

# Covert Language Attitudes: A New Outlook on the Sociolinguistic Space of Morocco

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## 1. Introduction

This paper presents empirical evidence from the Moroccan contact situation to challenge the current theoretical understanding whereby local languages, such as Standard Arabic (SA), are presented as iconic of local identity and synonymous to cultural authenticity, while French, the ex-colonial code, is portrayed as imbued with status-bearing traits and is aspectual of modernity. These two codes have been standardly analyzed as being in functional complementarity, whereby SA is analyzed as “integrative,” representing local culture and social solidarity, and French is portrayed as status-bearing, representing social mobility. I show that this ongoing, polarizing, ideological discourse of modernity and tradition, a ramification of ex-colonial exoticizing discourse, has been used, in the Moroccan post-colonial situation, as a hegemonic tool which seeks to relegate local languages to the domain of the cultural, thus undermining their competitive edge, and to make ways to increase French dominance in francophone countries within the current global context.

Of important relevance to the current study is the discussion of covert language attitudes vis-à-vis Standard Arabic (SA), Moroccan Arabic (MA), and French in Morocco. This paper examines these attitudes in light of, and alongside, the dimensions of status and solidarity as axioms that have traditionally motivated the discussion of the presence of local and transplanted languages in contact situations. The results show that the current linguistic realities in Morocco challenge the complementary representation of French as representing status traits, and SA and MA as iconic of solidarity traits. Additionally, this paper discusses how the ideology of modernity shapes the attitudinal landscape of Morocco, vis-à-vis the different codes in use.

## 2. Moroccan Language Profile

Standard Arabic (SA), the H local code, enjoys considerable overt prestige as the official language in Morocco. It has served as a language of public education and learning in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. Immediately following Morocco’s independence from France and Spain in 1956, SA, which presented a mounting challenge to the colonial power, was reinstated as Morocco’s official language, in order to reverse the French colonial influence and to stop the proliferation and dominance of its code. In fact, as Abi-Mershed (2010) outlines, “the educational domain has become a site for political, socioeconomic, and cultural struggle, and a domain for the definition of local histories” (Chakrani 2011). The reinstatement of SA is a classic example of local language revitalization in the decolonization process. However, SA not only lacked political support and will from the ruling elite (Grandguillaume 1983), but is, in fact, facing undermining challenges in the domains in which it serves, namely, public education, media, and government. The exception to this is the religious domain, where SA has always served as the primary medium of religion.

Moroccan Arabic (MA), the Low (L) variant of SA, constitutes Morocco’s primary communicative code and is used by almost all Moroccans in L functional domains, such as home and street, and for intimate communicative purposes. Although MA enjoys covert prestige for serving as a Moroccan in-group code, it does not perform exclusively in H domains, due to negative attitudes toward it as a language that is not equipped with enough linguistic robustness to tackle formal topics

and discussions of a technical nature. This is the reason why Moroccans often switch to SA or French when addressing formal topics, the discussion of which requires resorting to a higher register. However, MA still attracts overt prestige by serving alongside French in key functional domains, such as in business and in everyday, transactional exchanges. MA constitutes Moroccans' primary language of communication in informal settings, the non-official variety of SA that most Moroccans use in everyday interaction. Although MA is phonologically, morphologically and syntactically similar to other Maghrebi Arabic dialects in North Africa, it does differ drastically from the *Mashreqi* dialects, such as the Levantine and Gulf Arabic varieties, in terms of borrowings and lexical choices. Due to its absence from the media, the attitudinal disposition of Moroccans and of speakers of other Arabic dialects is negative, who consider MA as not "Arabic," as many speakers in the *Mashreq* still erroneously think that Moroccans address each other in French.

Berber, as a native and newly codified language, has three main varieties in Morocco, namely, Tashelhit, Tarifit, and Tamazight. Berber has, for centuries, alongside MA, served as the primary L code of the home and street domains. In an effort to revitalize and integrate it within the national stage, Morocco has introduced it to education within the last decade (see Errihani 2007), with the purpose of injecting overt prestige and legitimacy to a language often regarded as an oral code. Berber has recently been introduced in education as a mandatory subject, and many efforts are currently being exerted in order to maintain it as one of Morocco's national languages. As of 2011, Berber is also an official language. General overt attitudes towards Berber, similar to MA, are unfavorable, as Moroccan youth are reluctant to learn these languages, given that these youth perceive them as locally restricted and restricting languages with less potential to advance their future career, while learning them would restrict one's upward mobility (Chakrani 2010). Although the learning MA and/or Berber does not exclude these students from learning French or English, some students believe that any effort exerted in learning local languages subtracts from fluency in Western languages. These students recognize that their peers who have the highest fluency in French are those whose homes have the highest presence of the French language.

French, the H colonial transplanted code, has often been described as an H language within the Moroccan context. French served as the code of selective education during the colonial time and after independence, has now become the language of private elite education, giving it thus, overt prestige. SA, which has served as the medium of public education (Al Woudghiri 1993) and as the language of colonial resistance, continues to serve in public education, which is devoid of venues for vocational success. In fact, "the recent colonial encounter of the Arab world with European countries and the contact of Arabic speakers with transplanted, European languages have resulted in a linguistic domination of Western languages in the Arab world" (Chakrani 2013). French, although not the official language in Morocco, continues to maintain dominance and almost an exclusive presence with English as the only viable, emerging language to compete in the vital sectors of private and higher education, business, and technology. English is also beginning to dominate in media, entertainment, and the business sectors.

Spanish, the second colonial transplanted language, predominantly used in northern Morocco, is spoken as a second language to MA. Spanish, which has a direct influence on the northern variety of MA, has been receding in favor of the recent campaign to implement French as the second language in Morocco, as well as the increasing presence of English in the Moroccan linguistic landscape.

### 3. Ideology of Modernity

The concept of modernity within the colonial and post-colonial contexts has frequently emerged within the discussion of language contact situations. According to Esposito (1999), the notion of modernity can be characterized as "...Western in dress, language, ideas, education, behavior (from table manners to greetings), architecture, and furnishings" (Esposito 1999:14), which is how these Moroccan respondents interpret being modern. This paper discusses the ramifications of the notion of modernity as an ideology which has "...a direct link to inhabitable positions of power—social, political, economic. Ideology is seen as ideas, discourse, or signifying practices in the service of the struggle to acquire or maintain power" (Woolard 1998: 7). Attitudes, here, can be defined as a

disposition that refers to “a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, objects, or issue” (Abu-Rabia 2003: 3).

In this paper, we analyze how the notion of modernity defines Moroccans’ language attitudes and linguistic practices, as well as how, as an ideology, modernity is primarily concerned with the organization of the dynamics that construct the relationship, rationalization, and “intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (Woolard 1998: 3). The pervasive effect of such an ideology creates social representations that are behind the stratification of the linguistic codes available in Morocco.

The exclusive articulation of the ideology of modernity and the proliferation of images of advancement through Western languages in the ex-colonial context meant the guarantee of sociocultural and linguistic dominance through the exclusive appropriation of status-stressing traits to these languages. However, such a hegemonic dominance was further achieved through the process of recursivity, an ideological process which “involves the projection of an opposition salient at one level of relationship onto some other level” (Gal 1998: 328). The projection of modernity and sophistication, which is associated with English in the *Zambian* example (Spitulnik 1998) or *Kreyol Français* in the *Haitian* example (Gal 1998), transcends language asymmetries to include characteristics about the speakers themselves as being sophisticated and educated vis-à-vis speakers of local languages, who are perceived as vulgar and unsophisticated (Gal 1998). Local languages are therefore, “ghettoized” within the context of English language dominance in *Zambia* (Spitulnik 1998).

#### 4. Previous Research

In the sociolinguistic discussion of language attitudes in Morocco, many researchers, such as Bentahila’s (1983) foundational work, have discussed the presence of French, SA, and MA in light of two complementary poles of representation: one, representing solidarity and the other, representing status. Less than three decades after independence, Bentahila (1983) discusses the polarization of French as a language imbued with “status-stressing traits”, while Arabic possesses those of solidarity. Mouhssine’s (1995) work on Morocco showed that SA represents cultural heritage while French, the ‘*langue civilisée*,’ epitomizes modernity and a forward-looking projection. Ennaji’s (2005) work describes SA as representative of “cultural authenticity”, while French is iconic of social mobility. Furthermore, Marley (2004) argued for an “additive bilingualism” in Morocco, where French’s acquisition is instrumental and Arabic’s acquisition is integrative.

Although previous research has argued for French’s exclusive appropriation to the projection of modernity, and for SA to index local, cultural representation, these theoretical discussions do not fully describe the empirical realities governing the distribution of these codes. In fact, the relationship that governs French, SA, and MA does not align language attitudes toward these codes within this dichotomous division, along the axiom of instrumental and integrative lines of language use.

### 5. Research Methodology and Findings

#### 5.1. Covert Language Attitudes: Matched Guise Test

The current study discusses the results of a Matched Guise Test (MGT), a theoretical model that investigates covert language attitudes, based on a cluster of traits conventionally known as indexing power (status) and another set of traits widely associated with solidarity traits, after Lambert (1967), Bentahila (1983), Woolard (1989) and Park (2004). The status traits used are as follows: modern, educated, intelligent, rich, important, ambitious, open-minded, confident, would like to hire him/her, like his/her way of speaking, and want this person to be my boss. The solidarity traits included are the following: modest, honest, sociable, emotional, take as a friend, from a good family, patriotic, religious, and want to work with this person. The distracter traits are: owns a car and sounds to me that he/she smokes. These status traits are a list of descriptive adjectives that elicit upward, social mobility. The solidarity traits show which language(s) is linked to in-group solidarity and a marker of in-group membership. They represent a speaker’s socially integrative characteristics which define a speaker as

belonging to a given speech community and facilitate in-group integration and demarcate its membership.

The study investigated covert attitudes toward SA, MA and French by using the guises of a Moroccan balanced bilingual in French and Arabic and native MA speaker. The text chosen for the MGT was a passage about soccer, a topic that is linguistically, politically, and socially neutral, as sports are broadcasted equally in SA and French and discussed in MA.

The MGT was administered in 2007 at an English language school in a major metropolitan city in Morocco to 57 student respondents, 25 females and 32 males, who are overwhelmingly middle class. These respondents were native speakers of MA and had an equal speaking and understanding competence in French and SA, according to self-reported data. When analyzed by gender, students' covert attitude responses to the language guises did not have statistically significant differences.

### 5.2. Overt Language Attitudes: Language Questionnaire

The language attitudes questionnaire was administered in 2007 to four colleges within two major cities in Morocco. Since the questionnaire gauged attitudes of two linguistically-oriented and -educated groups, two versions of the language questionnaire were made, SA and French, in order for the students to be able to choose either version, depending on their linguistic competence or orientation. The language questionnaire investigated four aspects of language attitudes and use: (1) demographics and language use in the home, neighborhood and school; (2) attitudes to languages in various domains; (3) self-reported language competency and linguistic skills in codeswitching among these languages; and (4) an open-ended question related to the current linguistic situation in Morocco. There were 454 university student respondents, equally distributed between females and males, with a mean age of 21 years, from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic regions in Morocco.

### 5.3. Matched Guise Test Results

Overall, the student respondents predominantly preferred French over SA and MA for status traits (Figure 1). This, as we will see, is not surprising, given the fact that the projection and ideology of modernity are strictly associated with French. However, what is surprising, with regards to solidarity traits, is that although MA maintains a slight lead over SA and French, the latter is scored significantly higher than SA among one-third of the solidarity traits. This shows that French is not solely relegated to status-stressing traits, but is also negotiating solidarity traits as well. Due to the limited scope of this paper, it will only discuss results of the following status traits: modern, educated, open-minded, and want this person to be my boss, and the following solidarity traits: honest, sociable, take as a friend, and want to work with this person<sup>1</sup>.

<b>Figure 1. Matched Guise Test Results</b>			
<b><u>Trait</u></b>	<b><u>SA v. MA</u></b>	<b><u>SA v. French</u></b>	<b><u>MA v. French</u></b>
<b><i>Status Traits</i></b>			
Modern	not significant (p = .117)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .004)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .000)
Open-minded	not significant (p = 0.053)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .017)	not significant (p = .423)
Educated	<b>SA higher</b> (p = .000)	not significant (p = .131)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .000)
Want this person to be my boss	not significant (p = .056)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .000)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .006)
Rich	Not significant (p = .920)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .000)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .000)

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to Chakrani (2010) for a detailed discussion of the results.

<b>Figure 1. Matched Guise Test Results</b>			
<b><u>Trait</u></b>	<b><u>SA v. MA</u></b>	<b><u>SA v. French</u></b>	<b><u>MA v. French</u></b>
<b><i>Solidarity Traits</i></b>			
Want to work with this person	not significant (p = .181)	<b>French higher</b> (p = .002)	not significant (p = .122)
Take as a friend	not significant (p = .895)	not significant (p = .236)	not significant (p = .216)
Sociable	<b>MA higher</b> (p = .004)	not significant (p = .388)	<b>MA higher</b> (p = .011)
Emotional	not significant (p = .290)	not significant (p = .960)	not significant (p = .268)

### 5.3.1. Results Discussion: Status Traits

In student respondents' covert attitudes toward modernity and open-mindedness, the results show no statistically significant difference between MA and SA. These results are somewhat surprising, given that SA, as the High (H) code, has historically held an advanced position as the de facto language for educational and scientific research in the Arab world. Contrarily, MA, SA's local variant in Morocco, has always served as a medium for local expression and a means of intimate communicative purposes. The fact that SA has been relegated solely to discourses of tradition and cultural authenticity undermines its ability to project modern attributes.

SA is presented as iconic of cultural authenticity. Such a restrictive, authenticating discourse is stated in the following quote: "Arabization is also a means of finding authentic Islam, an Islam whose source is purified from the embodiment of the West and its modernism" (trans. mine, Mouhssine 1995: 51). In fact, this repeated association of SA and Islam with tradition relegates them both to the past, historical context. The ideological framing of SA as a code in juxtaposition to the ascription of modernity undermines efforts to introduce it as a language representative of the post-colonial, secular, modern Moroccan state.

Contrary to SA's disassociation with modernity, French maintains a comfortable and significant lead with regards to the ascription of modernity and open-mindedness, since the results show that French is significantly higher than SA in both traits. Similarly, French is significantly higher than MA in modernity, as a clear indication of French as strictly tied to the construction of the ideology of modernity.

However, among these middle-class respondents, there is no significant difference between French and MA for open-mindedness. This could indicate that MA has come to acquire some status traits, through its informal association with French in some formal settings in vital sectors, such in business, banks, hotels and government, where even the presence of SA remains official.

These results present modernity as quintessentially synonymous with French. This asymmetrical relationship also holds between learners of French and SA in multilingual Morocco. In fact, Western languages such as French, and increasingly English, are maintaining linguistic dominance through their exclusive attribution to a modern lifestyle. Such an attribution is continually reinforced through the "schizophrenic" nature of Moroccan education (Kaye and Zoubir 1990), where French, much like French *avancée* in Canada (Heller 1995), controls access to 'hard' sciences and opportunities for social mobility. Contrarily, SA is relegated to social sciences, which are perceived by many Moroccans as unnecessary for socioeconomic advancement. This can be seen through the question often posed by Moroccans students to each other about their high school major, "*wash nta 'ilmi* (are you a science-track student) *wulla 'adābi* (or torture)?" where the latter word *'adābi* (torture) is a pun on the word *'adābi* (literature-track student). The ideology of modernity is further perpetuated by beneficiaries of the state, like Mohamed Berdouzi, a Moroccan political figure, who presents SA as the antithesis of modernity, declaring that the adoption of SA for teaching science and technology would "consign millions of young Moroccans to a 'cultural and socio-economic ghetto'" (Berdouzi 2000 qtd. in Marley 2004b: 31). The promotion of SA will not be effective if it is solely relegated to the social

sciences section of education, with its presence precluded from domains that manage and police the images of modernity, that are actively allocating overt prestige, the assertion of status traits, and the projection of modernity.

The fact that there is no significant difference between SA and French in education signals that although students may be educated by speaking SA, since it is one of the languages of education, they are not perceived as modern or open-minded, which shows that SA is undermined by the ideological representation of modernity. The fact that SA and French are rated significantly higher than MA shows that both SA and French are languages of education, while MA is not.

For the trait ‘want this person to be my boss,’ French scored significantly higher than SA as well as MA, while there was no significant difference between SA and MA. Given the results, these middle class, Moroccan students would be inclined to have as a boss a Moroccan bilingual or a French monolingual. This is indicative of the considerable challenges that SA-taught graduates often find in their job search, given their limited exposure to French, which is taught as a mandatory subject and not as the language of instruction. This also signals that despite the seemingly bona fide attempt to promote SA in education, such a promotion remains subordinate and peripheral to a French elitist education.

In light of the French dominance in the job market in Morocco and its perception as the “economic reservoir” (Spitulnik 1998:175), French has come to be “associated in the minds of speakers themselves with modernization—if not necessarily with modernity, in a mythical sense—at least with modernization, because of its availability to deliver individual prosperity and emancipated lifestyles” (Gill 1999: 134). For the status trait ‘rich,’ French is rated significantly higher than MA or SA, which presents a strong argument for the exclusive, gate-keeping role that it plays in accessing venues of wealth and instructing the market economy regime. In fact, Moroccans often gauge one’s socioeconomic status and social mobility, at least perceptually, through one’s command of the French language as those of higher socioeconomic status display strong command of the language in a near-native level.

The fact that there is no significant difference between SA and MA in eight of the eleven status traits does not indicate a shift in covert attitudes toward MA, which scored significantly lower than French. Rather, the position of SA as an H code and status-bearing language, considered by many Moroccans to be the only likely candidate to compete with French, has been undermined, which hinders it from competing against French. In fact, covert attitudes are shifting toward relegating both MA and SA to solidarity traits, challenging thus, any prospect of revitalizing local languages to reverse the tide of French colonial influence.

The implications of relegating SA and MA to the realms of the cultural and traditional not only curtails the availability of either code, but also allows unrestricted permeation of French into competing with SA and MA for lower functional domains and attributes of solidarity often allocated to them.

### *5.3.2. Results Discussion: Solidarity Traits*

As shown in the discussion of status, these respondents would be inclined to prefer a Moroccan bilingual or a French monolingual as a boss. In addition, as a further ramification of the ideology of modernity, these middle-class respondents prefer to work with a Moroccan bilingual. These results provide further evidence that such an ideology creates systematic disenfranchisement and disqualification of masses of Moroccans educated solely in SA-taught, public schools. Such an ideology perpetuates the current social order and linguistic stratification (Woolard 1998). In fact, French’s dominance does not only permeate domains to which capital is allocated, but also to domains through which images of modernity are mediated.

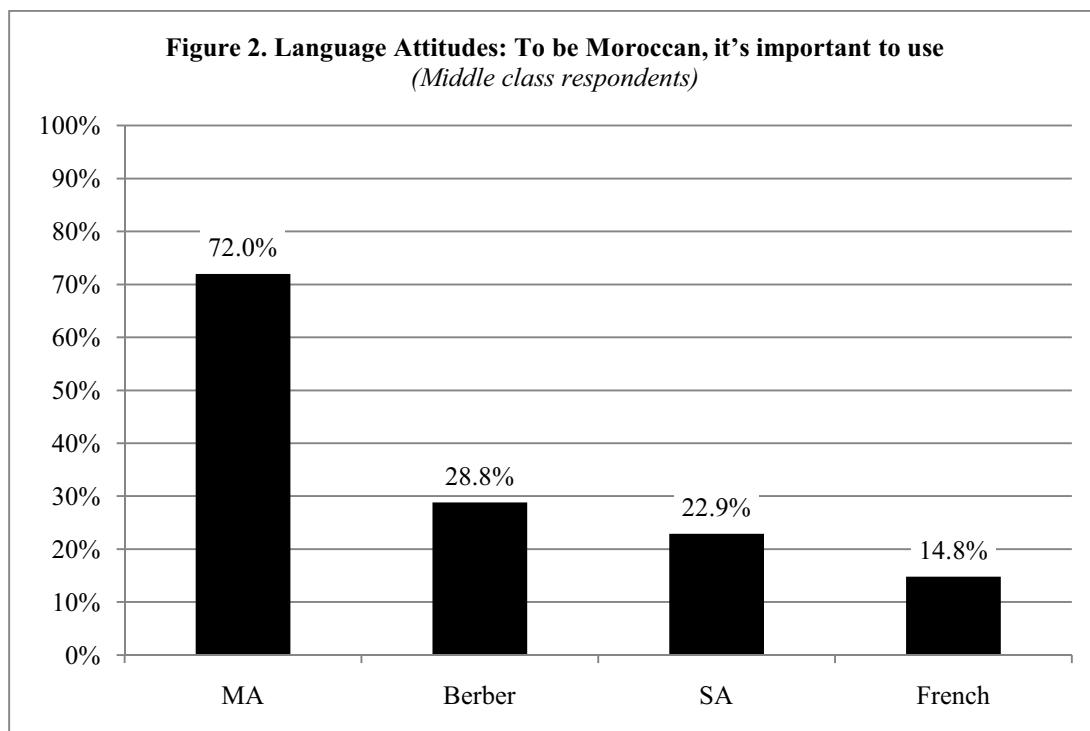
The discussion of covert language attitudes in the context of Morocco has always been dichotomized among French-status traits, while solidarity traits are traditionally and exclusively attributed to MA and SA. However, the current results show that French, the language often prescribed in sociolinguistic literature to status-stressing traits, has shown a tendency to begin negotiating attributes of solidarity traits, when compared to SA and MA.

Although MA is the default code for indexing in-group solidarity in Morocco, these respondents do not exclude speakers of French or SA from friendship, as seen in the trait 'take as a friend,' where there is no significant difference between the three codes. Moroccans prefer to socialize with MA speakers, as seen in the results, where they ranked MA significantly higher than SA or French in the trait sociable. Although the acquisition of either French or SA does not preclude one from sociability traits, MA still remains a necessary ingredient in projecting sociability traits. In fact, Moroccans do not want to take a French monolingual as a friend, nor do they want to socialize solely in SA. Because fluency in SA does not translate into belonging to any given prestige group (Haeri 2000), SA, by virtue of being the H variant of MA, competes for solidarity traits, although it is not used in and of itself, similarly to French, as a language for in-group communicative purposes.

French, when spoken by Moroccans, still maintains a communicative edge by acquiring two types of prestige: overt prestige through the exclusive appropriation of status, through the ideological projection of modernity, and covert prestige by maintaining sociability traits through codeswitching with MA. These middle class students seem to be projecting on French the social, in-group attributes and traits through which they see themselves.

Although a person is perceived as modern by their use of French, this does not preclude him/her from using the same code for sociability, nor does it preclude French from competing for solidarity traits. Thus, French further deepens the linguistic divide as it maintains, through the ideology of modernity, an exclusive access to power (status) traits, while it also works to acquire, through the presence of MA, solidarity traits as well. However, the reverse does not hold true for MA. MA, as an in-group code, performs better in terms of solidarity traits, but its use does not motivate the increase of its status to compete with French for status-stressing traits. In fact, even with regards to the attribute of 'emotional,' which shows that there is no significant difference between the three languages, SA, MA, and French, argues against the typical allocation of emotionality to mother tongues. The fact that French is competing for this trait compels us to conclude that, for middle class respondents, MA is not the exclusive means of projecting emotions, but rather, that French is competing for the acquisition of such an intimate trait as well.

In fact, the exclusive appropriation of French in projecting status traits has paved the way for it to begin indexing local culture. The overt attitudes language questionnaire, in fact, shows that French has started, with its continuous dominance in modern projection, to articulate local culture. When asked which language indexes Moroccanhood, the results from questionnaire respondents (Figure 2) show, at least for these middle class students, that French is closing the gap with SA and Berber, with regards to its representation of the 'we' code that many have so far argued as belonging exclusively to MA, Berber and SA.



### 5.3.3. Results Implications

Language attitudes research has shown the presence of the transplanted code as being traditionally motivated by the instrumental role these languages come to play in accessing social mobility. However, as we see in Figure 2 regarding Moroccanhood, the acceptance of French as representative of local culture, through its permeation into relatively insular functional domains, such as the home, via codeswitching with MA, has transformed French from “a window onto the world” (Kachru 1983 in Kahane 1986: 7) into a window onto the Moroccan culture itself.

The appropriation of French to solidarity traits, in addition to it securing status traits, is especially salient also for writers of French expression, who, as Abdelkbir Khatibi describes,

When I write in French, my entire effort consists of separating myself from myself, of relegating it to my deepest self. I am thus divided from myself within myself, which is the condition for all writing inured to the destiny of languages. Henceforth, little by little, my native tongue becomes foreign to me (qtd. in Ennaji 2005: 108).

This feeling of alienation through the use of French shows that the French presence in Morocco is not a static entity that only indexes status traits or is espoused for socioeconomic advancement, but more deeply, French is a hegemonizing linguistic tool behind the force of the ideology of modernity that seeks to gain more acceptance into intimate domains of Moroccan society. Not surprisingly, acquiring these native nuances has enabled French to compete with SA and MA, with no significant difference between them, in the trait, ‘take as a friend.’ This allows us to posit the possibility of French’s presence in Morocco as not simply an integrative instrument for Western acculturation, but also as a language that is assimilating into Moroccan culture.

## 6. Conclusion

The results of this study show that the social reality of the Moroccan linguistic landscape does not support the theoretical understanding of covert language attitudes toward SA, MA, and French. In fact,

these results show that the current linguistic realities in Morocco challenge the uniformly dichotomous portrayal of French as representing status traits, while SA and MA are iconic of solidarity traits. Based on the matched-guise test, the Moroccan sociolinguistic ecology is far too complex to be captured within a model that views status and solidarity as the only plausible organizing dynamic for these codes. In fact, the ideology of modernity is accelerating the acculturation of French lifestyle within Morocco.

The ideology of modernity is limiting the appropriation of SA and MA to the ascription of overt prestige, which allows French to compete for in-group solidarity. The results of the present study show, contrary to standard orthodoxies, that languages do not cluster neatly into the status and solidarity paradigms, but are competing to index both. This necessitates a revision and reanalysis of the dynamic and distribution of language attitudes in terms of colonial ideologies and local influences, where each code's exclusive legitimacy and dominance in a given domain is continually being contested, negotiated, and policed. These results show that unless Morocco and other Arab states actively change language policies to widen the scope of the use of SA beyond the official and inject modern attributes to local languages, such as SA, MA and Berber, they will likely decline. Unless SA is placed as a global language, French will persist as a dominant language in higher education, business, and foreign affairs, with English as its only potential contender in the present, globalized Morocco.

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