**French Language Revival In Morocco - Colonial Nostalgia Or Bridge To Modernity?**

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[](http://www.worldcrunch.com/source-partner/le-soir-16.html)French classes are fully booked in Morocco

**RABAT** - Along with Arabic, French has long been one of Morocco's languages. It is the language of culture; it is the flipside of our identity -- of our double identity, if you will, which is the result of a long coexistence and exchanges between generations.

Even though Morocco has been independent from French colonialism since 1956, the French language has never left our history and even less our memory. And today, while some are trying to bury the French language into a deep grave, there seems to be a revival of interest for the language.

The demand for French lessons is growing, according to Mohamed Malki. A former teacher of French and French literature for many years, Malki was later named inspector general of French at the Moroccan education ministry. “We are in a context of globalization, internationalized economy, closer relations with the EU, the development of off-shoring... and for Morocco, [French is the historic bridge to Europe](http://worldcrunch.com/world-affairs/once-just-a-gateway-to-europe-morocco-now-has-its-own-african-immigrant-tensions/c1s5648/#.UP6ivR3hKSo).”

This argument makes sense. It follows King Hassan II’s creed to open Morocco to the world.

The French Institute of Morocco (IFM) has regional offices across the country. Their [classes](http://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/brazilian-prostitutes-take-foreign-languages-classes-to-prepare-for-world-cup/brazil-world-cup-2014-prostitution-sex-workers-soccer/c3s10587/#.UP6iOB3hKSo) are fully booked, and they never lack students. “Young Moroccans are more and more eager to learn French and the demand outweighs the supply.” It’s a new reality that totally contradicts those who had prematurely announced the death of the French language.

Those who are considered responsible for the [slow decline of French](http://worldcrunch.com/business-finance/oh-mon-dieu-english-invades-french-workplace/c2s5075/#.UP6ihx3hKSo) in Moroccan schools are the Istiqlal party, a pro-independence and pro-monarchist party with conservative and nationalist views. They were the first to lead a crusade against French, while advocating massive *Arabization*. The Istiqlal lead its vigorous and politicized – quasi-ideological – campaign for decades. The arabization process created a rift between two opposing worlds and a new generation that can’t speak either French or Arabic properly. This rift, born of an extreme ideology, bears the responsibility of the current cultural divide that the Arab world is experiencing.

Globalization, the digital revolution, Internet and smartphones are not Arabic appendages. As sad as it may sound, the Arabic language is not in phase with the transformation of the world. Culture today revolves around new technologies -- and the new universal languages inherent to it are English and French, and pretty soon, Chinese or Brazilian...

This brings us to King Hassan II’s other paradigm: “An illiterate today is someone who only speaks one language!” The close-minded pro-arabization advocates cannot comprehend that in this new era, [we need foreign languages](http://worldcrunch.com/tech-science/say-what-study-reveals-best-language-at-getting-straight-to-the-point/c4s3979/#.UP6iSh3hKSo) – English or other European languages – as a complement.

When we interviewed people for this article, we realized that [contrary to what we believed,](http://worldcrunch.com/world-affairs/moroccans-debate-whether-to-ditch-french-language/c1s5358/#.UP6iQB3hKSo) young Moroccans were very [eager to learn English](http://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/where-english-is-the-new-must-have-language-but-98-of-the-people-can-039-t-speak-it/french-kinyarwanda-english-language-rwanda/c3s9612/#.UP6iNh3hKSo) or French. And Spanish too. For them, foreign languages are bridges to other worlds, a necessary step for a country open toward others.

**Asserting cultural identity**

This is about openness but also cultural and linguistic diversity. In its fifth article, the new Moroccan Constitution stipulates such a demand:

“Article 5: Arabic remains the official language. […] Tamazight constitutes an official language as common heritage for all the Moroccans without exception […] The State also preserves the Hassani culture as an integral part of the united [cultural identity of Morocco.”](http://worldcrunch.com/food-travel/saving-fez-morocco-039-s-imperial-treasure-that-risks-fading-away/fez-morocco-unesco-medina-tourism/c6s9896/#.UP6isx3hKSo)

Tamazight is an ethnic Berber language from central Morocco, while Hassani culture refers to the Bedouin nomadic tribes of the Sahara desert, in southern Morocco.

For the sake of a coherent and cohesive heritage, the old demon of linguistic ethnocentrism – in the form of Arabic – is trampled under the foot of the rising socio-cultural specificities and the assertion of [ethnic and cultural identity](http://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/talkin-kurdish-blues-turkey-hopes-language-classes-can-ease-ethnic-tensions/c3s5637/#.UP6iPR3hKSo).

Universalism and ethnocentrism aren’t opposite notions -- in fact, thanks to languages, they can be complementary. The revival of the French language in Morocco stems from an individual process. Officially though, there is a growing awareness of the divide between French and Arabic, even if we use both in the private and public sector.

According to Charles Fries, the French ambassador in Morocco, “the French school network in Morocco is the biggest one we have outside of France, with 32 schools and 26,000 students, of which 15,000 are Moroccan.” There was a 2.8% jump in registrations for the 2012-2013 school year, i.e. 700 new students. The French schools are jointly run by bodies affiliated to the French government (AEFE) and to the Moroccan government (OSUI). The partnership is a success.

Read the full article: [French Language Revival In Morocco - Colonial Nostalgia Or Bridge To Modernity?](http://www.worldcrunch.com/culture-society/french-language-revival-in-morocco-colonial-nostalgia-or-bridge-to-modernity-/c3s10662/#ixzz3mpeKLY9W)
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