

Language socialization and language shift in the 1b generation: a study of Moroccan adolescents in Italy

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International Journal of Multilingualism, 2008, 5, pp. 53-72.

Abstract

The article reports on a longitudinal ethnographic study of the language socialization of a group of Moroccan adolescents migrated to Italy in the late 1990s. The approach is based on the notion of language socialization, which sees the process of acquiring a language as linked to that of becoming a member of a culture.

Participants live in small towns in a semi-rural area in Northern Italy and were closely observed during their initial contact with Italian. Ethnographic observations continued in the following years, and were conducted both in the homes and in school programs. Five years later, in-depth interviews were carried out on a range of issues dealing with ethnolinguistic identity, language knowledge and use in a variety of domains and intercultural relationships. Written materials were also collected on personal experiences and attitudes towards Italy and Morocco.

These data taken together show how socialization into the new culture is producing a very rapid shift in language use and associated attitudes towards the different languages in the repertoire, i.e Italian, Moroccan and Standard Arabic, and other European languages. Patterns of language use, linguistic ideologies and ethnolinguistic identity of this multilingual community are discussed in relation to educational policies.

Key words:

adolescents, educational policies, Italy, language shift, language socialization, Morocco

Introduction

The present study reports on a longitudinal ethnographic study on language socialization of a community of Moroccan adolescents living in a rural area in Northern Italy. These youths arrived in the country in the late nineties, at ages between 9 and 13. They were immediately enrolled in local schools and had to adapt as fast as possible to the new linguistic and cultural milieu. While some research so far has focussed on young Moroccan migrants in urban areas (eg. Biazzi & Chini 2004; El Aissati & Schaufeli 1999; Extra & Verhoeven 1999), little is known about their language socialization in small rural towns.

When they left Morocco, the linguistic repertoire of our informants included three languages. The mother tongue for all of them was Moroccan Arabic. Their competence in Standard Arabic varied according to the number of years they had spent at school - most of them had a fair receptive competence in the oral, although only very few were functionally literate. French is also part of the Moroccan school curriculum, but most of them had just begun studying it and their knowledge was thus very limited.

Migration to Italy implied learning Italian and, at school, one or two other European languages. In this article we describe how their linguistic repertoire changed after a few years in Italy and how this was accompanied by a change in attitudes towards different languages and cultures and a process of socialization into the new culture.

Multilingualism and language shift among adolescents

Sociolinguistic approaches

Participants to this study may be referred to as '1b generation' (Clyne 2003:5, after Haugen 1953), in that they belong neither to the prototypical first generation of adults, nor to the second generation of children born in the host country or arrived there at a very young age. In other words, they began their linguistic, cultural and academic development in Morocco and continued it in Italy, with an abrupt linguistic and cultural shift taking place around puberty.

Not many studies on language shift focus specifically on the 1b generation, and the concept itself is not easily defined. For Clyne (2003: 5) speakers of generation 1b 'share some characteristics with the second generation – native-like pronunciation in both languages, childhood experience in both languages because of early migration, all or most schooling in the majority language, and early acquisition of the national language'. He sets an upper limit at age 12, while recognizing 'a grey area between eight and twelve'. Extra and Verhoeven (1999: 44) operationally define their 'intermediate generation' as that arrived in the host country between 5 and 12.

Previous research on Moroccan adolescents in Europe has not specifically set apart those belonging to the 1b generation, although many participants in such studies could have been thus defined. A common finding is that these youths shift quite rapidly from Moroccan Arabic to the host country language. Appel and Muysken (1987: 42) report the case of a 14 year old boy who, after four years in the Netherlands, used a mix of Dutch and Moroccan Arabic with his peers, admitting that some words could be retrieved more easily in Dutch than in Arabic. El Aissati and Schaufeli (1999) note that second and 1b generation Moroccan adolescents in the Netherlands show a lower L1 vitality than Turks. In fact, while both groups report regular use of the L1 with

their parents, Moroccan adolescents tend to use more Dutch with siblings and friends. Moroccans also score lower in both perceived and measured proficiency in the L1, with greater inter-individual variation, which the authors interpret as a sign of language loss. Extra and Verhoeven (1999), based on a large survey on language use at home, also report a medium L1 vitality index for Moroccan elementary school children, who regularly use the L1 with parents but not as much as Turks or Chinese with siblings. The same pattern was found by Biazzi & Chini (2004) with young Moroccans in Italy, who regularly speak Moroccan Arabic with parents but tend to use both Italian and Arabic with siblings more often than children of other nationalities. However, based on a variety of parameters (including use with parents and grandparents), their data show a medium-high language maintenance index for these young Moroccans.

Other studies have reported similar shift patterns in 1b and second generation adolescents of other origins, often associated with progressive L1 attrition. Some of these works (e.g. Bettoni & Rubino 1996; Hakuta & D'Andrea 1992; Tosi 1984) analyzed language shift in terms of how the L2 is increasingly used across domains (Fishman 1972) and interlocutors. One of the domains most resilient to shift is the home, especially in communication with parents and older relatives; with siblings, friends, and strangers, and in public and professional domains, 1b generation adolescents rapidly shift to the L2.

More recent work has extended this line of research by adding to these macro-social categories a more fine-grained analysis based on social networks, i.e. the individuals with whom one regularly interacts and/or who play a significant role in one's life. Li Wei (1994) found that social network patterns can explain language choice among young Chinese-English bilinguals in England together with more traditional variables such as age, sex, generation, duration of stay. Wiklund (2002) shows that most immigrant adolescents are not well integrated in Swedish society, having only a few native Swedes among their close friends. The highest network scores (which can be taken as an index of sociability) were achieved by those who had networks involving Swedes and ethnic groups other than their own, followed by networks oriented equally toward own group and ethnic group other than own or Swedes. The lowest scores were achieved by informants whose social networks were mainly oriented towards Swedes. Frequent contacts with Swedes were related to the ability to appropriately shift style between oral conversation and written compositions and, to a lesser extent, to proficiency in Swedish in general. Raschka et al's (2002) study on Chinese-English bilinguals born in the UK shows that younger children, who interact primarily with parents at home, are more likely to use 'pure' Chinese, whereas older ones and adolescents, for whom peers have become the most important social network, tend to use a mixed code with them. However, the chance of maintaining monolingual Chinese interactions with peers is directly related to proficiency in this language, which in turns depends on how frequently and consistently parents and relatives use it at home.

Ethnographic approaches and language socialization

Ethnographic approaches add other dimensions and methodological tools to the study of language maintenance and shift. Participant observation offers valuable insights into the social groups under study, as it allows researchers to reconstruct from the participants' point of view the complex relationships among communicative practices, social structures, and the attitudes and beliefs held by individuals. Rampton (2005) is an exemplary ethnographic study on adolescents' multilingualism in the UK. Using a blend of participant observation, direct recording of spontaneous interactions, semi-structured interviews and retrospective analyses with participants, Rampton demonstrates the complex relationships between language-style shifting and the adolescents' attitudes, social identities and roles. His ethnography shows that in this micro-culture it is not just non-native speakers of English who acquire and use English as a second language, but

that other languages and varieties such as Punjabi or Afro-Caribbean English form part of the community's shared repertoire, thus challenging simplistic, unidirectional models of the 'native speaker' or 'second language acquisition' (see also Rampton 1991).

Other studies have focused on younger children at home and school, describing the practices whereby they are socialized in using two or more languages with different people and in different situations, and how these discursive patterns form part of complex ideologies about the self, society and human and linguistic development (e.g. Pease-Alvarez & Vasquez 1994, Schecter & Bayley 1997, Toohey 1998). Some of these studies explicitly refer to language socialization, an ethnographic approach to linguistic development which has been applied to first (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986) and second language acquisition contexts (Kramsch 2002; Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen 2003). In Ochs' words (2002: 106), 'Language socialization is rooted in the notion that the process of acquiring a language is part of a much larger process of becoming a person in society. As originally formulated, the discipline articulates ways in which novices across the life span are socialized into using language and socialized through language into local theories and preferences for acting, feeling, and knowing ... Language socialization studies also examine how members of multilingual communities are socialized into using different codes, and how language socialization practices impact language maintenance and language change.'

The language socialization approach recognizes the importance of members' attitudes, beliefs and values concerning language and communication and their relation to social life. In this respect, it is related to recent work in linguistic anthropology on language ideologies, i.e. 'sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use' (Silverstein 1979: 193). As Silverstein (1992) notes, ideologies are always socially situated, which means that they develop and are reproduced through interactions with other people connected through complex networks. Hence, the assimilation, transformation and rejection of ideologies forms an important part of language socialization, since in order to become a member of a culture one has to come to grips with that culture's ideologies and position himself or herself with respect to them. In multilingual contexts this means that speakers more or less explicitly express their stance towards the languages and varieties in their repertoire, and such stances are related to discursive practices. Phenomena such as language maintenance, shift, conflict and the very idea of what counts as a language, are mediated by individuals' ideologies, which can be accessed through in depth interviewing and by participant observation and analysis of spontaneous communicative events. Much research has been conducted, mainly within a socio-psychological framework, on how attitudes mediate language acquisition and use in multilinguals (on adolescents see e.g. Bernaus et al 2004); the study of linguistic ideologies adds to this research line methods and insights from ethnography and anthropological linguistics (Woolard 1998). A few studies describe language contact and shift in terms of linguistic ideologies (King 2000; Kulick 1998), but we are not aware of any contribution dealing specifically with immigrant adolescents' language ideologies.

The research

Social Context

Participants in the study live in a few small towns of 2000-7000 inhabitants in the Appennine mountain area located about 40-50 km from Bologna, the region's administrative capital. These towns are connected to the main city by a railway, but moving from one town to another is not always easy with public transport.

The first migrants in the area arrived in the late eighties and they were all Moroccan men.

They settled in this mountain area mostly because there were some job opportunities and houses were less expensive compared to the city. As soon as they got a permanent job and a house, they were joined by their families, which happened during the nineties. By the end of that decade the number of migrants in the area had risen substantially, and is still rising nowadays (4.5% of the total population in 2000, 7.2% in 2003, 8% in 2004). Other nationalities began to arrive, although Moroccans are still the major migrant nationality in the area. Nonetheless, one cannot really talk of a Moroccan community, with strong social networks, institutions and meeting places. The only cultural association of Moroccan migrants was started in 2003; in the same period two small mosques and a few Moroccan stores were also opened. Some families are related by kinship or strong friendship - parents and children are often visiting each others' homes, but there is no clear sense of belonging to a broader 'Moroccan community'.

This migration pattern can be seen in the school demographics for the area. In 1999, immigrant students were 7.2% of the population in primary schools, 9% in junior high schools and only 1.72% in high schools. These figures increased to 11, 8.5 and 2.25, respectively in 2002. In 2005, immigrant children in the area reached 14.4% in primary schools, 12.5% in junior high and 5.9% in high schools.¹

The Moroccan families involved in our study share several features. They all come from the area in Morocco located between Beni Mellal, Mohammadia and Statt and are composed of four to seven members. Older children were born in Morocco, the youngest were born in Italy. In most of the cases fathers work in factories and are the only breadwinners, while women remain at home with children. Both parents have a low educational profile and most of them are illiterate both in Arabic and in Italian. Their competence in Italian is rudimentary and for some of the women close to nil.

The migration plan of these families is clearly oriented to remaining in Italy and many of them have recently started to buy houses in the area. More generally, they have positive attitudes toward Italy, which they consider a better place to live in than Morocco, offering better opportunities for both parents and children.

Participants and methodology

The study began in 1999 as an action-research project. Two of the authors (Di Lucca and Masiero) worked as adjunct teachers, hired by the local educational authorities to set up an experimental program for teaching Italian as a second language to the young Moroccans who were beginning to attend the schools in the area. Thanks to their knowledge of Arabic, the two teachers were able to develop a project-work based on oral and written narrations on Moroccan and Islamic cultural traditions and the students' biographies, experiences, attitudes. The aim of the project was to stimulate learning of Italian and cultural dialogue by means of autobiography, which has been reported to assist individuals in reconstructing their identity after critical changes such as migration (Demetrio, 1996; Legrand, 1993).

Twenty boys and girls aged 12-17 were involved in the project for one or two school years. Some of them had just arrived, others had been in Italy for some years; they were all reported by the school to have difficulties with Italian. Besides oral narratives, written texts were also collected, documenting both their progress in Italian and their feelings and attitudes towards Morocco and Italy. Subsequently, the same teachers started literacy courses for adults, in which some of the mothers took part. This allowed personal bonds to develop and teachers began to regularly visit families at home, conducting ethnographic participant observations.

Six years later, in the summer 2005, ten of these adolescents were interviewed in depth. Interviews were conducted in Italian and had no fixed structure, although they all touched upon themes involving participants' acquisition of Italian as a second language, their perceptions about

the use of the various languages in their repertoire (Italian, Moroccan Arabic, Standard Arabic) in Italy and in Morocco; the implications of being Moroccan in Italy, their social networks and values attributed to languages and communities. Participants were also asked to write short texts about Moroccan culture and identity, in analogy with those they had written six years before, being free to choose the topic they wanted to develop and how to go about it. In this period Masiero spent several days together with the families, engaging in informal conversations and participating to daily activities such as preparing and eating meals, watching television, visiting friends and relatives. As usual in ethnography (Delamont 2004; Tedlock 2005) and in participatory action research (Ladkin 2004; Kemmis & McTaggart 2005), researchers were thus not just passive spectators, but they were also part of the social events reported here. Their role changed over time, from that of children's teachers to teachers of their mothers and eventually friends to both. In this respect, they played a part in their learning of Italian and their socialization in the Italian culture.

In this article we will focus on seven participants, who constitute a rather homogenous group. They all arrived at ages between 9 and 13 (average 11.3). In 2005, when interviews were collected, they had been living in Italy for periods ranging from 4 to 11 years (average 8.0). The analysis here will be based mostly on extracts from interviews, casual conversations and written documents. All recordings were transcribed using the CHAT format from the Childes Project (childes.psy.cmu.edu) and were coded for the topics covered and the languages referred to. This allowed a subsequent computer-assisted content analysis with the program suite CLAN (*ibid*), yielding sub-corpora containing all the passages dealing with a certain topic. Interviews' excerpts are reported here in their English translation, which tries to represent as closely as possible the original talk, including dysfluencies and the not completely linear syntactic constructions of oral discourse. INV stands for the interviewer, while GHI, HAS, AHM etc. indicate the interviewees' names.

The results presented in the following pages emerge from a careful scrutiny of a substantial amount of recorded and transcribed data. Validity and reliability of qualitative research can be assessed in specific ways (Lazaraton 2003; Miller & Dingwall 1997). A common method employed in ethnography is triangulation of different types of data. In our case, participants' reports and opinions given in the interviews were systematically checked against their actual linguistic practices as they were observed in the school and home domains (and to some extent in other public places). Their self-assessed linguistic proficiency in different languages was compared to oral and written productions in Italian and Arabic and with their ability to understand written and oral materials in both languages. The television always tuned to Arab channels stimulated discussions on varieties of Arabic and allowed to assess how they were understood. The reliability of our conclusions can also be supported by reference to the numerous extracts provided in the paper and to many other examples that can be found in the transcribed corpus, which is publicly available on the Internet (www.gabrielepallotti.it).

First contact with Italian: language socialization at school

When they moved in the new country, participants couldn't speak Italian at all. They were mainstreamed in ordinary classes, but were all enrolled in a class lower than the one they should have attended based on their age, allegedly to help them with learning Italian. Some of them later expressed that in their opinion this was useless and humiliating, and that they could have made it even if they had started in the class appropriate for their age.

Even though they were the first non native children at school, a strongly negative social stigma was immediately attached to them. *Marocchino* ('Moroccan') was a derogatory term in many parts of Italy even before Moroccans actually arrived. Already in 1992, preschool teachers reported that children as young as four or five giggled upon hearing that another child was

'Moroccan' (Pallotti 1996). Some of our informants describe episodes in which they were clearly discriminated and made the object of racist prejudice.

In the first years after arrival the school was the only place where these youths learned Italian and were socialized into the new culture. The school's orientation was strongly towards cultural and linguistic assimilation, with no interest in these students' multilingualism. The main goal was that they learned Italian as soon as possible in order to achieve grade level competences, an objective which prevailed over social and affective concerns. For 'facilitating' their mainstreaming in ordinary class activities, not only were these youths enrolled in classes lower than that of their age, but they all had to repeat at least one school year (a rather common policy in that period in Italy: Favaro, 2002). This way, they ended up being two or three years older than their classmates, with obvious consequences on self-esteem, motivation and social relationships. Teachers seemed to be exclusively worried that their Italian and content knowledge were at the same level of the other students, and did not care much about how these young Moroccans felt being with much younger classmates, repeating the same subjects twice, going through academic failure and completely neglecting the other languages in their repertoire, in particular Arabic.

Some students reacted to such difficulties by forming a group with other Italian low achievers, in what Ahmad remembers as a playful rebellion against the school system.

- AHM: we used to get up to so much mischief!
INV: and was it so amusing?
AHM: very amusing. And also tease the teachers, things like that
INV: oh it was a fun thing to do, but were you used to doing this in Morocco?
AHM: no. Because we met here and we simply got up to some mischief for the experience of it!

Others report their great distress, how they considered themselves excellent students and that they would have never expected to fail a school year. The following passage, written by Fatna in 2002, a few months after she had arrived in Italy, exemplifies how most of these boys and girls felt during the first period:

My name is Fatna XXX, I'm 13 years old I'm Moroccan I like Morocco very much I went to Morocco in Casablanca and Morocco is beautiful as always I saw my sisters and my friends I saw all Morocco I want stay there and I like better Arabic music now Arabic music has become very beautiful. I would like more my country and especially Casablanca is a big and beautiful city.
I've been in Morocco for 24 days it's few. I don't like Italy because I have no female friends I have a male friend in my classroom I need friends to be happy like in Morocco

One can see all the grief, sadness and loneliness expressed by the girl. She feels torn apart from her country, friends and relatives and would like to return there as soon as possible. Socialization in the new language and culture must have been such a traumatic experience for many others like her, who felt uprooted from their home country, their social networks, the language they spoke everyday with everyone.

The school and multilingualism

National guidelines by the Ministry of Education (C.M. 205/1990; L. 40/1998, art. 36; C.M. 24/2006) suggest that the school should positively value the students' mother tongues, but delegate the actual implementation to the family and other public and private agencies. Apart from

scant purely tokenistic manifestations, Italian is thus the dominant and unique language used at school, even in the teaching of foreign languages. Most teachers don't see minority languages in the classroom as a valuable resource, but rather believe that maintaining the L1 might be an obstacle for L2 acquisition. At best, they think that developing the mother tongue, for example its literacy, is just a useless distraction, subtracting precious time from the more important objective of learning Italian.

The schools attended by our informants made no exception. At a certain point, an Italian teacher who had studied some Arabic began a programme for both Moroccan and Italian speakers based on comparing the two languages. This initiative, however, ended soon, as the teacher realized the limited schooling of most Moroccan students and their lack of motivation. Some results were achieved in the special courses arranged to support the learning of Italian as a second language, both during school hours and after school. Teachers of these courses were not part of the regular staff, but were hired with temporary contracts. They had a good knowledge of Arabic and the Arab world, which allowed them to start an intercultural education workshop centered around the positive evaluation of aspects of Moroccan and Islamic culture. At these workshops students were allowed to use Arabic if they wished, and a few of them did. This however is quite far from true multilingual education, but rather a display of a positive attitude and sincere interest towards the students' cultural background and an opportunity for them to express their feelings and memories.

However, even these activities were framed within a course of Italian as a second language. The school's main concern was in fact that these youths learned Italian as quickly as possible and great pressure was put on them to meet such demands. This took priority over everything else, certainly of L1 development in the written mode, but also of teaching foreign languages, from which some students were exempted at least for some time, allegedly to help them learn Italian faster. In short, with respect to multilingualism, the school proposed what Skutnabb-Kangas (1999) calls a 'nonmodel', the traditional sink-or-swim submersion program. In this there is really no alternative to learning the second language, while the mother tongue is left to itself, which often means that it does not develop and gradually declines, especially in the written mode and in academic contexts.

The local mosque offered some course for reading and writing Classical Arabic, but the few among our participants who tried to attend them found them boring, taught with old-fashioned methods, and mainly directed to younger children, so they soon gave up.

Linguistic repertoire: contexts of use and competences

Despite the school's denial of multilingualism, our informants were multilingual when they arrived in Italy and are even more so now, with a linguistic repertoire including Moroccan Arabic, Standard and other varieties of Arabic, Italian and, at varying degrees, some other European languages, like French or English. We will now outline a profile of their linguistic competences and domains of use, based on their self-reports and on ethnographic observations.

Moroccan Arabic

Moroccan Arabic is the mother tongue of all the interviewees. The main, and sometimes exclusive, context where it is used in Italy is the household. All informants report using it with their parents, relatives and a few intimate acquaintances, who have limited competence in Italian, thus making Moroccan Arabic an almost obligatory choice.

The Moroccan Consulate, in the main town, seems to be the only public place where

Moroccan is used. In other public places, even when the interlocutor is clearly Moroccan, e.g. a colleague or the assistant in a Moroccan store, informants declare that they speak Italian, unless the interlocutor is manifestly unable to understand them.

GHI: we speak Moroccan but even with Moroccans whom I work with for example, I don't speak Moroccan to them

INV: at work at the icecream shop you mean

KHA: not even at the agency

INV: in Italian?

GHI: outside even, at the supermarket if someone wants to speak to you I speak Italian

INV: like a shop where you go to and speak Arabic?

SOU: if it's an Arabic shop I speak Italian

INV: if it's an Arabic shop and there is a Moroccan man inside, you speak Italian?

SOU: yes

INV: ok and if he can't speak Italian?

SOU: well that depends... that depends if he can't speak Italian I translate?

Even with Moroccan close friends, Moroccan Arabic is rarely spoken if they are in public places. The only exceptions are when all participants are Moroccan or when they want to express themselves in a 'secret language'.

At school too Arabic is no longer used, although it was during the first periods with other Moroccan peers. Fatna provides a clear statement regarding this gradual shift, from Arabic only in the first year, to code mixing in the second, to the third year when Arabic *didn't even come out*.

INV: do you speak Arabic with X [a Moroccan schoolmate]

FAT: yes then during the first year I used to speak just in Arabic with him, in the second year I started to mix up with him, by the third year no more Arabic, it didn't even come out.

This rapid shift is accompanied by a certain degree of first language attrition. Even if our informants declare a good competence in Moroccan Arabic and they visit Morocco almost every year, during these stays they become aware of lexical gaps in peripheral semantic areas and of a reduced fluency, which becomes the object of mockery by relatives and friends, as Ghizlane notes:

GHI: yes and my uncles and aunts tease us ... jokingly they tell me I don't know Arabic anymore and how could I have forgotten it and it must mean I don't think of them anymore etc. And after some time it is embarrassing as you don't really mean to. Or else when they use a word I have never heard before or I can't remember, I ask them to explain the meaning as there are so many different ways and sayings, like with words I may have heard a while back when I was a child but that we don't use any more.

Standard Arabic and other varieties of Arabic

Arabic is a 'pluricentric language' (Clyne & Kipp 1999) whose standard variety is official in many states and widely used in the media, but has virtually no native speakers. In recent years it has become increasingly difficult to define even the standard. Scholars agree in fact on setting apart Classical Arabic, that of the Kuran and traditional literature, and what is now called 'Modern

Standard Arabic', which departs from the Classical in its lexicon, unmarked syntactic basic word order (SVO rather than VSO) and simpler nominal morphology (Ennaji 1991). Furthermore, these standard varieties of Arabic form a continuum with local dialects, so that one may find regionalized varieties of the standard and standardized varieties of the vernacular. For example Youssi (1995: 29), besides written literary Arabic and spoken Moroccan Arabic, identifies 'Middle Moroccan Arabic' as an 'educated', exclusively spoken [variety] used between strangers for formal, official purposes'. Youssi thus proposes to replace Ferguson's (1959) classical notion of diglossia with 'triglossia' or even better 'multiglossia', i.e. 'a structural continuum sought between the diglossic varieties' (1995:36).

The difficulty in clearly defining and distinguishing these more or less standardized varieties of Arabic is apparent in our informants' metalinguistic practices. They have no problem in identifying Moroccan Arabic as a variety of its own, which they simply call 'Moroccan'. The term 'Arabic' refers almost always to the standard variety. For example, when asked whether she speaks Arabic at home, Fatna answers *I speak Moroccan, maybe I have lost my Arabic*.

Among our subjects, reading and writing in Arabic is very limited, even for those who had a substantial literacy curriculum in Morocco. As a matter of fact, after their arrival in Italy written Arabic has been completely neglected. None of the subjects reads books, magazines or newspapers in Arabic, even though these can be found in selected stores and public libraries. Reading in Arabic is confined to TV subtitles and a few leaflets. Even in Morocco written Arabic is scarcely used and French is preferred instead, due to its closeness to Italian, which has become the only written language these adolescents use in their daily lives.

No wonder then that all our informants declare to have difficulties in reading and writing in Arabic, which may be the result of attrition, given that they have not practiced it for several years now. However, their initial competences in Arabic were sometimes rather weak, with the exception of two older girls. More generally, it is recognized that the Moroccan education system is not very effective in promoting literacy in Arabic and that most of the students who complete high school (a small minority of the total population) still have difficulties in understanding relatively easy texts (Saïb 2001; Youssi 1995). Only some of the most literate in our group declare to occasionally write in Arabic, for note-taking and sometimes as a secret language.

Oral Standard Arabic is certainly more present in the life of this community, thanks to television programs. At home the TV set is always on, and always on Arabic satellite channels. Our subjects regularly watch programs where the Standard is used, and claim to have no particular difficulty if the subject matter is religion, as on *Iqra*, the channel entirely devoted to religious issues. However, channels like *Al Jazeera*, with its socio-political themes conducted in formal varieties of Arabic, seem to pose more problems. As Fatna says, 'that's really Arabic'.

HAL: (...) but channels that really speak Arabic, koranic Arabic, for example *Iqra*, or Egypt or Saudi Arabia or even the koranic channels, I can understand those. Then very occasionally there is a word I can't understand, I ask my mother or my eldest sister Ghizlane

INV: If you listen to al-Jazeera, do they speak Arabic?

[...]

FAT: yes that's really Arabic, and I don't really understand that fully. () these things I can't understand – democracy is fine, those things – those are really Arabic terms they use

Television also allows exposure to other regional varieties of Arabic, which the informants declare to understand relatively well, although they add that they never interact with other non-Moroccan Arabs.

Italian

In the community of adolescents under investigation Italian is the dominant language. As Ghizlane says after eleven years in Italy, *now you dream in Italian, speak Italian, and almost everything is in Italian, [...] except with mum and dad*. Although the family is the only context where Italian is not dominant, its use is growing there too, for example with younger siblings. This quite substantially changes communication patterns at home, and children may begin to use Italian as a secret language to exclude parents.

In all domains other than the family, including with Moroccan friends at bars, parks and sport clubs, Italian is the dominant language, although school is definitely the most significant context for its use and development.

Interpersonal communicative skills are perceived as adequate for most purposes. At school, their competences seem to be satisfactory for oral use, where they can achieve excellent results in oral tests on subjects. They have more difficulties in writing, which at school essentially means writing essays. The problems they report seem to be related mostly to form, rather than to the expression of content - they are aware of still making mistakes at grammatical, syntactic and orthographic levels, but they can adequately express what they mean.

Besides school, written Italian is also used for composing SMSs both to Italian and Moroccan friends, filling in forms, reading books, magazines and newspapers. Some girls regularly borrow Italian books from the public library, even though an Arabic section is available. None of them is familiar with computers and e-mails, as public internet points have only recently been opened in the area.

Language ideologies

As we have seen, the contexts for using Moroccan Arabic are narrowing and are now confined to the private domain of the home and a few close friends. The language is attriting and this gets noticed when they return to Morocco, but this too does not produce any particular feeling of loss or regret. The same holds for Standard and other varieties of Arabic, which are regularly heard on TV, but for which there are virtually no occasions to read and write. Although most of these teenagers are functionally illiterate in Arabic, nobody seems to be particularly concerned. They just say that Arabic is not very useful and that, apart from filling forms at the consulate, they never really need it. As Fatna succinctly puts it: *In Italy we don't need it at all. In Morocco if you know French you are sorted*. The only reason for which Standard Arabic is perceived as useful and important is related to the reading of the Koran. However, although none of these youths have any doubts about their Muslim religious identity, they don't attend the mosque (some even don't know where it is), don't say their prayers and don't read the Koran.

A few tried to attend Arabic courses at the mosque, quitting them very soon, though most of our informants, like Hasan, didn't even consider such an eventuality:

INV: have you ever thought about doing [an Arabic course in Italy]?

HAS: no, I don't need it.

INV: why not? You said that today you weren't able to fill in a form [at the Moroccan Consulate].

HAS: but I couldn't care less! Now I live in Italy. I mean I can read a little Moroccan, but it's becoming a little bit of a bother to write it as the hand doesn't go to the right anymore but to the left – it doesn't function anymore.

While no particularly strong feelings seem to be attached to Moroccan and standard

Arabic, these teenagers seem to have developed rather negative attitudes towards Morocco and Moroccans. Although some have fond memories, Morocco is never idealized as a 'lost paradise', as a place to return. Most of them criticize its education system, the scarcity of work opportunities and the lack of organization. When it comes to Moroccans, especially those living in the city, quite strong opinions are expressed, as in the following excerpts.

AHM: with Italians you speak to them easily and it's cool. With Moroccans we are always saying no to this and no to that! Then they get drunk and so

INV: who does this?

AHM: Moroccans. The majority of them drink and smoke.

INV: you mean Moroccans your age

AHM: yes

INV: you mean they drink more than Italians do and smoke more than Italians?

AHM: yes but Italians drink and they don't get drunk

INV: well and you instead?

AHM: Moroccans drink and drink

INV: really?

AHM: yes, they couldn't care less

INV: and why did you say there are many Moroccans there [Bologna]

FAT: the problem with the Moroccans, even amongst those faces you see in Bologna [...] faces that take drugs, more Moroccans, when a Moroccan sees you on your own, he does not leave you in peace

INV: what you are saying is that if you go round bologna like this and there is a Moroccan

FAT: he teases you

It is worth noting that these youths never call themselves, or their families and friends, 'Arabs', but always 'Moroccans'. In other words, their identification is clearly with a given country, Morocco, rather than with the more abstract notion of 'Arab people'. None of them questions their being Muslims, but religion too is lived within the boundaries of the family and a few acquaintances, for example during Ramadan or on particular feast days. The muslim community in the area is not considered as an opportunity for social networking and religion is not invoked as a crucial part of their identity.

Much more positive attitudes are expressed towards Italy and Italian. This is clearly seen as the language of the present and the future, the language for improving one's condition, for social, professional and academic success, the language one should really invest in, even at the expense of Arabic.

INV: And so you didn't read Arabic anymore?

FAT: I don't have time to lose. I have to learn Italian. That's enough, nothing more comes to my mind, plus English and French. It makes three languages so where is the time.

For some boys Italian is the means of socializing with their Italian peers and they are particularly proud of being accepted in a group where they are the 'only Moroccan', as one of them says. It is as if they perceived their integration in social networks composed of Italian peers as a success, avoiding a possible Moroccan-only social ghetto. In the words of Hasan and Ahmad:

INV: do you have friends here?

HAS: yes

INV: yes? Italians or Moroccans?

HAS: no all Italians

INV: all Italians? And where did you meet them?
HAS: around here. I knew them when I went to school.

AHM: I go out with almost everyone
INV: you go out with everyone but
AHM: we all stick together
INV: all who?
AHM: guys, girls, everyone
INV: oh men and women together
AHM: yes
INV: ok so it seems you are doing well
AHM: yes, the only Moroccan!
INV: when you go out as the only Moroccan
AHM: the only Moroccan amidst all, and I enjoy it. It's better to be the only Moroccan.
If there is more than one, three/four, then it gets messy

Other participants, especially girls, directed all their efforts towards academic success, despite the difficulties they had to go through, the negative prejudices, the school's policy of slowing their career 'for their own good'. This attitude resulted in a strong willingness to learn Italian as soon as possible, taking it as a challenge for their self-esteem. Some of them eventually achieved outstanding results, including the awarding of two grants, which are quite uncommon in Italy.

Despite the hardships they had to experience, all the interviewees display quite positive feelings towards school. They all recall having had at least one particularly friendly and helpful teacher, who assisted them during their school years, and no-one expressed complaints about the other teachers or school in general. It is as if they had fully accepted the school's ideology as a taken-for-granted, as if there really were no alternative to the path they had gone through. Some of the girls express their satisfaction towards the Italian school system, and they affirm its superiority with respect to the Moroccan one. Fatna - the girl who wrote the desperate words we quoted at the start, where she said she preferred Morocco to Italy and she wanted to return there - after four years in Italy has radically changed her mind:

FAT: well, now I prefer [Italy] to Morocco. Living here is more peaceful. There are thieves there. Here school is beautiful, much better than in Morocco. If I stayed in Morocco I would have done very little, like French which I love now and I'm one of the best in the class, but in Morocco I didn't know anything and studied for four years for nothing

Conclusions and implications

While language shift is often described as an intergenerational phenomenon, in this case it is taking place within one generation. This shift does not imply the complete loss of any of the languages, but is rather to be seen as a redistribution of languages across domains. If it is in fact true that use of Moroccan and Standard Arabic is now restricted to orality and confined within the household, and that Italian is gaining more and more domains, these adolescents do maintain all their languages, at various degrees. As Ait Ouarasse and van de Vijever (2005) note, second generation Moroccan adolescents are clearly oriented to the ethnic culture in the personal domain and to the host country culture in the public domain, so that acculturation in one is not related (neither positively nor negatively) to acculturation in the other.

After some years in Italy, these young migrants of the 1b generation are thus in between

different languages and cultures. Morocco and Moroccan Arabic seem to represent the past, an origin that no one denies (they self-identify as 'Moroccans') but that has a small role in their thoughts about the present and plans for the future. Moroccan Arabic is a community language, but the 'community' is in fact restricted to the family and a few intimate acquaintances. Despite the relatively high number of Moroccans in the area, even coming from the same region, they have not developed into a close-knit social network. Neither the language, nor common migration stories, similarity of education and socio-economic status, and not even religion, have provided the grounds for establishing a Moroccan community proper. Tosi (1999) too notes that for the 'new immigration' it is harder to establish strong communities than it was for groups involved in older migration waves. Families do not cherish the 'myth of Return' or a rigid conservatism in opposition to assimilation of Italian cultural values, as has been the case for many Muslims in the United Kingdom (Westerlung and Svanberg, 1999).

Standard Arabic is present only through television channels. Those who could read and write it have abruptly given up as soon as they arrived in Italy, and now their competence is dramatically reduced. Even religion, which is often reported to be a factor promoting maintenance of Arabic (Clyne & Kipp 1999), does not seem to be a valid motivation for these youths.

They are definitely oriented towards Italian, which is seen as a useful language not only for living in Italy, but also as a bridge to other European languages. This dissociation from Arabic, accompanied by a gradual affiliation to Italian, is also evident in their social networks. Those who have friends (some girls tend to be rather shy and spend most of their time either at school or at home) are proud to say that most of them are Italians, as if they wanted to make clear that they don't belong to any Moroccan enclave. Also, Italian friends are considered to be better than Moroccan ones and, with the exception of a few family acquaintances, 'other' Moroccans are often referred to as quarrelsome, idle, misbehaving.

The school has certainly played a role in this rapid language and culture shift. These students were exposed to its ideology of 'Italian first and above all' and their language socialization in Italy consisted almost exclusively in an intensive assimilation program. Their reaction was 'apathetic' (Tosi 1999), i.e. they accepted this ideology and tried to assimilate as fast as possible to the dominant language and culture. The school certainly carries a responsibility in the promotion of Italian as the principal language in their lives, but it would be unfair to blame it as the sole reason for the gradual contraction of Arabic across domains, although it is true that the school did not take any significant action against it. The activities of the L2 seminar were mainly directed towards learning Italian, and occasional use of Arabic was made possible only thanks to the exceptional linguistic competences of the adjunct teachers. The small Arabic workshop too was short-lived, but this depended more on the students' low level in Arabic and lack of motivation than on the school itself. The religious community did not have a much bigger impact, with its old-fashioned Arabic courses for children.

Even if the school had taken more incisive actions, it would have been hard to contrast language shift for several reasons. The first has to do with Arabic itself. Its multiglossia poses considerable problems even in Arab countries, where many people remain functionally illiterate because they cannot speak the Standard variety (Ayari 1996). Youssi (1995: 40) proposes 'Middle Moroccan Arabic', an educated variety of the vernacular, as a viable solution for bringing more people to literacy, although he is aware of 'the extremely weighty nature of the forces of inertia and their strong conservational impact'. López and Mijares (2001: 289) too are quite critical of multilingual programmes implemented in Spain where 'the teaching of classical Arabic ... instead of the mother tongues confirms that Moroccan identity is invented in order to be taught to children'. However, in the Arab world today, only Standard Arabic is recognized as a written variety, and if L1 literacy is to be fully achieved, students must come to terms with it. As a possible compromise, with respect to Italian, another multiglossic language, Tosi (1984) suggests teaching the standard and written varieties through 'guided transfer' from the students' vernacular.

Secondly, Arabic is spoken by hundreds of millions of people, but its use as a written

language is much more restricted and in Morocco as in other Arab countries many people read and write in European languages more often than in Arabic (Saïb 2001). Hence, its 'market value' is not so high and a cost-benefit analysis may explain why these youths are not inclined to invest so much energy in it (Clyne 2003:67-8).

Other factors may explain this rapid shift towards Italian. To begin with, adolescence is a time in life when peer models are extremely important (Kerswill 1996; Raschka et al 2002), and such models for these youths are essentially their Italian peers. There is no strong Moroccan teenager community to which they can turn for building their self-image. Furthermore, adolescence is also the time in which individuals try to differentiate themselves as much as possible from the family, and for these youths this may correspond to their strong orientation to Italian language and culture.

As Clyne (2003:68) notes, one should consider 'the interaction between two democratic rights - the right to maintain and the right to shift'. The school and educational authorities cannot impose neither of the two, but should be attentive to individuals' and communities' needs, trying to balance the strong social pressures towards assimilation and monolingualism. In other words, multilingualism and L1 maintenance can never be forced upon students, but should be encouraged and stimulated in a variety of ways. Research shows that, when such policies are implemented at the State level, this can result in positive attitudes by second generation adolescents toward L1 maintenance and a more balanced ethnolinguistic identity (Vedder & Virta 2005).

To conclude, promoting multilingualism in a migrant minority group requires complex educational and language policies. Such policies should consider with great attention the point of view of the community, their attitudes, ideologies, objectives, social networks and patterns of socialization, be they chosen, imposed or both. However, as we have seen, the community's point of view itself may be influenced by those policies, so that the relationship becomes inevitably circular. The research presented here is an attempt to analyze this interplay among social, psychological and political factors that in the end lead to certain patterns of language use, acquisition, maintenance and loss.

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Endnote

¹ Statistics are published by Bologna Province, www.provincia.bologna.it/immigrazione/documenti.