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The Position of English in the Workplace in Algeria: An Economic-oriented Perspective

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Abstract*: This paper explores the value of English as a foreign language in the Algerian oil-industry context. The study has as a main objective examining the respective position of English in the presence of Arabic and French in an economic sense. The data was collected using a small-scale self-reported survey inclined mostly towards multiple choice items. The data elicited was then analysed through the tabulation statistical procedure. Therefore, the research design is primarily quantitative. The results show two main findings. First, English is highly valorised in the context of the study and appears to enjoy an appreciated position. Second, French is of minor value in comparison to both English and Arabic. That is surprisingly incompatible with previous research suggesting that the languages of colonial legacy usually gain a prestigious status within past-colonies labour markets. Further, these outcomes have language policy implications. Because English is obviously dominating in the Algerian business setting in question, second/foreign language planners must reconsider their decisions from a more inclusive perspective than a mere academic predilection. Economic reasons also dictate strong indicators for overall language policy and planning.*
keywords*: Algeria, English, Economic implications, Foreign language, Language policy, Multinational company, Second language.*

الملخص: يستكشف هذا المقال قيمة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في مجال الصناعة البترولية للجزائر. ويهدف البحث بالأساس إلى دراسة موضع اللغة الإنجليزية في ظل تواجد كل من اللغتين العربية والفرنسية وذلك من الناحية الاقتصادية. وقد جمعت البيانات باستخدام استبيان ذات نطاق محدود وبطابع تقييم ذاتي لأفراد الدراسة، حيث أن الأسئلة المضمنة في الأغلب تضم مجموعة من عناصر باختيارات متعددة. بعد تجميع البيانات، تم تحليلها من خلال إجراء معيار الإحصاء المضاعف. وبذلك، فإن منهج الدراسة المتبع يتمثل في البحث الكمي بالمقام الأول. وتظهر النتائج استنتاجين رئيسيين. أولا، في سياق الدراسة التي بين أيدينا، يبدو أن اللغة الإنجليزية تحظى بقيمة بالغة الأهمية. ثانيا، تظهر النتائج، وبصورة مفاجئة، أن اللغة الفرنسية ذات

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قيمة هامشية مقارنة باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية، عكس ما توصلت إليه العديد من الأبحاث السابقة التي تشير إلى أن اللغة الموروثة من خلفية استعمارية تكتسب مكانة قيمة في الأوساط التي تعرضت للإستعمار. أما عن مضامين البحث، فان النتائج تنطوي عنها أهمية تمتد إلى سياسة التخطيط اللغوي. ولأن اللغة الإنجليزية من الواضح أنها تحتل مرتبة عالية في المعاملات الداخلية لمجال الصناعة الجزائرية المعنية، يجب على مخططي اللغة الثانية / الأجنبية إعادة النظر في قراراتهم من منظور أكثر شمولية من مجرد ميل أكاديمي. ومن ثم فَإِنَّ الدوافع الاقتصادية تفرض مؤشرات قوية للسياسة والتخطيط اللغويين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الآثار الاقتصادية، الجزائر، التخطيط اللغوي، اللغة الثانية، اللغة الأجنبية، اللغة الإنجليزية، شركة عالمية

1. Introduction

From independence in 1962 up to present, language policy in the Algerian educational system passed through several reforms characterized by an omnipresence of French. Language issue constituted a heated topic ever since. While the language of colonization exerted its pressures in some ways, there was a perpetual struggle of language identity to come about in the subsequent years. With Arabic officially acknowledged to be the first national language, French took the position of the second language in administration besides of being a means of instruction at school to a far extent.

A few decades later, another language dilemma facing policy makers was that the aboriginal Berber population, also known as Amazigh or Imazighen (and thus Alternatively Tamazight language), sought their language to be represented in national matters. This atmosphere set an air of tension among the different ethnic groups for some time. The recent constitutional amendments included an article declaring that *"Tamazight is also a national and official language"* (Const. pt. I, Art.6 March, 2016, our translation) besides Arabic while maintaining French in the former nominated position as a second language (SL)[1].

As to other languages, English has been a dominant foreign language (FL) along with a host of other languages emerging gradually through educational reforms, of which German, Italian and Spanish are taught at the secondary school levels. More languages, such as Russian, are optionally offered to students for specialization at university whereas definitely keeping Arabic, Berber, English and French in the list. Indeed, the majority of students interested in obtaining a degree in languages tend to pursue one of the latter four. Apart from colonial legacy, other factors contributed well in the shaping of language choice under the aegis of the so-called globalization effects.

Doubtless, with a growing urge of being internationally involved at the recent times, the nation soon realized the demanding impetus of considering an updated dynamic procedure to keep up with overseas affairs at all levels; notably technology and trade exchange be to the fore. In a way, an air of that nature is by far crucial to bring about consecutive factors liable enough to take part in informing language choice decisions. While internal determinants owe principally to ideological drives, the supranational incentives figured in dimensions that a mutually intelligible means of communication, a

[1] It must be noted that the terms 'national', 'second' and 'foreign', as used in the text to refer to a given language status, are to be distinguishable. *National* describes the original language which comes at the first position. Besides, a national language can be officialised so that it is acknowledged by the government to have a formal use. *Second* denotes a language that comes in the secondary degree after the national language(s). Lastly, *Foreign* is for any language of the third position after both national and second languages which is usually restricted solely to academic instruction at school.

lingua franca, became exigent worldwide. English gained empathy with progressive momentum as an international delegate for global welfare. In the case of Algeria, adopting to a socio-political standpoint, English is rather warmly welcomed in public opinion than an obnoxious French.

Given that this is practically so, what an effect economic agents may bring at play in favor of promoting such a view of assessing English in relevant industry sectors and overall policy. Under the light of the perceptual framework just presented, assessing the position of English and its value in the business settings comprise the focal points around which the following parts of the paper are made out. The remaining text is structured as follows: the next section shall briefly elaborate on the literature review and introduction of the research brand on which the study hinges; followed by a presentation of the data and statistical analysis as well as discussion of the results. The last section concludes with an evaluative consideration of the English language reality in the Algerian economic context along the consequential socio-economic implications.

2. Literature Review

Around well over a half century ago, a very renowned economist called Becker (1957) made reference to how education forms a human capital asset that contributes to the value of individuals and corporate groups in the market labor. It was not so long afterwards that a six-page briefly articulated paper by Marschak (1965) was published and surprisingly struck attention to possible links between language and economics.

The premise is leaned on the evolutionary nature of languages and their contribution to economic development. Roughly a decade later, Becker (1976) came to openly incorporate language in his wider model of economic reasoning, a model constituting in subsequent years a cornerstone of distinct benchmarks for weighing the role that language plays in relation to the various composing elements of education economics overall. This however was to come in later stages when Marschak credited language pertinence in economics studies. He patently marked the birth of such a research paradigm, with a uniquely characterizing wealth of data to capitalize on among the different spheres of research disciplines theorizing about language.

In such a state of affairs emerged an approach to language nowadays recognized as "Economics of Language" or "language and economics". It is based on the belief that several language issues in business count for economic explanation and modelling, much in the same way that the many various macro-analyses (such as psycho or socio approaches) of language configured.

Several studies extensively started to emerge ascribing to the rationale reposing on the ideal of economic views to language. Conversely, this field of research does not overlook the role of language into molding economic processes of production. Topical issues pursued on the basis of this line of research were dominantly investigating possible bilateral links between language and economic factors; language-based earnings and promotion constitute the whopping majority of the subjects researched. Examples of representative works are Boulet (1980), Grenier (1987), Grenier & Lacroix (1986), Grin (1997) and Henley and Jones (2005) among many others. In this direction, language is being conceived of as an attribute with an economic value. Thus, researching the effects of linguistic variables may exclusively pertain to one specific language with its value in

the market labor insofar as the bearings it implies among all other languages present. On top of that, a given language may be surveyed in terms of how it intrinsically conjuncture to its agents profits on an economic level.

Following the reasoning of that argument, one or more languages are juxtaposed in relation to the value they play among themselves. On equals terms with pursuing the role of linguistic attributes within economic contexts, the analysis may take on considering multiple languages at a time. This is often addressed from the perspective of examining the effects of linguistic diversity whether a hindrance or a rather rehearsing communicative means at workplace environments. With an exception made of three studies --namely Bianco (1988), Weizman (1992) and Grin (1994), diversity has been extensively investigated especially by the turn of the millennium. Of such studies Caminal (2016), De La Cuesta and Wantchekon (2016), Ginsburgh and Weber (2013), Desmet, Ortuño-Ortín and Wacziarg (2009), Mitchell and Nicholas (2006) and many others lie in the period of the past ten years clustering particularly towards the end.

The significance of language functions within business settings and industry contexts proved solid (Koslow, Shamdasani and Touchstone, 1994; Krishna and Ahluwalia, 2008) with more and more research projects continually cumulate to substantiate it. On the industry level, a well body of research focused on exploring the role of languages not only as instruments alleviating communication problems between employers and their respective employees, but more importantly as tools of production (see e.g., Grin et al; 2011). Indeed, while equally taking account of co-partners, multinationals are increasingly becoming aware of languages being economically valorized within their industrial levels. That is to say, besides to the quality of the goods produced, for example, considering the target markets where the material will expose is drastically paramount and the language of marketing is of more significance. In this respect, assessing the profits and losses will not merely make allowances of consumers' taste satisfaction; the linguistic background of clients should be matched to the internal policies of language choices made by firms or otherwise in order to appraise the costs (Grin, 2003).

The present work is an attempt to examine the reality of English in the Algerian economic context, more particularly within industrial sectors. The researcher takes initiative to account for the economically-related implications of English in the presence of two languages: Arabic as a national language and French as a second language.

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Data

The data was collected through a self-completed survey administered to individuals. The sample is made up of 21 participants in a multinational company. The respondents who took part in the study occupy different positions reflecting a pool of varying missions which interplay in completion of one another. In here, languages impart in the different processes of communication as well as in undertaking the tasks assigned to the sub-groups of the stuff. Some workers are of a foreign nationality to their Algerian peers.

The questionnaire consists of three sections each of which asks for specific information relating globally to language at work. Except of the questions asking for the linguistic profiles of the respondents in terms of how many languages they are

knowledgeable of, most items are of multiple choice where individuals may select as many of the cases of linguistic statuses as apply to themselves.

The questions address mainly the language choice strategies within the company with an application upon the different raw language abilities of individuals in respect linguistic background (sections one and two). Also, of the data relevant it is important to seek how language and business can interact. It remains as a substantial aim of the study to elicit such data and handle it interpretatively in order to identify the likelihood of English language use and its implications in the context. More illustrative facts are given in due course of the sections that follow.

One important remark should be made thus far. The present study is restrictively addressed to investigate language skills at work. In doing so, the ultimate purpose is to discern the extent to which English is specifically appreciated in the presence of two languages: a homeland national language (Arabic) along with a second language (French). The claims made should not extend to assess other language-less skills which may absolutely exert spill-over effects. The data obtained is far from considering aspects with a for-granted interrelatedness to language traits at work. The complementary roles of language to other human capital assets are undeniable.

3.2 Statistical Analysis

After data has been collected, it was organised and classified in a format of summary tables in order for it to be amenable for statistical analysis. The analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Because of the nature of some data on one part and on the other due to the content sought after by specific questions, multiple choice items required descriptive analysis by means of tabulation as explicitly referred to in the respective reporting passages.

3.3.1 First Language Profiles at the Workplace

The first step into the survey is recognizing the classification of individuals per languages mastered. Participants were asked to fill in boxes that apply to their state according to languages spoken[2]. To easily single out, the options were put into a classifying table introduced to them with possible assignment of their language ability. So that, speakers of only one language are shown

	AR	FR	EN	AR+EN	AR+FR	EN+FR	AR+EN +FR
Monolingual of	4	3	2	/	/	/	/
Bilingual of	/	/	/	2	4	1	/
Multilingual of	/	/	/	/	/	/	5

Table 1. The language profiles of participants
(Items and calculations by authors)

[2] *Note.* AR=Arabic. FR=French. EN=English. AR+EN=Arabic and English. AR+FR= Arabic and French. EN+FR= English and French. AR+EN+FR= Arabic, English and French.

that they are monolinguals, speakers of two languages are bilinguals, and those speaking three languages are noted as multilingual individuals. Of importance, the labels given here are based on restrictively three languages: Arabic, English and French (see *Table 1.*).

As clearly noted, out of a number of 21 individuals, 9 consider themselves monolinguals of Arabic, English or French respectively with 4, 3 and 2 speakers. Likewise, of the remaining participants, 7 workers report on being bilinguals of two languages from the three, where 4 of them know both Arabic and French, 2 for Arabic and English and only one bilingual of English together with French. As to knowledge of the three languages considered, 5 members of the whole are multilingual. It seems that the multinational enjoys a linguistic diversity of individuals with different linguistic affiliations.

3.3.2 The Second Rankings of Languages used for Communication

Of the whole number, four cases are missing. For that matter, the results are reported on the 81% level of the valid cases taking part in the estimate at hand. Further, statistically, values are tabulated minimally at value 0 and maximally at 1 for a negative or positive response respectively.

The tabulation gives on a sum of 123.5% standing for all multiple items. Of the valid cases, in relation to languages employed internal to the workplace, results show that roughly 117% constitutes an aggregate of users of Arabic together with English at same significance for each (N=10). Comparatively, with around a remaining decent 6% (representing one user), French seems by far insignificantly of meaningful presence (see *Table 2.*).

Language	**Responses**		**Percent of Cases**
	N	**Percent**	
Arabic	10	47.6%	58.8%
English	10	47.6%	58.8%
French	1	4.8%	5.9%
Total	21	100.0%	123.5%

Table 2. Language used at the workplace frequencies
(*Items and calculations by authors*)

Regarding the languages commonly functioned for use outside to the workplace, there is an 86% valid portion of respondents and a remainder of 14% missing. Considering the tabulated statistical procedure of multiple response, 172% of the valid cases is accounted for. With no much significant gap between English and Arabic, the latter takes on a rate of 45% compared to a slightly more than 51% for the former. Once again, French is lagging behind with a mere 3%. These three presented percentages are at 86% valid cases level. Therefore, on the tabulation level, English, Arabic and French accord in order with rounded values of 78%, 89% as well as 5%. Let us note a whopping large vacuum

separating French from the respective position assigned to English and Arabic at both levels of presentation (see *Table 3.*).

Language	Responses		
	N	**Percent**	**Percent of Cases**
Arabic	14	45.2%	77.8%
English	16	51.6%	88.9%
French	1	3.2%	5.6%
Total	31	100.0%	172.2%

Table 3. Language used outside the workplace frequencies
(Items and calculations by authors)

3.2.3 Language Proficiency and Work Performance

For identifying the formal positions preserved to each language at the workplace, 02 missing cases (10%) are marked from the total of 21 respondents in the initial data obtained. It should be noted that this item mirrors the languages run by default by the exigencies of the multinational in specific occasions rather than a personal option for individuals such as in cases of informal use. Therefore, the item questions under consideration differ from the previous ones in regard their continuum composed of the extent of freedom and restriction of given languages use, targeting at the same time the preferences of workers in this respect. Then, rates are reported in association with an approximated valid 90 % of cases at the frequency level separately. Bearing on the percentages of responses, there is a 38% for Arabic, 50% for English and around 12% for French. Using the tabulation procedure, the value 90% turn into179%. Thus, by consequence there is 68% for Arabic, 90% for English and finally French with 21%. The seemingly dominant languages at work amongst workers are English together with Arabic compared to a wining rate of French in such a context. English however is leading (see *Table 4.*).

Language	Responses		
	N	**Percent**	**Percent of Cases**
Arabic	13	38.2%	68.4%
English	17	50.0%	89.5%
French	4	11.8%	21.1%
	34	100.0%	178.9%

Table 4. Languages used by default at work frequencies
(Items and calculations by authors)

Reading the results shown in *Table 5.*, Of the total number of respondents, there is a single missing case, and a valid percentage of 95%. Based on the sum of respondents as a whole, thus, the language of preference while at the workplace is accordingly English in the first position amounting to 49%, followed by Arabic with 42%, noticeably with relatively insignificant difference, and with a rest of 9% as to French. This is for a unilateral consideration of the choices of each language opted. In the same fashion, tabulated results reflect multiple responses varying from a 70% for Arabic and 80% for English towards a clear-cut farness of French with only 15%. Indeed, French is quite marginally preferred as a language to converse with in the workplace according to the respondents**.**

Language	**Responses**		
	N	**Percent**	**Percent of Cases**
Arabic	14	42.4%	70.0%
English	16	48.5%	80.0%
French	3	9.1%	15.0%
Total	33	100.0%	165.0%

Table 5. Language of preference while at work frequencies
(Items and calculations by authors)

Regarding the usual language imposed by the workplace settings other than a free choice of the workers there is a missing case out of the total, so that 95% is the valid value**.** Applying the tabulation procedure, multiple response statistics demonstrate a rate of 95% for English as the seemingly frequent language used for meetings, followed by Arabic with 40 % and French with 35% (see *Table 6.*).

Language	**Responses**		
	N	**Percent**	**Percent of Cases**
Arabic	8	23.5%	40.0%
English	19	55.9%	95.0%
French	7	20.6%	35.0%
Total	34	100.0%	170.0%

Table 6. Language used by default in meetings frequencies
(Items and calculations by authors)

The valid percentage of the cases participated is approximately 86%. Running the same procedure of tabulation, results display that if it were a choice of the workers regarding which language(s) is (are) preferred for holding meetings, English wins over 90% while Arabic and French take on 55% and 39% respectively (see *Table 7.*). It appears

that the majority of workers tend to feel more comfortable if meetings are held in English rather than either Arabic or French.

Language	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	**Percent**	
Arabic	10	30.3%	55.6%
English	16	48.5%	88.9%
French	7	21.2%	38.9%
Total	33	100.0%	183.3%

Table 7. Language of preference for meetings frequencies (Items and calculations by authors)

4. Results and Discussion

A starting point is the apparent commonality of English among speakers and its value at work. As advanced beforehand, results showed that the context of survey in the study is clearly a setting where the three languages take part in the different levels of communication.

Though scantly explored in developing countries, English received much credit in a number of studies and is found to be outstandingly rewarding in economic terms. For example, in a study conducted in India, Azam, Chin and Prakash (2013) found that English results in approximately 32% differentials accruing to males and 22% to females who qualify as fluent speakers than their counterparts with less qualification. In the same way, speakers qualified as having a little English skill tend to earn more than their peers with no language skill at all for both genders respectively with 13% for men and 10% for women. On the other hand, a South African research by Casale and Posel (2011) echoed similar conclusions in that English, even in the presence of indigenous languages, is highly valuable for its speakers to be recruited for work.

Worthy to mention, in both of these contexts English is a language of a former colonizer which is of the British Empire. It might have some ideological implications and inherent effects within the different composing layers of the respective governmental systems and policies, including economic considerations

Indeed, in the present work the linguistic diversity panel does not put all languages at the same scale of appreciation by workers. Besides to the fact that though many of the respondents consider themselves as either bilingual or multilingual individuals, it seems that French does not reflect much significance. English language dominates in comparison to French.

The findings are also significantly compatible with Di Paolo and Tansel (2015)'s study which was carried out in Turkey. While they reported on foreign language skills to be valuable in the Turkish market labour, English was found interestingly highly rewarding. Noticeably, English, as examined in the latter work, is rather a foreign language and Turkey has never been under English-speaking nation occupation. It is important, also, to observe that in the case of Turkey, Arabic is found to be with no much

market value. This fact is the same for French in Algeria. The results display the importance of having multiple competencies in different languages in that most individuals possess qualification in two or three languages than in one. It follows that French, though has a significant number of speakers, it is far from being attractive to be largely involved in the setting considered in the study. In addition, Arabic is found interestingly of considerable value next to English. However, in the Turkish labour market Arabic was found of minor role.

It is probably because this language in both cases is differently a national language in Algeria while a foreign in Turkey. Yet, English is a Foreign Language (FL) in both contexts reflecting confluent results. All in all, being aware of more value to English compared to Arabic, of the three languages, these two are shown to have a positive impression amid workers.

Once again, comparable to the two aforementioned studies, Casale and Posel (2011) along Azam, Chin, and Prakash (2013), in which English is a language of a past-colonizing power, it is surprisingly deduced that French is marginally set aside in Algerian context much far behind the position of English in either cases of Indian or south African nations.

5. Conclusion

English language is highly prevalent in the context of the study in hand. The sample of the research makes up a mixture of individuals from different origins, cultures and linguistic backgrounds with a majority of Algerians.

The majority of participants can communicate in more than a language. In attempt to estimate the relative value of English in correspondence with Arabic and French, it was found that English excels. Statistical results show a proportionate independence of work performance on proficiency in English. Further, it is also obvious that work force selection decisions are largely related to how many languages are manipulated, which languages specifically individuals master, and how much proficiency in a given language they are qualified. In almost all cases, this is weighed up in association to English. For that matter Arabic occupies a significant place just next to English.

The analysis of the results demonstrates that a respectable number of individuals express their wish to have some routine protocols such as meetings be held in English. In some cases, despite unfavourable as it seems, French interferes as a medium for some incentives be it a cultural communicative urge or otherwise. In general, a tendency towards English is enthusiastically put into the open by the surveyed individuals, with differing degrees of how much restricted this choice can take on. An ultimate conclusive point is that the position booked for English in the contexts of business is well entrenched.

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