boyd 1985) is a clear indication of language shift in the BZ community.

The pattern of language use between the BZ generations is also indicative of a language shift in progress. This is so because larger proportions of older speakers use the BZ language than younger ones. This is mainly due to the fact that the use of the BZ language by the young people is vertical rather than horizontal (i.e BZ is not the means of communication between the members of the same generation). Interaction with age peers takes place in MA. BZ is rather used with the old generation.

To illustrate the degree of shift in the BZ community we have recorded - through a hidden tape recorder - two situations where two

men are in interaction with the investigator. (The Arabic sentences, phrases and words used in their answers are underlined.).

Conversation one (a 55 years old man).:

Investigator : *'alach ur theslemdeṭ thmaziyth ilwaychath neech?*

(Why didn't you teach Berber to your daughters?)

Informant : *binnisba ithyira*

(in order not to have problems at school)

maynechmuch yaqraw

(They could not study (if they spoke Berber))

almuchkilu ana netch thasley xxes

(I'm aware of this problem)

teg inath. ur ufin lhell nnes

(They didn't find any solution to it (the informant refers to the example of a monolingual Berber rural seven years old boy))

macha aṭiruh aṭi yerr ze'ama

(for him to go to school, he will)

yelqa lmuchkil, kbi:r

(face a big problem).

ana chethum. mechhal men wahed

(I have seen them., so many of them).

Conversation two (a 76 years old man) :

Investigator : *misem th.egga lwaqth.u?*

How is life nowadays?

Informant : *th.esbah teg icht ntewwurth. th.eqbah teg icht ntewwurth..*

(It's good on one side but bad on the other)

Ima'aicha mazyana. maxass hetta masa'il.

(Life is good - comfortable - Nothing is missing)

kayen lmasa'il f ddin neqsa.

(There are things missing in religion)

Investigator: *'alach thennit naqsa?*

(Why do you say there are things missing?)

Informant: *ddin marahch mtebqinu.*

(We are not practicing our religion as it should be)

Notice that though we were speaking only Berber to this informant, he was answering mostly in Arabic. To make him aware of it we asked a direct question to him

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Investigator: *'alach kiṭi thessawaleṭ thaerabth waxxa netch ssawaley
akiṭech thmaziyyth ?*

(Why do you speak to me in Arabic even though I'm speaking
Berber to you?)

Informant: *hna nehhadru kulchi* .

(We speak everything)

(Then in Berber) : *ttasiyyid tha'arabth thefsus*.

(I find the use of Arabic easier or (light))

yadi dzi wahed lwaqt chchelha mayadich tebqa.

(There will come a time Berber is going to disappear)

The above conversations reveal that even the most fluent BZ speakers can no longer engage in a conversation - even for the shortest periods of time- without shifting to MA. As we have mentioned before, language shift in the BZ community was, to a great extent, the result of a collective choice. The BZ bilingual parents' transmission of only one language (i.e MA here) to their children is an unmistakable sign of shift. (Fasold 1984). The pattern of language choice on the societal level (i.e the BZ community) reflects language attitude, another important cause of the BZ language loss that will be examined below.

The socio-psychological factors

The socio-psychological factors seem to play an important role in the BZ language loss. The complete cultural and linguistic assimilation that the BZ community has undergone, the conscious and voluntary decision to give up its language and to cease to transmit it to its descendants are the result of a negative language attitude. This is the most important socio-psychological factor that we will examine here.

The BZ speakers' linguistic choices cannot be separated from their own and others' attitudes towards them. The attitude of the BZ speakers towards their language and its status reflects the status of its speakers.

The BZ language and culture are so demeaned that parents came to think that it is not worth passing on to their children. Some parents seek to avoid "embarrassment" or "failure" for their children by not teaching the BZ language to them. Others look for "success" by insisting that their children learn only MA. Some BZ people consider the abandonment of their language as part of the process of "development" and "progress", for BZ is regarded as a primitive language.

A bilingual couple explained why they didn't transmit the BZ language to their children saying what follows :

"What's the use of it (i.e BZ)? It's rather a handicap. A real obstacle at school. MA somehow prepares them for school. It is close to classical Arabic. They will at least have no problem to communicate with their mates...It is not the BZ language that will help them get a job..."

During our inquiry and through the use of both participant-observation and direct interviews, we were able to speak with many people from different age groups -about their native language, what it means to them, what attitude they have towards it and what they think of the phenomenon of shift to MA. THE majority expressed no regret about the shift and loss of their native language. They considered its non-transmission to children as an efficient solution to school failure. They all insisted on the disadvantages of not knowing MA. Most young people described how their parents consciously and actively used only MA in their interaction with them in childhood. Some even stated that their parents discouraged them to learn the language by making negative remarks about it (e.g It's "not useful", 'primitive"...). Only some very old people revealed a certain affection for the language and stated that they felt more at ease in it. Even the most fluent BZ speakers showed very low awareness of their ethnic identity. They almost all described themselves as Moroccans and Moslems.

Most of our informants pointed to the effects of school in lowering the value of the BZ language. They nearly all insisted on the negative attitude that BZ people have towards their language. Both young and old people agreed that the BZ speakers are ashamed of their Berber origin because they view it as a stigma that sets them apart and contributes to their estrangement from the dominant group, the Arabs. They also consider it a socially discrediting marker. This is, in fact, what has inhibited and is still inhibiting the use of the BZ variety among its members especially in public places. A nineteen years old informant said the equivalent of:

I have learned Berber with my grand parents, but when I speak it with my parents, they reply in Arabic. For them it is of no use. At school it is even worse. No one dares to use it. They are ashamed to speak it. Some act as if they don't know it...

A forty five years old woman told us about the psychological pressures she has gone through as a child :

My sisters and I have for too long hidden our Berber identity. I personally used to perceive myself as inferior, especially in the presence of Arabs. I used to hate the Berber language and reject it because of all the problems I had at school. We (i.e my sisters and I) refused and stopped to speak it even at home. When we grew older, we denied our Berber origin. We used to beg our mother not to speak

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Berber in the presence of our friends or classmates. "Don't make us feel ashamed" we used to tell her...

These attitudes are still prevailing in the BZ area even after the emergence of strong feelings of in-group solidarity, the re-establishment of the Berber Identity and the growing awareness of the Berber culture and language.

Conclusion

This paper had as its primary aim the investigation of the major causes of the gradual loss of the BZ Berber language. Our analysis helped us reach the following conclusions:

(a) The BZ situation is a clear case of a language shift in progress that is leading to the BZ language loss in the urban area if no maintenance measures are undertaken.

(b) The voluntary and conscious decision of the BZ community to cease to transmit its language to its descendants is the result of a negative language attitude that has led to collective doubts about the usefulness of language loyalty and the lack of ethnic awareness.

(c) The ignorance of the mother tongue by the young BZ generation is the main symptom that this language is being lost. Without native speakers the BZ language is facing not only loss but also death and extinction.

(d) The learning of another language, in this case MA, alone is unlikely to have led to the gradual loss that BZ is actually undergoing. This would not have been accomplished without cooperation from the BZ elite and community.

(e) Though the BZ speakers seem to be at ease in their Moroccan and Moslem identities, the BZ language situation is a classic case of a minority language being submerged by the majority one.

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