

Education and Illiteracy of the Touat Speech Community

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Abstract:

The present article sheds light on a social phenomenon whereby the Touat speech community sends its children to Koranic schools well before they attend formal institutional ones. The aim out of this societal behaviour is to keep Arabic a living language within the community. However, according to the statistics, the number of male and female pupils, in both kinds of institution, is not balanced: boys are more numerous than girls. The same trend is found in illiteracy eradication schools; men are also more numerous than women. Yet; during the last years, the number of illiterate women attending illiteracy eradication schools has increased considerably compared to that of the men. This fact can be sociolinguistically accounted for as the women try to have a certain educational level to overcome social difficulties and to try to climb up the social ladder.

Résumé

Cet article met en exergue un phénomène social qui consiste en l'envoi des jeunes Touatis aux écoles coraniques à un âge très avancé, bien avant qu'ils soient inscrits à l'école publique. Le but derrière cette attitude sociétale réfléchit la volonté de garder la langue arabe vivante parmi les membres de la communauté. Cependant, et d'après les statistiques, le nombre d'élèves males et femelles, dans les deux institutions, n'est pas équilibré : les garçons sont plus nombreux que les filles.

La même tendance se retrouve parmi les inscrits aux écoles pour l'éradication de l'analphabétisme : les hommes sont plus nombreux que les femmes. Toute fois, durant les dernières années, le nombre de femmes illettrées inscrites dans ces écoles a augmenté considérablement en comparaison avec celui des hommes. Ceci peut-être expliqué socio-linguistiquement par le fait que les femmes veulent avoir un certain niveau d'éducation pour pouvoir faire aux difficultés sociales et pour essayer de gravir les échelons de l'hierarchie sociale

Introduction:

Adrar speech community encourages the learning of 'Arabic' at an early age. To accomplish this aim, the children re sent to Koranic schools so as to be proficient in this language well before they attend formal school. The next lines try to shed light on the impact of the Touat society and the Holy shrines (the Zawayas) on the learning of both 'Arabic' as well as on the foreign languages taught in public schools. The graphs and analyses do also

show that there is a disparity between boys and girls, as well as between men and women concerning the number of attendances of both school systems.

1. The Zawayas and Informal Education:

The teachers of the Zawayas are 'religious professionals' who teach 'Arabic' through the Koran, the Prophet's sayings [Hadith] and life [siira]. They form an important part of the social hierarchy, as they "monopolized the existing social function of the Arabic-Islamic societies" (Maamouri 1999:21)

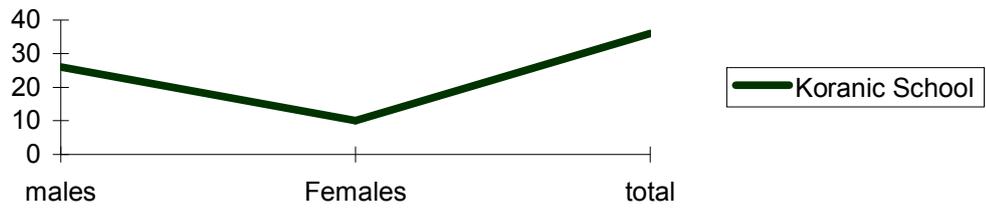
Nowadays, as will be shown in the next graphs, Adrar Arabic young speakers still attend Koranic school well before formal education. They learn the Koran and 'Arabic' grammar starting from the age of five (05) years. When they reach formal-school level, i.e.: six (06) years-old, they attend Koranic schools twice a day during the holidays. Although young girls can attend Koranic schools, their number is not as important as that of boys.

A comparison between the total of young and old people, both male and female, who attend Koranic school shows that there is a gap. Old people had no choice but attend the Zawayas, since during the French colonisation of Algeria and its military settlements in the south there were few civilian schools. The local inhabitants could not afford going to formal school and were not encouraged to do so by the religious scholars. As such, most of them attended the Zawayas.

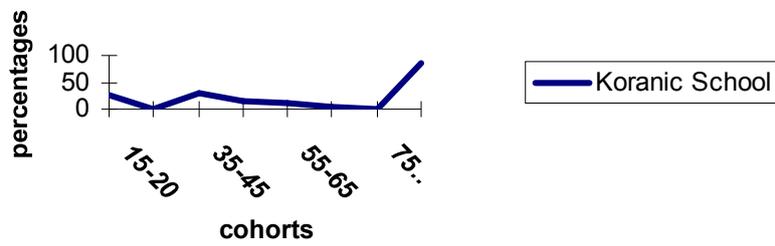
The other important discrepancy concerns the disproportion that exists between males and females. Women do not attend Koranic school as easily and as freely as men. Though they learn to read, write and speak 'Arabic, their number is not equal to that of the males. As an instance, the following graph shows that young rural girls (10 out of 42, i.e.: 23.08%) who go to Koranic school before formal education are less numerous than the boys (26 out of 54, i.e.:48.14%). The sample (n=96) is taken from a secondary school situated in Fenoughil, which is a rural area situated at thirty (30) kilometres from Adrar-city.

To cross-check the results obtained with the secondary school pupils, another sample was tested. This time, all the participants (n=157, 73 females and 84 males) live in Adrar-city; that is, they are urban dwellers.

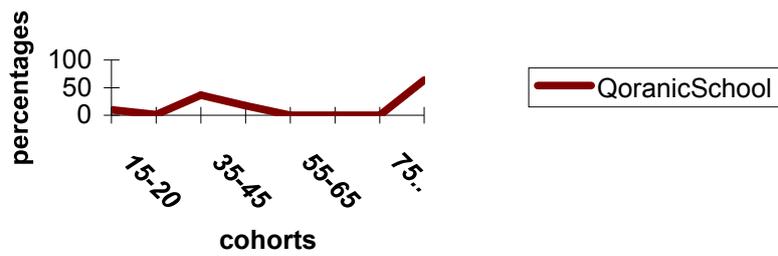
Graph n°1: Young males and females' attendance of Koranic School, Fenoughil district



Graph n°2 :Males' attendance ofKoranic School, Adrar-city



Graph n°3:Females' attendance of Koranic School, Adrar city



In the graphs, we notice that most young/old males and females attend Koranic school. Yet, their numbers are not equal. Very few males aged 65 years-old and more could attend these informal schools because, during the French colonisation, they were not granted the right to go to school. On the other hand, both graphs show that the highest number of the people who attended Koranic schools is that of the cohort aged between 35 and 45 years. These were born just before or just after independence. The males aged between 15 and 35 could go to the Koranic schools as well as to the formal educational classes. However, the number of young pupils is slightly higher than that of the eldest.

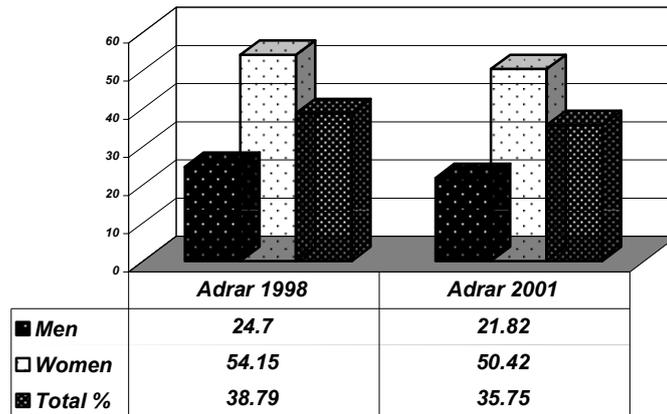
As to the female cohort, Chart3 shows that young women have more opportunity than old women to attend Koranic schools. All the women aged 50 and more have never attended these informal schools. This fact may be historically and socially accounted for; during the French colonisation, the women confronted many problems, among which fetching for food, clothing and shelter for their children. At that time, their priority was not education but survival. Socially, the women were responsible of the home and the education of children. Their homely concerns obliged them to care about their households rather than about their personal improvement.

After the independence of Algeria, some of the southerners who neither attended formal schools nor Zawayas had the chance to sit for non-formal adult education courses known as Illiteracy-Eradication Programme schools. Nowadays, the number of people who register in these programmes is important. The total sum of females, on another hand, is higher than that of the males, as women aspire for better conditions of life and for a higher social status. To achieve these goals in conformity with local criteria and standards, women need to master both reading and writing 'Arabic'. These numbers and graphs (i.e.: graph1, 2, and 3) show that the males have more opportunity than the women to attend both formal and informal schools in the Touat.

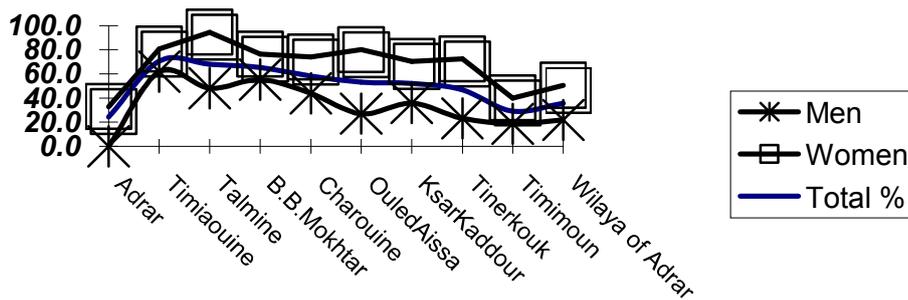
2. Literacy of the Touat Speech Community:

The 1998 national census showed that Adrar, i.e. the Touat, scored a high percentage of male and female illiterates (38.79%). In 2001, the overall number of illiterate people decreased (n=35.75%). As the next graph instances, the number of women who never attended school is higher than that of the men; their number is twice important.

Graph n°4: Comparison of Percentages of Illiteracy in Adrar.
(Source ONS,1998 & 2001)



Graph n°5: Percentages of Illiterate People in the Wilaya of Adrar-year 2001. (source: ONS-Adrar)



Individual learners are aware that, in the local society's values and norms, mastery and command of 'Arabic' is a sine qua non condition for a better social retribution. Their strategy is to develop knowledge of CA (Classical Arabic) or MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) through reading, speaking and writing 'Arabic'. This linguistic instrument enables them to advance in their future careers and gain acceptance of the local society. (Ager 2001:146)

In the next graphs, we note that the number of male illiterate people is less important in Adrar, the capital-city, and Timimoun the second most important urban centre of the Touat. On the opposite side, in the Ksours (Talmine, Charouine and Ksar Kaddour, for instance) the number of illiterate people grows notably. This may be due to the fact that urban dwellers are more motivated than the rural dwellers to learn 'Arabic', which will permit them to have access to work and to better economic and social opportunities. It may also be the case that rural individuals do not have the same reasons as those of urban folks, and that their work on the fields does not allow them much time to study and go to formal school.

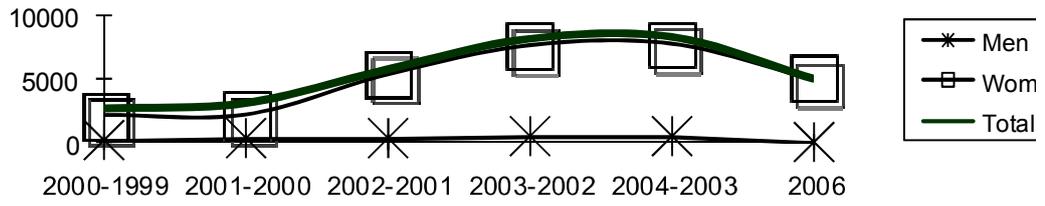
The graph shows that both rural and urban Adrar Arabic speakers do the effort of learning the language at a relatively older age. This means that there is a real motivation. The stimulus may be social as well as individual. (Ammon 2002:315) The other noticeable point is that the women are more numerous than the men in matter of illiteracy and that their number is higher in rural areas than it is in the urban districts.

From another angle, we note that in cities like Adrar and Timimoun the women are more illiterate than men. This confirms previous idea; that is, the males are sent to both Koranic schools and formal educational classes more than it is the case for the females. The local society, which is conservative, sees that a man should learn 'Arabic' to be a full fledged member of society.

With the advent of independence and modern times, the local society and speech community's traditional beliefs and customs have partly changed. Nowadays, the women are more numerous than the men in attending Illiteracy-eradication programmes. The female learners' aims and motives are more social than individual, for the women would like to read, speak and write 'Arabic' to participate to the local development and improve their personal standards.

Graph 6 shows that the number of female learners attending illiteracy-eradication programmes is in constant increase, from 2198 in 1999 to 7832 in 2004. In 2006, the women's attendance reached the number of 5031. The males' figures, which increased from 143 in 1999 to 445 in 2004, sensibly decreased in 2006 (n=07). These statistics do also inform us about the disparity that exists between male and female attendance of illiteracy-eradication programmes, and that there is a sociolinguistic change in progress. Societal attitudes towards literacy and competence in 'Arabic' will be affected, and future prospects will be available for the women.

Graph n°6: Overall numbers of men and women attending Illiteracy-Eradication Programmes in Adrar



The Koranic schools are among the many factors that facilitated 'Arabisation' in the Touat. The nationalist enthusiasm that characterised Algeria after independence was a significant cause for the young people to learn their ancestral language variety, i.e.: 'Arabic'. This fact is detailed in the next section.

3. Arabisation:

Nowadays, two political decisions, namely Arabisation and the making of Tamazight an official language have changed the sociolinguistic situation of Algeria. Societal attitudes towards both 'Arabic' and Tamazight have also changed.

Arabisation, as a language planning (LP), aimed at the reattribution of its status to 'Arabic'; it sought to elevate this language variety to the level of a national standard language used all throughout Algeria. It was meant to promote it at all levels of education, from primary school to university, as well as at the community level starting from the government and its various services, ministries, and so on. (Sirles 1999:123)

In fact, Arabisation was a political decision out of which the government wanted to reassess 'Arabic' as both the national and official language of the country. Throughout that LP, the central political administration aimed at getting rid of the French language, which at the time of the application of Arabisation, was spoken by half of the Algerian population. (Gallagher 1964:134, cited in Sirles 1999:118)

That language policy was not welcomed by all the Algerian society. It faced many obstacles in northern Algeria, particularly from the educated elite whose members were formed in French schools. It was also not accepted by most inhabitants of the coastal line, who were French rather than Arabic speakers and whose exposure to the language has historically been high.

In southern Algeria, the informal-school system of the Zawayas had an impact on local speakers, and encouraged the implementation of Arabisation. Their support of 'Arabic' as the language of the Koran, of classical poetry, as well as that of the literary heritage enabled them to teach it and preserve it during the colonial era.

In the Touat, the impact of the Zawayas can still be felt, nowadays. The ability of the southerners to use French was insignificant if compared to their mastery of 'Arabic', for the latter was seen not only as a means of expression, but also as a means of expressing nationalistic feelings and the retention of one's own identity. Arabisation, then, was quite symbolic to the southerners, who saw in it an 'idealistic' opportunity directly related to the appropriation of 'Arabic' as the language of the whole society and as the medium of all functions, purposes and roles.

3.1 Arabisation of the Touat Speech Community:

The Arabisation process tries to spread 'Arabic' to all the spheres of society. It aims at imposing this language variety not only to all formal situations, but also as a means of communication in such domains as the home and the street.

Although Arabisation confronted some obstacles in the north, in southern Algeria it did not face any troubles, since 'Arabic' was already taught in the religious shrines (the Zawayas). The ruling spheres, i.e. the Chorfas (the Nobles) and the Mrabtines (the Marabouts descendants of the Almoravids), had also a part in the implementation of 'Arabic' in the Touat. The language was not only an instrument, but also a means of imposing their rule over the minority. Those two high social classes benefited from 'Arabisation' which gave them more power as a ruling group of the local society. For them, 'Arabisation' was not a language planning, only; it was rather a language policy which sought to re-establish the power of a group through language attitudes and behaviours.

Post-independence Adrar Arabic young speakers did not have problems to attend formal education in 'Arabic', as they were acquainted with that language since an early age. However, and it is worth mentioning, there was, and still is, a social tradition which fosters disparity between male and female education in Touat.

Since school is compulsory in Algeria, at the level of formal education, the girls can attend official instruction and their number is in constant increase. The same process is witnessed in Touat where the number of female pupils is significant and varies from a year to another.

4. Education of the Touat Speech Community:

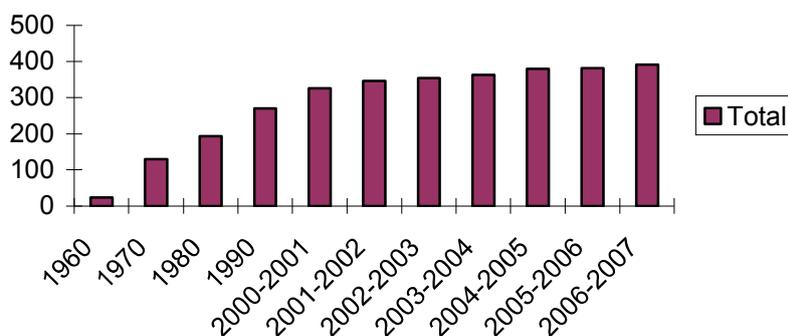
At the level of school infrastructures, the government and local academy have built a certain number of primary, intermediate, and secondary schools throughout the whole Wilaya (department or province). As is shown in the next table, school infrastructures increased significantly.

In the 1960's in the Touat, there were neither intermediate nor secondary schools, but primary schools only (n=24). Ten years later, the number of primary schools augmented (n=127) and two (02) intermediate schools were built. The first two secondary schools appeared in 1980; their number is constantly rising following the evolution of the demography of the Wilaya. By 2004, Adrar had more than 363 educational institutions to provide compulsory education to young people. Actually, the total number of schools is 391.

Table n° 1: Number of Schools for the three educational levels, throughout five decades

Number of schools/ Years	Primary schools	Intermediate schools	Secondary schools
1960	24	0	0
1970	127	2	0
1980	181	10	2
1990	243	19	8
2000-2001	284	30	12
2001-2002	286	47	13
2002-2003	289	51	14
2003-2004	294	54	15
2004-2005	304	58	17
2005-2006	304	58	19
2006-2007	306	64	21

Graph 7: Total Number of Schools in Adrar



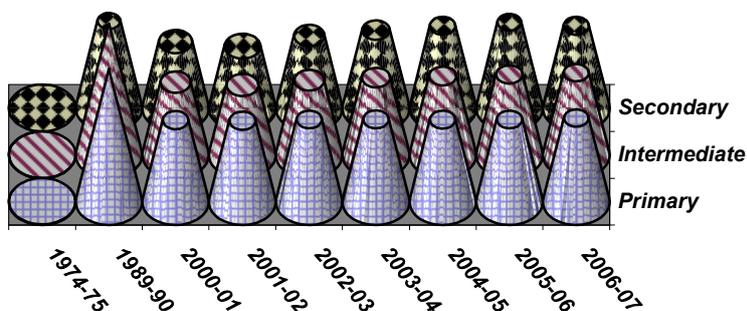
The statistics about the number of pupils attending primary, intermediate and secondary schools in the Wilaya of Adrar show that there is a substantial growth. As an example, in 1980-1981 the number of pupils registered in the three levels of education was 24045. Ten years later, the number was twice as important (n= 44702). By the beginning of the 21st century, the total number of registered pupils in the three levels of education was 90466, i.e. 79% of increase compared to the 1980's. In 2006-2007, their number reached 102377, that is 80, 98 % of augment.

Table n° 2: Number of pupils in the three levels of education, throughout three decades

Years	Primary	Intermediate	Secondary	Total
1980-1981	18579	4375	1091	24045
1989-1990	33460	7129	4113	44702
2000-2001	59428	22374	8664	90466
2001-2002	59614	24891	9703	94028
2002-2003	59510	26121	10881	96512
2003-2004	59626	26929	12118	98673
2004-2005	58223	28015	13093	99331
2005-2006	58049	26674	15168	99891
2006-2007	55122	32341	14914	102377

As mentioned in the previous section, the number of Adrar Arabic female pupils is in constant increase in the Touat. The next graph gives a clear idea about the progression of the figures:

Graph n°8: Total Percentages of Female Pupils in Adrar



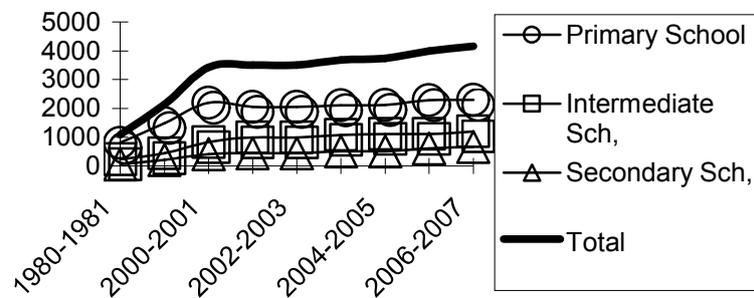
We notice that the number of females attending primary, intermediate and secondary schools has increased considerably between 1974 and 2006. Their total number reached a top during the school-year 1989-1990; there were more girls than boys at school. It, then, decreased and followed a constant level during the first six years of present century.

The government has also encouraged the recruitment of school teachers for the three levels. Their number has also become greater than it was; it gradually passed from 1097 in 1980-1981 to 4162 in 2006-2007, i.e. 79.14 % of increase compared to the 1980's. The next table and graph illustrate the figures:

Table n°3: Number of School Teachers in the Wilaya of Adrar during three decades

Teachers/Institutions	Total
1980-1981	1097
1989-1990	2145
2000-2001	3427
2001-2002	3499
2002-2003	3499
2003-2004	3691
2004-2005	3737
2005-2006	4001
2006-2007	4162

Graph n°9: Number of Teachers throughout Three decade



Conclusion:

The Algerian compulsory school system accelerated the education of young Adrar Arabic speakers of both sexes. It has also facilitated the regional academic institutions to implement the infrastructures which would permit people to attend school all throughout the area.

This educational system has also enabled the natives to send their children to school for free, so that, nowadays, one can say that illiteracy in the Touat has significantly receded. Young Adrar Arabic speakers of both sexes attend school, and can climb the social ladder.

The implementation of the Algerian language policy, i.e. 'Arabisation' could easily take place in the Touat region, since the people were already acquainted with 'Arabic' through the teaching of the latter language variety at the level of the religious shrines, the Zawayas. The role of the shrines was linguistic and societal, for the Zawayas worked hard to promote and keep up the Algerian Arabo-Muslim identity. After the independence of the country, the 'Arabisation' process was welcomed by the Zawayas, as it reflected their ideologies and principles.

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