Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

# Language policy and planning of Amazigh languages in Morocco: a study of the language ideology of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM)

Bao, K.

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# 7. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of the thesis are presented in the following sections. First, it reexamines IRCAM's role in the Moroccan Amazigh cultural movement and concludes how this role shapes its guiding ideologies. These ideologies are reflected in Mohamed Chafik's writings and confirmed in the institute's foundational documents. Next, it summarizes IRCAM's planning efforts, categorizing them into two aspects: ideological planning, as embodied in Ahmed Boukous's works, and practical planning, which serves the ideological objectives. The latter is reflected in acquisition planning and corpus planning, addressing graphical-phonological, lexical, and morphological aspects. Following this summary, the thesis concludes by situating IRCAM's planning of the Amazigh language within the broader discussion of linguistic authority and its related ideologies, contributing to the understanding of how a language ideology of post-naturalist authenticity, shaped by political agendas rather than speakers' agency, can manifest in practice.

## 7.1. The Role of IRCAM in the Moroccan Amazigh Cultural Movement

The Moroccan Amazigh cultural movement is inspired by Amazigh nationalism, akin to German and Arabic cultural nationalism, where ideologies on language and history play a central role. Developing into social movements, it has two core expressions mainly against Arabization, namely reevaluating and rewriting, specifically re-Amazighizing the Maghrebian history, and standardizing the Amazigh language, envisioning it as a constitutionally recognized language by the state. From this "culturalist" trend, the Amazigh issue developed potential for transforming into ethnic-based politicization as shown in Algeria, interwoven with Kabyle nationalism. A similar politicization of the Amazigh issue is the red line for Moroccan authorities who govern the largest Amazigh-speaking population in the world.

In what could be described as an Amazigh awakening from the late 1960s to the 1970s, several Amazigh cultural associations thrived in Morocco, in parallel to developments in France and Algeria. During this period, Moroccan authorities faced the risk of the politicization of the Amazigh issue. Two responses were devised: the accommodating approach, proposed by Mohamed Chafik, an Amazigh scholar and educator within the inner circle of King Hassan II, which called for the creation of an official institute for Amazigh studies; and the opposing approach, aimed at

suppressing the Amazigh movement through repressive measures. The latter prevailed throughout the 1980s, until the 1990s, when the atmosphere began to shift.

By the advent of the new millennium, as the Amazigh issue once again approached the brink of politicization, the long-reserved proposal to create a royal institute for Amazigh studies was adopted by the new king, Mohammed VI, under the influence of Mohamed Chafik and the Amazigh Manifesto he drafted. This decision led to the establishment of IRCAM, paving the way for efforts to standardize, teach, and constitutionally recognize the Amazigh language in Morocco. While the institute can be seen as a significant achievement of the Moroccan Amazigh movement, IRCAM's role should also be understood as an instrument of Moroccan authorities to prevent an ethnically based politicization of the Amazigh issue—a role reflected in its founding ideologies.

### 7.2. The Founding Ideologies of IRCAM

Mohamed Chafik's historical and linguistic ideologies, developed mainly in the 1990s through his works, serve as the basis of IRCAM's ideology. They show an important discrepancy from Amazigh nationalism in not viewing Imazighen as a distinct people, but instead reshaping Amazighness as one of several tributaries contributing to a broader Moroccan national identity based on the Islamic faith and allegiance to the King. This is represented by his historical ideology, which claims: "Any Islamic state can only be an Islamic state. It should not seek its legitimacy in a racial or ethnic affiliation, but rather it must seek it in piety and sincerity of belief…"[702] In this framework, the people in the land of Morocco are described as either Arabized Imazighen or Amazighized Arabs, between whom "the gap is not vast."[703] Thus, they can be seen as a homogeneous people, shaped—sometimes unconsciously—by the same social soil.

Accordingly, in Chafik's language ideology, the Amazigh language is not seen as the defining factor of Amazighness, but rather as one of the important civilizational and cultural elements that have shaped Moroccan identity for all, rather than for any majorities or minorities. Chafik's works involve efforts toward planning a standard Moroccan Amazigh, primarily by compiling a Amazigh dictionary and writing a

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[702] Chafik, M. (1989). pp. 48-49.
[703] *Ibid*. pp. 49-50.

schoolbook that includes vocabulary and grammatical features from all three main Moroccan Amazigh varieties, without naming them, but presenting the works under the unified label of the Amazigh language. Furthermore, Arabic loanwords are largely excluded from Chafik's works, tacitly reflecting standard and purist language ideologies. This exclusion suggests that language contact between Amazigh and Arabic is an undesirable phenomenon, one that leads to the killing of Amazigh words and further widens the gaps between its dialects.

Chafik's ideologies are clearly reflected in the three founding documents of IRCAM: the Royal Speech of July 30, 2001 (Throne Day Speech); Royal Decree No. 1-01-299 (IRCAM Dahir); and the Royal Speech of October 17, 2001 (Ajdir Speech). These documents stipulate that IRCAM must secure Morocco's national identity, characterized by "homogeneity, unity, and originality," with diverse tributaries, namely "Amazigh, Arab, Sub-Saharan African, and Andalusian," all contributing to the whole. The homogeneity is anchored in the Islamic faith under the united Moroccan nation, with its enduring monarchical regime, "recognizing neither majority nor minority." Amazigh language and culture are consistently presented as a "national wealth and a source of pride for all Moroccans," ultimately aiming to ensure that "Amazigh identity... cannot be used for political purposes of any kind." For the aim of a homogeneous Moroccan identity, the language is always referred to as *l'amazigh*, with no reference to its varieties.

Mediating the discrepancy between the language practices of the three main varieties existing in Morocco and the language ideology of a homogeneous Moroccan Amazigh—especially adapting the former to the latter for the standardization and teaching of the language—becomes the central issue of IRCAM's language planning efforts. These efforts can be categorized into the dominant ideological planning and the subordinate practical planning that cooperate with it.

### 7.3. Ideological Planning

IRCAM's ideological planning for the Amazigh language is primarily reflected in the works of Ahmed Boukous. The central concept of this ideology is the revitalization of the Amazigh language. However, the language revitalization in Boukous's ideology differs from the concept in the model of Reversing Language Shift, which is based on, and preceded by, studies on language death. Before IRCAM, Boukous consistently described Amazigh as a language with vitality, emphasizing the need for maintenance

rather than revitalization. Within the IRCAM context, his new discourse on the death of the Amazigh language serves as a major ideological explanation for why the standardization and teaching of Amazigh varieties in practice are not seen as desirable. Instead, IRCAM advocates for a homogeneous standard Amazigh in Morocco, aimed at its revitalization. This death and non-existence of a unified, homogeneous Amazigh language—thus necessitating revitalization efforts by IRCAM—are primarily explained through two terms: dialectalization and attrition of the Amazigh language.

Dialectalization, as a way to explain the death or non-existence of the Amazigh language, is reflected in Boukous's words: "Amazigh is a highly dialectalized language to the point that some researchers doubt the very existence of a single Amazigh language and speak of a plurality of Amazigh languages."[704] This concept functions to define Tarifiyt, Central Moroccan Amazigh, and Tashelhiyt as dialects with a lower status than languages, viewing them as pre-revitalized, dying forms, unworthy of standardization and teaching. Furthermore, even works that describe these supposedly dialectalized Amazigh varieties, without a vision for their revitalization, are seen by Boukous as undesirable, aligning with the tradition of colonial dialectology.

Language attrition is another concept used to explain the attrition-death of the Amazigh language. It is featured in Boukous's discourses as a combination of two types of attrition: one in broader sense described as: "Attrition is a process whereby languages in conflict with stronger ones are weakened and devitalized. This situation is generally characterized by the reduction of the functions and uses of the language, the diminution in the number of speakers, semilingualism, the break in intergenerational transmission and, in fine, death."[705] The other is in the narrower sense, referring to "the progressive attrition of Amazigh in urban areas to the benefit of colloquial Arabic."[706] This concept focuses not only on the attrition of the space of usage of Amazigh, as Boukous discussed pre-IRCAM, but also stresses the so-called attrition of the language's corpus. Boukous supports this with examples of urban children's diminishing Amazigh abilities, highlighting the borrowing from Arabic as evidence of this attrition. The narrower view of attrition as an individual phenomenon

[704] Boukous, A. (2012). p. 45.
[705] Boukous, A. (2011). pp. 19-20.
[706] Boukous, A. (1997). p. 41.

is then used by Boukous to support, or predict,[707] the broader attrition and the attrition-death of the Amazigh language as a whole.

Based on the ideology of attrition of the Amazigh language, the language as a whole is described as facing a "deterioration of structures"[708] similar to what occurs as individual phenomena and hence needs to be addressed as an essential part of corpus planning within the framework of the revitalization of the Amazigh language.

### 7.4. Practical Planning

IRCAM's practical planning for the Amazigh language is primarily reflected in two aspects: acquisition planning and corpus planning, both of which are designed in alignment with IRCAM's ideological planning. In terms of acquisition, IRCAM adopts a plurinormalist approach to language teaching aimed at familiarizing Amazigh speakers with other varieties besides their own to achieve successful communication. However, this approach does not serve a polynomic language ideology akin to that in the Corsican context; instead, it aligns with the standard language ideology emphasizing the ideological unity of standard Moroccan Amazigh. The adoption of plurinormalism can be understood as a compromise with the linguistic reality of the three main varieties existing in the country, which contradicts the ideological vision of unity.

To support this ideological purpose, IRCAM's schoolbooks are designed to teach the three varieties under a homogeneous label of Moroccan Amazigh. The differences between the varieties are not represented by their names but are instead indicated through a color-coding system: blue, green, and yellow bands correspond to the varieties of Tarifiyt, Central Moroccan Amazigh, and Tashelhiyt, respectively. Additionally, brown is used to introduce content that represents standard Moroccan Amazigh, common to all three varieties, though the content under the brown color can still carry strong traits of each variety. This does not mean that standard Moroccan Amazigh is merely a collection of three varieties ideologically combined; rather, this acquisition planning is supported by corpus planning efforts on the Amazigh varieties being taught, which also serve IRCAM's overarching ideology of revitalizing the Amazigh language.

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[707] Boukous, A. (2012). p. 65.
[708] Boukous, A. (2009c). p. 37.

IRCAM's corpus planning for the Amazigh language concerns mainly three aspects: graphical-phonological planning with the Neo-Tifinagh script, lexical planning reflected in IRCAM's dictionary, and morphological planning concerning IRCAM's discussions on the grammar of standard Moroccan Amazigh. The Neo-Tifinagh IRCAM script is distinguished by grapheme features borrowed from lesser-known Neo-Tifinagh systems, notably using circle signs instead of point signs for writing vowels, derived from the Neo-Tifinagh *Afus Deg Wfus 2 Regular*. This design secures Tifinagh-IRCAM a high level of distinction, ensuring the visual and ideological existence of a standard Moroccan Amazigh, as it is officially regulated that Tifinagh-IRCAM was designed to write nothing but *l'amazighe standard*.[709] Similarly, in the phonological aspect, Tifinagh-IRCAM also does not represent any variety specifically, but rather standard Moroccan Amazigh.

Lexically, IRCAM's dictionary is characterized by a strong standard and purist language ideology that anonymizes the three main varieties of Morocco it incorporates, grouping words under a single, unified label of Amazigh, while excluding the vast majority of Arabic loanwords. These features are inherited from Mohamed Chafik's method in compiling his Arabic-Amazigh Dictionary, but it should be noted how the ideology behind it was developed by Ahmed Boukous, with his discourses on the deterioration of structures of the Amazigh language, suffering attrition due to contact with Arabic.

Besides, both in Chafik and Boukous's ideology, Arabic loanwords are seen as a factor that widens the gaps between Amazigh varieties. Thus, removing loanwords is viewed as a way to address not only the attrition but also the dialectalization of Amazigh, leading the way to its revitalization. The results are twofold. Firstly, considering that the Amazigh languages, including the three main varieties in Morocco, all borrow heavily from Arabic, the standard Amazigh as envisioned by IRCAM might significantly diverge from actual language practice. Secondly, since Central Moroccan Amazigh and Tashelhiyt borrow fewer Arabic words than Tarifiyt, the exclusion of almost all Arabic loanwords in the planning process makes Tarifiyt more affected in the process of converging the three varieties.

Morphologically, it is suggested that the planning is based on a polynomic approach ensuring the entirety of varied structures in the national standard, as shown

[709] Elmedlaoui, M. (2004b).

in the planning regarding the imperfective tense—one of the most varied and irregular aspects in Amazigh morphology—the polynomic approach only applies partially. The prioritization of the vowel *a* in stem derivation, the omission of the negative imperfective form, and the obligatory prefixed particle, all in contradiction with the language practice of Tarifiyt, are applied in an imposing manner. And where the polynomic approach is applied, allowing speakers to choose between *CC:C* and *ttCCaC* for deriving *CCC* verbs, it is notable that, since Tarifiyt speakers exclusively use the *CC:C* form, this polynomic choice in practice accommodates Central Moroccan Amazigh and Tashelhiyt. Moreover, Tashelhiyt retains an additional "polynomic" option to preserve its specific *C:CC* form, as reflected in IRCAM's dictionary.

Therefore, in all aspects examined in IRCAM's practical planning for the Amazigh language, serving the ideology of its "revitalization," the suggested aims such as "bringing the different varieties closer together and achieving convergence"[710] and "better integrating regional variations"[711] reflect a consistent process of compromising, adapting, and converging Tarifiyt with the other two main varieties in Morocco. However, it would be misleading to interpret this simply as an ideological bias against Tarifiyt. To fully understand the broader ideological framework of IRCAM, it is useful to consider Kathryn A. Woolard's concept of *sociolinguistic naturalism* as a reference.

### 7.5. IRCAM's Ideology: A Politically Driven "Project Authenticity"

The concept of sociolinguistic naturalism, developed by Woolard and building on John Joseph's concept of linguistic naturalism, describes the belief that a linguistic form is rightfully authoritative because it is perceived as the natural, unmediated expression of social reality rather than the result of human will, effort, intervention, or artifice.[712] It reflects the similarity between the two seemingly contradictory ideologies of authenticity and anonymity, both of which place a high value on the relationship between linguistic form and a vision of truth. However, paraphrasing

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[710] Ameur, M. (2009). p. 81.
[711] Iazzi, E. M. (2018). p. 225.
[712] Woolard, K. A. (2016). p. 30.; Joseph, J. (2000). *Limiting the Arbitrary: Linguistic Naturalism and Its Opposites in Plato's Cratylus and Modern Theories of Language*. John Benjamins.

Woolard, while the ideology of anonymity locates truth in the "referential fit" of language to the world, the ideology of authenticity sees truth in the "pragmatic fit" of linguistic form to the speaker who authors it or the community that authorizes it.[713]

In sociolinguistic naturalism, both the language from somewhere and the language from anywhere may be regarded as the most direct and unmediated expressions of the true self. The language from somewhere refers to the form of language acquired first and produced apparently artlessly.[714] In contrast, the language from anywhere is an anonymous, dislocated language described by John Joseph as "the language common to all the people but specific to none of the towns: what all of them do, yet what none of them does."[715] Both might be perceived as natural and therefore inherently good.

Sociolinguistic naturalism has been challenged by developments in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. In these fields, scholars have proposed models that emphasize speakers' agency in shaping language, rather than portraying them merely as inheritors of language and identity.[716] In this understanding, speakers themselves can still value a sense of authenticity even when it is not one that comes naturally to them. Rather than being based on origins and "where you're coming from," authenticity can also be framed as "where you're going."[717] It can be a goal, described by Woolard as post-natural, "project authenticity."[718]

This framework of project authenticity might be a fitting description of IRCAM's language ideology, as it situates the authenticity of the Amazigh language within its project, termed revitalization. As a post-naturalist ideology, it challenges key aspects of sociolinguistic naturalism. On the one hand, IRCAM contests the authenticity of Amazigh language varieties used in practice, or the language from somewhere. On the other hand, it shows little interest in the concept of the Amazigh anywhere, distancing itself from pan-Amazigh perspectives that represent "where you're coming from." In IRCAM's language ideology, authenticity is consistently tied to its own project, which is oriented toward "where you're going," namely a

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[713] Woolard, K. A. (2016). p. 30.
[714] *Ibid*. p. 32.
[715] Joseph, J. (2000). p. 147.
[716] Woolard, K. A. (2016). p. 32.
[717] *Ibid*. p. 33.
[718] *Ibid*. pp. 38, 296.

developing Moroccan Amazigh.

While being described as a project authenticity, it is crucial to note that IRCAM's post-naturalist ideology is politically driven from external forces rather than an internally driven project primarily shaped by speakers' agency. Specifically, IRCAM's ideological distance from both Amazigh from *somewhere* and from *anywhere* is not rooted in speakers' reflections on their language but is instead shaped by the Moroccan state's political agenda. This agenda seeks to distance Moroccan Amazigh speakers both from a pan-Amazigh movement associated with *anywhere* and from a localist attachment to *somewhere*. The political dominance shaping IRCAM's ideology is explicitly articulated in the Ajdir speech:

> "Nous voulons aussi affirmer que l'amazighité qui plonge ses racines au plus profond de l'histoire du peuple marocain appartient à tous les Marocains, sans exclusive, et qu'elle ne peut être mise au service de desseins politiques de quelque nature que ce soit. Le Maroc s'est distingué, à travers les âges, par la cohésion de ses habitants, quels qu'en soient les origines et les dialectes. Ils ont toujours fait preuve d'un ferme attachement à leurs valeurs sacrées et résisté à toute invasion étrangère ou tentative de division."[719]

It is this political agenda—resisting both "any foreign invasion" and "attempts at division"—that defines IRCAM's post-naturalist stance and shapes its language ideology. This politically driven ideological prescription primarily dictates what IRCAM's ideology should not be rather than what it should be. Consequently, on one hand, it initiated the formation of a new project authenticity, which would later be called *revitalization*. On the other hand, it initially left a significant ideological void, allowing aspects of traditional sociolinguistic naturalism to persist.

These aspects, in filling the void, include both the ideologies of authenticity and anonymity, along with standard language ideology, national language ideology, purist language ideology, and polynomic language ideology—all of which have left traces in IRCAM's ideological framework. This complexity is reflected, for example, in Chafik's approach to compiling an Amazigh dictionary without indicating word

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[719] Available at IRCAM's official website: https://www.ircam.ma/fr/textes-fondateurs/discours-dajdir (accessed January 21, 2025)

origins, aligning with the ideology of anonymity, while Ameur initially disagreed with this approach and suggested presenting word origins under the unified label of Amazigh, demonstrating that the ideologies of authenticity and anonymity are not inherently contradictory.

Similarly, IRCAM's commitment to teaching the three main varieties in Morocco through a plurinormalist approach reflects an ideology of authenticity while simultaneously labeling all varieties under the homogenizing framework of Moroccan Amazigh, reflecting the ideology of anonymity at work. Furthermore, IRCAM's shifting application of the polynomic approach in grammatical planning exemplifies this complexity. On one hand, as shown by examples in *La nouvelle grammaire de l'amazighe* (2008), IRCAM initially prescribed the strict formation of *CCC* verbs in the imperfective exclusively as *CC:C*.[720] This was later expanded to include not only *ttCCaC* but also the specific *C:CC* pattern. However, on the other hand, an initial openness to the vowel *i* in imperfective formation was later restricted. And more generally, some very specific usages that were previously presented in *La nouvelle grammaire de l'amazighe* later lost their inclusion in subsequent works.

Nevertheless, this ideological complexity and dynamism must give way to the development of the new revitalization project, which claims supreme authenticity while filling the ideological void that was initially shaped by political intentions to be post-naturalist. In rationalizing this project, or justifying why the concept of a standard Moroccan Amazigh—neither from somewhere nor existing anywhere—should be the destination of "where you're going," Boukous introduced the concept of the death of Amazigh, supporting it with discourse on *dialectalization* and *attrition*. This then became the dominant ideology of IRCAM, guiding its planning efforts. A deepened purist ideology toward Arabic loanwords serves as a clear illustration of how this project authenticity dictates IRCAM's planning decisions.

At the foundation of IRCAM's revitalization project lies the belief that Amazigh varieties are essentially the same and that this underlying similarity must be made visible through planning efforts rather than being left *dialectalized* indefinitely. As a politically oriented Moroccan national institute, IRCAM is dedicated to realizing this process among the three main varieties in Morocco, rather than considering Amazigh without a sense of national borders, or prioritizing the convergence of more obviously

[720] Boukhris et al. (2008). pp. 93-94.

similar" varieties in its planning. More broadly, the case of Amazigh language policy and planning in Morocco, shaped by IRCAM's ideological framework, contributes to the understanding of how political factors might influence language planning decisions, and to what extent a politically driven project, grounded in a post-naturalist stance on linguistic authenticity, can challenge speakers' language practices in the planning process, particularly in a multilingual environment.

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