

Some ethnographic features of the moroccan autochthons people

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Abstract

This article deals with the identity of the Amazigh community, native African people, for the time being of the Latin, Greek, French, and Arab conquest until the present. Employing a qualitative approach, we analyze considerable documents that have addressed some aspects related to the ethnography of the Amazigh people. The procedure concerns linguistic historiography. The results obtained show an intense struggle for survival in contexts of multiple cultures and languages that have forced the displacement of these native people.

Keywords: Amazigh group, identity, North Africa, contact with other cultures.

Aspectos etnográficos del pueblo autóctono marroquí

Resumen

Este artículo aborda la identidad de la comunidad amazigh, pueblo nativo de África, durante diferentes etapas de la conquista latina, griega, francesa y árabe hasta hoy día. Desde un enfoque cualitativo, analizaremos diferentes documentos coloniales y modernos que han abordado aspectos relacionados con la etnografía del pueblo amazigh. Los métodos empleados conciernen la historiografía lingüística.

Los resultados obtenidos permiten observar una intensa lucha por la supervivencia en contextos de múltiples culturas y lenguas que han forzado al desplazamiento de ese pueblo.

Palabras claves: el pueblo amazigh, identidad, África del Norte, contacto con otras culturas.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the studies that have been made on the Imazighen¹ deal with linguistic aspects: phonological, morphological, and syntactic analyses with the idea of preparing lexicographic material (pedagogical grammar, and vocabulary, among others). Despite this research, a little bit is known about the historiography of these people. For this reason, this article discusses some aspects of the linguistic historiography of this African group.

Therefore, this paper aims to examine carefully information taken from several researchers on topics related to the ethnography of the Amazigh community. Then, it will deal with the identity of these autochthonous people of North Africa and their identifying features. That is their traditions, economy, history, social activities, and their physical location inside and outside Morocco. Language is deeply rooted in the identity of the Imazighan, who have resisted despite a long process of contact with other civilizations. In that sense, it will undertake the task of demonstrating how the official discourse in Morocco has returned to accepting the traditional values of Amazigh, and the desire to take serious actions to preserve the original component of Moroccan identity. This change in the official speech of the State gave rise to new challenges related to the universal rights of native peoples. Culture and language form the basis of identity because these elements are closely linked to the notion of belonging to a particular group inhabiting a specific geographical location.

To successfully study the characteristics of the Amazigh people, it is of the utmost interest to address the following issue: to specify the location and identity of the community under study, who have resisted despite a long process of contact with other civilizations.

Therefore, this article broadly addresses the topic of the Amazigh identity. The next section sets out a method concerning the study of Amazigh ethnography.

¹ In this article, I use the word Imazighen rather than Berbers or other terms to refer to the native peoples of North Africa. Because that's the unique name they call themselves.

2. Method and conceptual approach

The present study describes and explains the different historical moments experienced by the Amazigh people from a qualitative approach. To this end, the theoretical underpinnings of linguistic historiography and sociolinguistics were used to collect documentary and empirical data organized in a two-stage work plan. The first stage consisted of looking for primary and secondary sources, which constituted the instrumental basis of the research. From the final results we proceeded to a second stage which, under a hermeneutic approach, allowed us to define the interpretative categories of the analysis starting from i) The geographical space, ii) linguistic and cultural contact, and iii) socio-political conflicts.

3. Ethnography of the native peoples of North Africa

3.1. Physical location, origin, and history of the Amazigh people.

The Amazigh community, known as Berbers, call themselves: 'Amazigh' in singular and 'Imazighen' in the plural to refer to a people. The term *Imazighen* is used to name the autochthonous Moroccan groups and has the meaning of the Noble Families and Free Men. The Imazighan belong to ethnic groups located in North Africa. This region is known as *Tamazgha* among local academics. In addition, there is a word that is used to name the language spoken by the Imazighan and it is *Tamazight*. In addition, foreigners use the word *Berber* to refer to both the native people of North Africa and their language. This word does not belong to the Tamazight culture, as it comes from the Greco-Latin *barbarous*, a derogatory term that was formerly used to designate populations that did not belong to the Greek or Latin civilization. *Shlouh* is another lexicon that Arabs often use to refer to native Tamazight speakers. This term, According to Arabic dictionaries, has a meaning of barefoot person. These terms are not acceptable to the Imazighan. Among scholars, the generic word *Amazigh* or *Imazighan* and the word *Tamazight* are frequently used to refer to the language or set of languages native to the Tamazgha region.

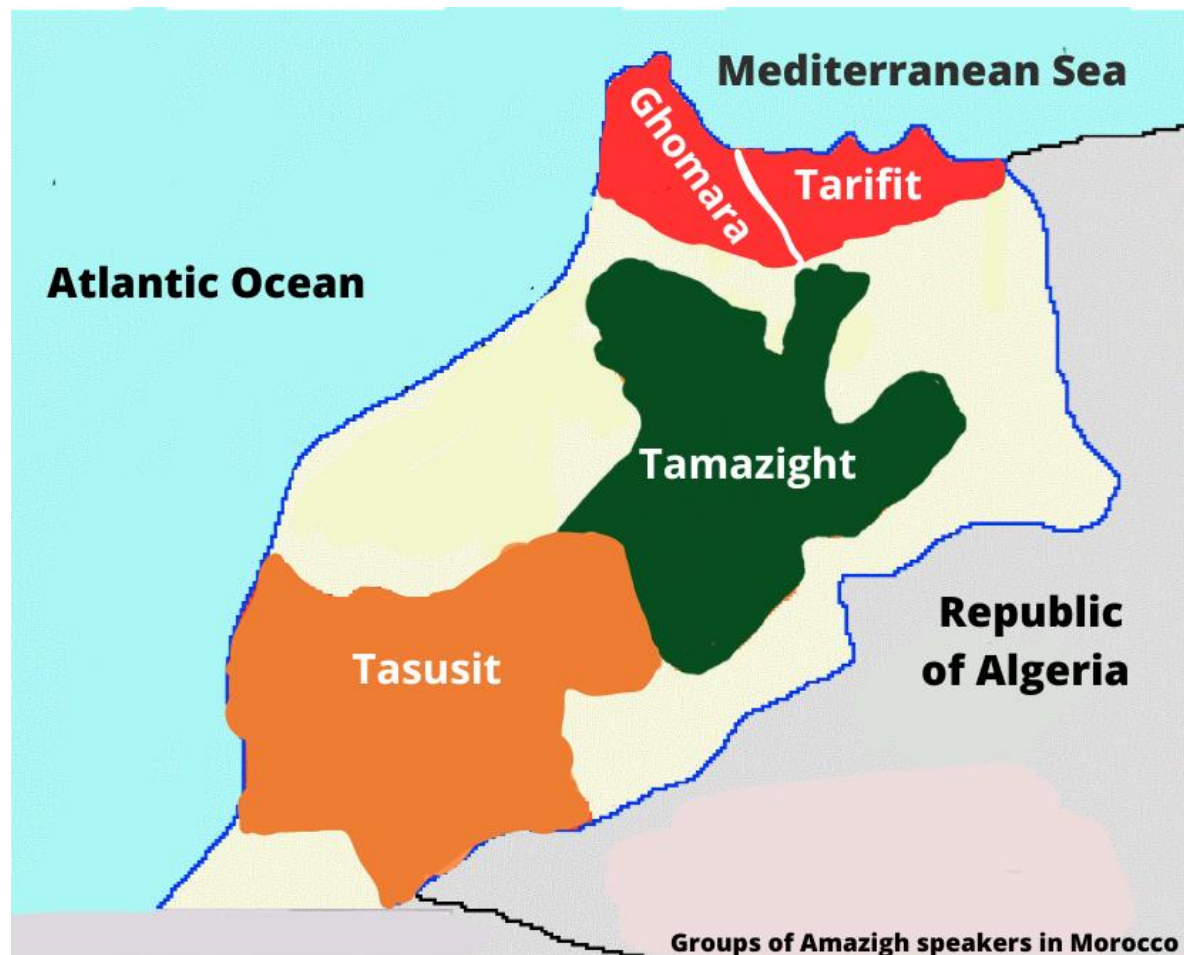
Moroccan Jewish communities frequently used depreciative terms, such as *Shlouh* during the colonial era to refer to Amazigh groups, to stigmatize their origin (Schroeter 1997: 181-183, cited in Agrour 2012). In Antiquity, the Egyptians used the term *mashauash*

to call the Berbers, while the Romans used the word Numidians or Mauritanians. Medieval Europeans included them in the Moors or Mauros, a name they designate to all North African Muslims (Brian M. et. al., 1975).

The main criticism of the original inhabitants is to emphasize their defects. In this type of relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, authority, exploitation, and violence predominate. In addition, a series of prejudices are created based on the culture and the way of speaking of these people. For example, some groups of Arab ideology say that the Amazigh language is a language made by the French in a laboratory and is not a product of the communication of these native people. The Tamazight language has an ancient gender system (for more details see Aziz Nejjar forthcoming).

3.2. The location of the Imazighan in Morocco

The Imazighen in Morocco is distributed throughout the country. Therefore, I argue that each language cannot be assigned to a particular zone, there are speakers all over the country, but one can recognize four main regions where there is a high number of native Tamazight speakers. See map (1) which shows the location where one of the country's native languages means communication in daily life:



Map 1. The physical location of Amazigh speakers in Morocco.

Source: <https://es.wikipedia.org>.

- On the Mediterranean coast, the Tarifit language is spoken in the cities of Al Hoceima and Nador, among others.
- In the western Rif, approximately 10,000 users speak the Ghomara language, especially in the cities of Tetouan and Chaouen, (El Hannouche 2010: 25)²
- In the Middle Atlas, there are Tamazight means of communication in cities such as Khnifra, and El Hajeb, and in the High Atlas as in Errachidia, Beni Malal, and others.

² Few scholars mention the Ghomara language in their linguistic works. Historically, Jebala and the Rif share the same geographical space, i.e., the same people live on the Mediterranean coast and the western Rif. They have a rich culture.

- In the south of the country, the Tasusist language is spoken with the largest number of speakers compared to the other above languages.

It should be noted that in each of the regions described above, traditions and cultural practices such as songs, dances, and celebrations are preserved. In addition, the typical dress of each community, its gastronomy, and its musical instruments are preserved. A typical dance of the Middle Atlas is the Ahidous where women and men dance in a circle or semicircle (see image 1).

The photo shows the Moussem that celebrates for three days every September in Imilchil (Morocco). This annual festival features different types of Amazigh dances, one of the typical dances being the ahidous:



Image 1. Ahidous, a typical dance of the Middle Atlas
Source: visitdraatafilalet.com

The Amazigh languages are also spoken in a vast territory that starts from the Republic of Egypt in the oasis of Siwa to the Canary, and from the Mediterranean Sea that connects to the Sahara Desert Mali and Niger in the south.

The percentages of the current population of the Tamazight speakers in Tamazgha are:

- In Morocco 26, 7 % of the population use Tamazight in daily life (Statistics of High Commissioner for Planning 2014).
- In Algeria, 20 % of the population talks one of the Tamazigh languages as Kabyle, Shenwa, and Mazhab, among others, in real daily life.
- In Tunisia, 1 % of the population speaks Tamazight.

Salem Mezhoud (2015) mentions that the official institutions of North African countries minimize the true number of the original populations to dominate them easily.

Nowadays, we do not precisely know how many speakers there are of these local languages. For many reasons, for example, there is no reliable data from official statistics. Therefore, the official figures offered by the authorities are not based on any survey, as no linguistic census has been carried out in any community of the region. However, these figures are constantly repeated and disseminated by official media, even by language scholars who have never gone out to do fieldwork.

Why do I consider these statistics of the number of speakers provided in each country are not close to reality? Because this statistic does not include bilingual communities. Tamazight languages speakers in different regions of Morocco and Algeria are not counted, as there are Tamazight-speaking families all over the country. Imazighan immigrants in European countries, the United States, and Canada are not counted.

Taking these data into account, the number of Imazighen speakers could be more than half of the population in Morocco and Algeria. The number of Tamazight speakers in countries of North Africa could reach 50 million. (for more details see Nejjar 2018).

Thanks to the efforts of associations and scholars who have organized meetings on topics related to the native groups, both in Morocco and in other countries, the

officialization of the Tamazight was achieved in the 2011 Morocco constitution but it is requiring approval of the Organic Law³.

According to Article 5 of the Moroccan constitution:

...تعد الأمازيغية أيضا لغة رسمية للدولة، باعتبارها رصيدا مشتركا لجميع المغاربة بدون استثناء. يحدد قانون تنظيمي مراحل تفعيل الطابع الرسمي للأمازيغية، وكيفية إدماجها في مجال التعليم، وفي مجالات الحياة العامة ذات الأولوية، وذلك لكي تتمكن من القيام مستقبلا بوظيفتها، بصفتها لغة رسمية....

I can paraphrase Article 5 as follows:

... the Amazigh has also an official status in the Moroccan constitution because it is a heritage of all Moroccan society. An organic law determines how it will be implemented in several administrations to accomplish its function as the official idiom.

I return to the discussion of this article: regarding the legal framework, it was intended that the Amazigh population be recognized as equal, however, inequalities continued and resulted in the continuous denial that led to Arabization and assimilation. Related to the linguistic aspect, it was considered that the natives should learn Arabic to acquire the knowledge that would lead to progress. Proof of this, the teaching of this language in school was made compulsory, since through the language a nation would be unified and a patriotic consciousness would be fostered. It is noticeable that the population of the city stopped speaking the language of their ancestors because interactions were carried out in Arabic, which was the language of those who wielded power in the political, economic, and social sectors. With all this, we can say that the use of language in Moroccan society is not a linguistic issue, but a problem of power and relations between the dominant and the dominated. Today the percentage of autochthonous people has decreased, not because of their physical disappearance but because of Arabization and strong assimilation processes.

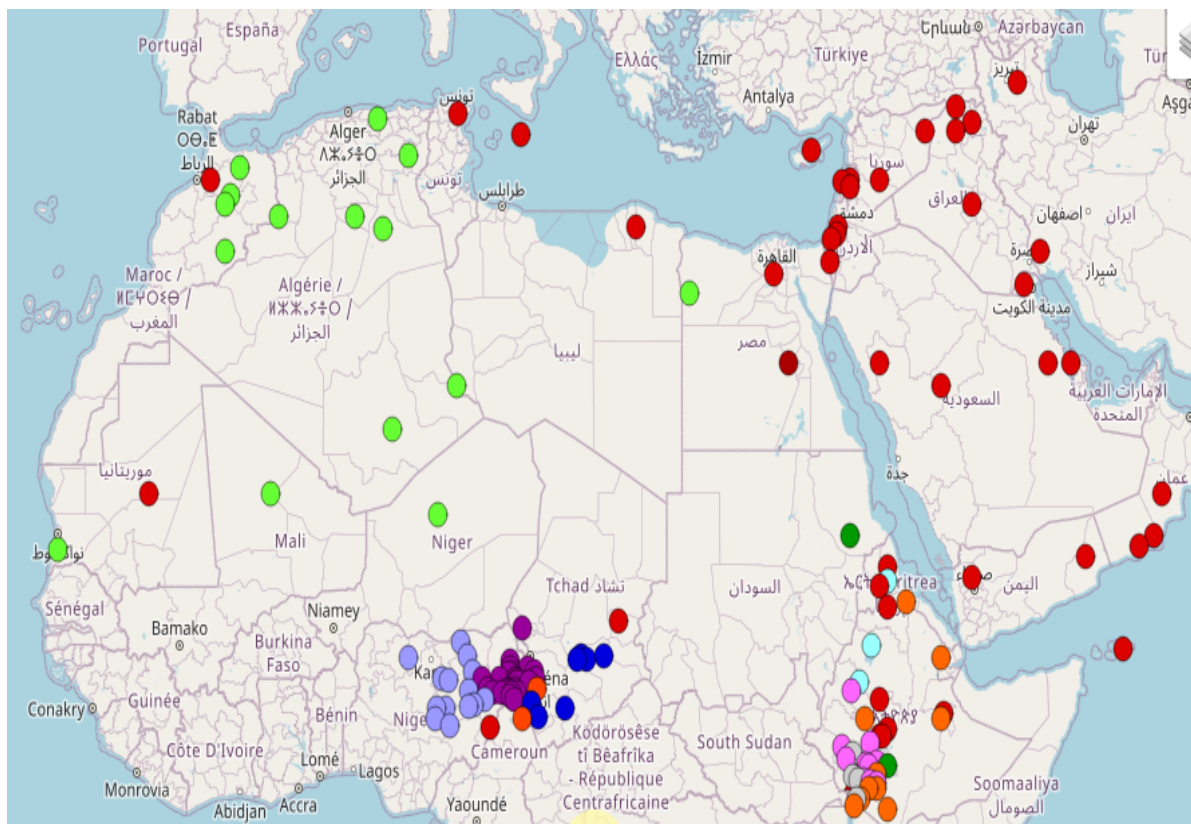
³ Organic Law No. 26.16 is the legal framework that allows the process of establishing the official status of the Tamazight language and its integration into different sectors of society such as education, administration, and priority spaces of public life.

3.3. The Tamazight languages are spoken throughout North Africa

In Algeria (see map 2), it is spoken daily in the four main areas, and native speakers can be found throughout the country:

- In the northern Kabylia region, Kabylie is spoken
- In the southeastern Kabylia region, the Shawia variant is a means of communication in daily life.
- In the mountains of the Aurès, Gharra the Chneoua variant is spoken.
- The most populous community of speakers is in the center north, where the Lmzab variant is spoken.
- Tunisia is the North African country with the largest decline of the Amazigh language in favor of Arabic and other languages.
- In Libya, Tuareg is means of communication in daily life in the zone of Gebel Nefusa. It is also spoken by communities spread between Mali and Niger. Also, this native language is spoken Niger and Burkina Faso.

Here in map 2, we can observe the green dots representing the physical location of the Amazigh languages spoken in North Africa. The red dots represent the varieties of Arabic speaking in the Middle East.



Map 2. The physical location of Amazigh speakers in North Africa.

Source: <https://wals.info/>

Amazigh communities also remained in Andalusia after the last Muslim emirate. There is also a large Amazigh community distributed in Europe (mainly in France, Spain, Holland, and Belgium).

3.4. The family of the Tamazight

Regarding the linguistic lineage of the Tamazight, many hypotheses have been proposed: some studies have aligned it with Greek, others with Basque, others with Celtic, others with Semitic languages, etc. According to the theory that has the most impact and acceptance among linguists, Amazigh languages belong to the lineage of Afro-Asiatic languages. Greenberg (1963) mentions that Amazigh belongs to the Afro-Asiatic family, a related language group consisting of approximately 240 languages spoken by 400 million people in a geography that includes North Africa, Sahel, East Africa, and the Middle East.

3.5. Imazighen culture and lifestyle

According to historians, it was the Imazighan who opened the ancient trade routes between West Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

As a native of the Amazigh group, I have noticed that agriculture, and the cultivation of cereals, olives, potatoes, apples, and oranges are the most important economic activities among the families of the community. In addition, they are engaged in livestock production.

Nowadays, there is a major source of financing for Amazigh families: the income comes from immigrants, mainly from Europe and the United States.

Women play a crucial role within the communities, as they take care of the household chores and take care of the whole family. It is common to see women serving the men in the house all the time. In addition, women start their work very early in the day to prepare the bread in the traditional oven⁴, and food that will be eaten during the day and that which men will take to work.



Image 2. A Tamazight woman prepares bread in the traditional oven
Source: (Photographer: Christian Goupi)

⁴ An enclosure formed by an adobe factory where the wood from trees produces heat

One of the most striking constructions is that of the Imazighan who live in the hills of Jebel Nefusa in Libya. These constructions look like caves cut into the slopes of the hill.⁵

As for the architecture of the Imazighen living in the Atlas, generally, we find typical houses as we see in the photo below which are made with red brick walls and roofed with planks covered with brick blocks, or mud mixed with straw.



Image 3. A typical house of an Amazigh village in the Atlas
Source: (photo by Monticello 2016)

4. Genetics

According to academic studies on DNA analysis, most North African groups are descendants of the Imazighen. Thus, most Moroccans and Algerians have Amazigh

⁵ Not unlike the Anasazi cliff dwellings of the US Southwest.

ancestors, also more than 80% of Tunisians and more than 90% of Libyans (Semino et. al. 2004).

Nicole et. al. (2004) state that in the Canary Islands, the mtDNA lineages of the ancestors (direct maternal) constitute a major proportion of the contemporary Canary Islands gene pool, which means that the population is closely related to the population of the archipelago, whose origin was from northwest Africa.

5. History

The Imazighen commemorate the victory of King Sheshnoq I, who became Pharaoh of the XXII dynasty of Egypt around 935 BC, after overthrowing Ramses II. Shoshenq I was the founder of that dynasty, and the Amazigh Calendar begins its history from that fact. Therefore, the Amazigh year 2973 corresponds to the Christian year 2023.

The Imazighen groups were organized in independent kingdoms that were later unified under Numidia, around 201 B.C., in what is known today as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, etc⁶.

According to studies, the Romans founded what was called Mauritania Tingitana (Mauretania Tingitana in Latin), which was an ancient Roman province located at the western end of the African coast of the Mediterranean Sea. (For more information see Jimenez Martinez, 2012)

According to historians, it is difficult to trace the origin of the Berbers. However, archaeological sites found in the Sahara, such as the rock paintings of Tassili n'Ajjer, argue in favor of the presence of man in this region of Africa for at least 6000 years B. C. (UNESCO). Therefore, this archaeological evidence argues in favor of the Imazighen being the autochthons' inhabitants of North Africa.

⁶ The fights between the Imazighen and some clean of the Imazghen loyal to Arab Muslims caused the decline of the Almohaed empire in North Africa. Therefore, the empire ended up being divided into what, roughly speaking, ended up being the countries of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.



Figure 1. Rupesters paintings en Tassili n'Ajje
Source: Tassili n'Ajje National Park, Djanet: 2017



Figure 2. Antílope en Tin Taghirt, en el Tassili n'Ajje
Source: Tassili n'Ajje National Park, Djanet: 2017

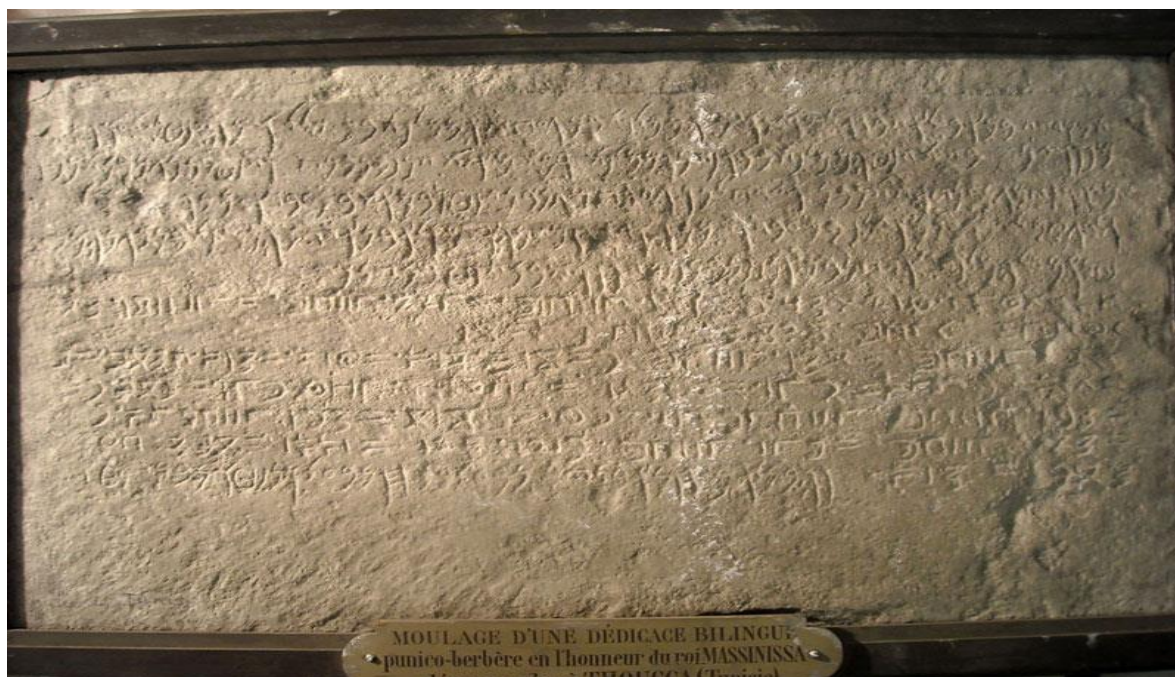


Figure 3. Transcription of the dedication to Masinisa (RIL 2) (photograph by Sophie A. de Beaune).

Fuente: <http://afriques.revues.org/docannexe/image/1203/img-4.jpg>.

The recording of the Libyan alphabet of the *Recueil des Inscriptions Libyques* (Chabot, 1940- 1941: 3), is an archaeological argument allied in the construction of the ethnography of native peoples. This alphabet is very important because it is not only evidence that these local peoples have a writing system of their own, but it also presents content that helps us to give an approximate date of their writing. The recording on the stone is in the Punic system and Libyan system.

In this sense, Irma (2015) mentions that the bilingual texts in Punic and Eastern Libyan narrate that Micipsa erected it in the tenth year of his reign and memory of his predecessor: Masinisa. As this Amazigh king died in 148 BC, during the Third Punic War, we can date this dedication to the year 138 BC.

6. The other people's invasion of North Africa

Several civilizations like Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Portuguese, and French, among others, have passed through North Africa, therefore, they have left an influence on both culture and language of the native people. Although the local peoples

have undergone a long process of colonization, they continue to maintain their culture and their language of oral tradition transmitted from generation to generation.

6.1. The invasion of new territories: the coexistence of languages and cultures

Nowadays, linguistic contact is strongly present among groups speaking different languages due to the increase in communication. This fact offers rich linguistic areas, where it notices the influence of dominant languages on dominated languages, for example, the influence of Arabic, French, and Latin on Tamazight.

In the following section, I will discuss the step of the influence of these languages on Tamazight.

6.2. Stages of influence of a language on another language

It is normal for languages to be influenced, and this can go through two stages. The first stage has a colonizing dimension. In this case, two forms of influence can be distinguished in turn: influence of the dominator on the dominated, where it affects the way of life of the colonized people; at the linguistic level, it can influence the phonological and lexicological level, without modifying its syntactic structure: then it is a top-down influence (see Amado Alonso [1982], Uriel Weinreich [1974]).

If there is a top-down influence, one can also speak of a bottom-up influence, or rather, of a substratum. This phenomenon is not the inverse of the first mentioned; in this case, the language of the dominant people influences the language of the conqueror. Another aspect of linguistic influence is found when two languages share the same geographical space. It can be found in border areas where words are frequently exchanged. As for the linguistic influence on Tamazight by other languages spoken in North Africa, the following periods stand out: classical languages such as Greek and Latin, the period of the colonization of Morocco by France, and the period of the Arab conquest up to the present day.

6.3. The Arab invasion

The arrival of the Arabs⁷, in North Africa was to have a considerable influence on the native population. Since the Islamic religion was introduced day by day in all sectors of society thanks to the detractors of that religion that have infiltrated the tribal practices, fragmenting them by fidelity to the new political and social model.

The process of Islamization and the Arabization of the region was made difficult by the rebellion of the native peoples totally against the new orders. Most notably the Tamazight queen and warrior Dihia successfully mounted a fierce resistance to the conquerors, managing to push them back. The Arabs took almost 30 years to conquer the new territory for them and spent another 300 years Arabizing North Africa. According to Abouzaida (2011: 20), Arabs coming from the Arabian Peninsula began the Arabization⁸ and assimilation of new territory from 649 to the present.

Schaff (2012) points out that before the arrival of the Arabs, the majority of the native population was Jewish, Christian, or animist. Some Amazigh theologians played a fundamental role in the development of 25 groups of Western Christianity, for example, Donatus Magnus, who was the founder of a Christian group *the Donatists*, and also Saint Augustine of Hippo was a saint, father, and doctor of the Catholic Church (354-430) (see Moreno Villa 2003).

Therefore, the military conquest lasted a long time and then the spiritual conquest started. It is an ideological struggle, that is to say, a way of life (thought, customs, beliefs, etc.) against another, where religion on both sides played a very important role. At first, the Muslim Arabs destroyed the Catholic religion to implant the new religion (Islam).

⁷ The dynasties that ruled Morocco after the arrival of Arabs:

1) The Edrisids: 789-1055. 2) The Almoravids: 1060-1144 (Amazigh tribes)
3) The Almohads: 1147-1269 (Amazigh tribes). 4) The Marinids: 1269-1472 (Amazigh and Bedouin clans)
5) The Wattasids (1472-1554) (can be considered the first non-Amazigh dynasty to rule Morocco)
6) the Saadians (1554-1659)

⁸ The Arabs imposed their ethnic distinction and exercised authority over the local people. Moreover, they favored Arabic in all sectors of society intending to force the indigenous people to adopt foreign cultural and linguistic stereotypes instead of preserving their native languages and cultures.

The native population of North Africa has long embraced the Muslim religion and the majority of this population is faithful to that religion.

The Arab tribes arrived in North Africa intending to liquidate the native people and establish Islam through the political and military processes. According to historians, the conquest began violently in the year 642, beginning almost thirteen centuries of the presence of Muslim Arabs in Morocco and other countries of North Africa.

It is interesting to mention that the Arab civilization has been introduced gradually after hard fights and battles, so it gives us a clue to deduce that the members of the Amazigh groups resisted the Arab conquest and did not accept it with open arms. In the same way, there was a great influence on the Tamazight culture and language.

The Muslims who conquered the Iberian Peninsula in 711 were not only Arabs. So, a large part of them was Imazighen under the command of the Amazigh general, Táriq bin Ziyad. This general received orders from the representative of the Arab regime in North Africa, Musa Ibn Nusair.

6.4. The French invasion

The French period in Morocco began with the signing of the March 30th, 1912 Treaty of Fes between France and the Moroccan authorities, this political process was to manage the internal and external affairs of the country due to the then weak regime, which was unable to control the public order. The French language day by day was introduced into the two major languages spoken in Moroccan society, Tamazight and Arabic.

Although the policies of the Moroccan regime have made great efforts to Arabize the Moroccan natives since independence, the French language is still widely used in different areas of society. In many cities, there is a bilingual class that often alternates between the Tamazight and French or Spanish linguistic codes. Therefore, French has exerted and continues to exert a great influence on Tamazight, especially at the lexical level, since French words have entered the Tamazight vocabulary.

Concerning the above, it is interesting to note what Iraqi-Sinaceur (2004: 520) says: "Today, the Tamazight language is being nourished by other languages, mainly French and classical Arabic, which explains the appearance of new terms in the language".

6.5. The Roman invasion

Latin spread with the increase of the Roman Empire around 40 B.C. over all the countries of North Africa. Thus, this language replaced Punic in official life and became the means of communication for administration. The Latin influence covers various fields; however, one can speak of two varieties of Latin in North Africa: Classical Latin, which influenced various sectors of society, such as administration, religion, etc. Vulgar Latin, the category of no formal register, is used for daily life communication (Bouallal: 2013).

According to Bouallal (2013), Latin did not disappear abruptly, despite the arrival of the Arabs, because they used it for a long time: the time necessary for the processes of Islamization and Arabization. The Arab colonizers used Latin since most of the Imazighan professed the Christian religion. Therefore, Latin was the only tool to bring the new religion to the natives of North Africa.

7. The status of the Tamazight

When I talk about the status of any language, I refer to the number of users of the language in different sectors of society, including the administrative sector, the media sector, and the educational sector, among others.

Language has a place in the visual, print, and digital media: there is a national radio channel broadcasting daily that devotes a certain amount of time to each language. The time given to these native languages in the media sector is very shameful compared to other languages, such as Arabic or French. Also, since 2010, the official launching of the "Tamazight" television channel has taken place, which presents time-limited programs, a few hours a day, to promote the traditions, social practices, identity, and language of native people.

As time goes by, the Tamazight language is gaining ground in the press. For example, the foundation of the monthly magazine of the Amazigh culture *Tifinah*, the *Amazigh world*, among others. We can now safely say that the Tamazight language has a very important dynamism in Moroccan society, as the Imazighan are proud to speak the language among themselves and to declare that they are a people with their characteristics and on their territory.

The Tamazight language is not only a means of communication among Moroccans but can also transmit the characteristic cultures rooted in the history of the whole *Tamazgha*.

Finally, without a doubt, the Amazigh people in Morocco are spreading with a greater force through the consciousness of social, political, and intellectual actors, presenting the linguistic, economic, and social rights of this Amazigh ethnic group.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented general facts about the language and sociolinguistic data, and I have also shown how the language is deeply rooted in the identity of the Amazigh people, who have resisted despite a long process of contact with other civilizations.

Autochthons peoples of Morocco are widely recognized as being those whose grandfathers inhabited the Tamazgha region before the arrival of colonizers. Fortunately, many Amazigh languages are spoken in North Africa at this time. However, Native Morocco peoples were forced to abandon their culture and assimilate during a long time of oppression.

Thus, the local people are recognizing a very important dynamism, which has forced political actors to recognize the identity of these people and to grant their language official status in the country's constitution. In this regard, although the language has had a legal framework for more than 10 years, its status is far from being on equal rights with Arabic and French.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of these native people of North Africa is that they have regained their dignity and understand that the other people (the Western and Eastern World) are not superior and that their culture is equally valid.

Finally, the Tamazight language is threatened by the conflict of interests among different groups that have unlimited power in Moroccan. The Amazigh people are more aware of their cultural and linguistic rights. Proof of this is the increase in the number of Amazigh associations and advocates active in Morocco.

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