[Morocco: Speaking the Wrong Language](http://www.moroccoboard.com/viewpoint-5/64-author/1133-morocco-speaking-the-wrong-language)

By Said Bellari, Morocco News Board, 08/06/10

While illiteracy has been recognized justly as an important factor in the lagging behind of the development of Moroccan society I wish to propose in this essay that another, perhaps far more important factor, is a much less acknowledged cause: "disliteracy". While you will not be able to find this word in a regular English dictionary I think that it matters nonetheless.  The more so because it is especially prevalent amongst the educated elite. It means that they are speaking the wrong language in Morocco amongst themselves and with the rest of the world. Because of that we fail to go with the global flow and we isolate ourselves more and more from the development growth of other areas abroad like the one in South East Asia. Just to be clear from the onset: with this assertion I do not want to say that we should stop speaking Arabic in Morocco. Allah yastar! Not in the least, perhaps we should do that even more. With it I mean in fact that we should aim to fade out the French language as soon as possible. Simultaneously we should give the English language a fresh stimulus in all aspects of Moroccan society and let it take its place as a second language of Morocco. French should not even be 3rd or 4th language for that matter. This change from a francophone to an "Arab-Anglophone" country will introduce a second era of Istiqlal. It will unleash a sense of freedom of spirit in our Moroccan society that will erode historic brakes and obstacles settled in Moroccan collective mind. Let me explain further.

It has been more than 55 years since independence now and while a lot of progress has been accomplished during these decades much advance is still needed in Moroccan society. This is also the awareness behind the recently launched social development plan to address poverty and unemployment: the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH). Fact is though, that however much effort, time and money is poured in a top-down approach like the ones with the help from the IMF, the World Bank, the Paris Club or from the entry into the Association Agreement with the EU and a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the US, or just the boosting of the tourism sector,  it all boils down to, in the end, the action or inaction for that matter seen on the grassroots level. It is at this “individual level of Hassan and Fatima” that optimism or pessimism will reign in their thoughts about their future and their kids’ future. My counsel then is that a lot of the “haraka” on this specific basic level is determined by the second language that Hassan and Fatima will be speaking to each other ordinarily.

While we celebrate quite some decades of independence now year after year, one can truly ask himself whether that state of independence has truly soaked our whole Moroccan society? Or is it that in certain corners, some of them essential, the French occupier is virtually still subjugating our hearts and minds to the detriment of our future prospects? Well in the matter of language the question does not even beg for an answer: every Moroccan academician, scientist, entrepreneur, artist, writer, doctor, politician or whatever key societal character, will easily admit that French is still the Master of the Moroccan Universe. In more than 50 years France has still succeeded in keeping the illusion in Morocco alive and kicking that we need our historical and cultural ties with it. It is a communal trance-like state of mind that is inhibiting our progress. Even after  all the abuse that colonialism brought with it. (Or perhaps even because of the abuse of our people during centuries by the Western occupiers that shared the inhumane idea behind colonialism.)This pathological trait of dependency is still hurting Moroccan society and it’s future enormously. While I am in the least propagating a severing of ties with France or its culture, it would be foolish indeed, I am merely asking Moroccans to count to 10, think again and again and ask themselves plainly why they would choose French as a second language in this 21st Century? France and its culture has become a niche society on Earth and following it as a Moroccan amounts to civilizational self-destruction. While it was understandably hard to make this massive cultural transition in the sixties or the seventies of the 20th Century, nothing ought to keep the Kingdom and its people from choosing their own future nowadays. And this counts especially for the second language that we are cultivating collectively in Morocco. So that is why I am proposing to kick out the French asap and welcome the English in our homes, of course secondly behind our treasured Arabic. There is also a powerful psychological reason behind this transition that will mean a world of difference on this grassroots level.

France and French are part of our history. And that is exactly all it should be. A part in our history that we did not choose voluntarily. A part also that cost our society a lot to shed definitely, if not  at least partially. For the remaining part, French as a Lingua Franca in Moroccan society, consciously, but even more unconsciously, still reminds us of being slaves, of being dependent, of being backward, of being unable and of being all the things that second rate people are, or better phrased: of being what racist people want you to think of yourselves, of being second rate: "I am less worthy, less able”. This mental complex deeply rooted in our collective mind would take generations to overcome otherwise. By audaciously and emphatically peeling French from our society, which was not of our own choosing, we heal ourselves collectively. And by replacing it of our own accord by English (as a logical alternative to better connect to world society and be better prepared for the future) we would heal ourselves even more! It would emanate a second grand wave of independence in Moroccan society. A true collective grass-roots wave that speaks ofwill-power, self-determination, self-expression and new trust, hope and optimism for the future. It is the collective people’s effort of riding the Laraki of Moroccan destiny while halting the constant watching in the rear mirror and start looking through the front window, to 2050 and beyond, in the sole interest of our children and grandchildren.

This gargantuan social effort would be very difficult for Morocco on its own to endeavor. Before mentioned complex is responsible for a lot of “no-can-do”-mentality in Morocco. The easiest thing is therefore to just say no and acquiesce in the status quo. Once bitten, twice shy goes the saying. Or to evade the matter by inventing excuses why change is not there to happen. But Morocco is in dire need of stepped up growth. The question is whether all the actions taken now are enough to meet the needs of the exploding young generations. That is why an audacious and innovative approach is desired. A committee could investigate and report on how this transition is best done during one generation. Helpful would be ties with the Anglophone part of the world in general and Islamic countries in particular. As a live example of  the last category, showing a marvelous development trajectory counts the experience of Malaysia: it is comparable to Morocco in population but instead had a very successful transition since independence  from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy and now in the midst of growing into a services oriented economy delivering these also to developed countries. Not coincidentally Malaysia was managed for decades by a doctor who had an assertive and healing stance against their former colonial occupier: the legendary Dr. Mahathir. Morocco would do well to emulate his Wawasan 2020 vision and try to learn from his teachings on the issue of transforming society. But Morocco needs to disremember French and acquire English very soon: the 2nd language after Bahasa in Malaysia….il n'est jamais trop tard pour bien faire.

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