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LANGUAGES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: EVIDENCE FROM SMS LANGUAGE IN ALGERIA

Abstract

Communication is an efficient tool used to create efficient contact and maintain strong sociolinguistic ties between the members of any speech community. Technology is one of the most important elements that made communication successful and reliable, and speaking using technology such as chatting and sending SMS are therefore the prominent instances of such use. Henceforth, the sociolinguistic situation in Algeria and the survival of its dialects are conditioned by both their oral and written production. For instance, Tamazight that is used in the Great Kabylia has a considerable record of written literature such as poetry and literature. And SMS is a reflection of such linguistic complexity that will be thoroughly explored, analysed and discussed in this empirical study. The latter is based on SMS analysis. The purpose is therefore to highlight the diversity of languages in Algeria, in this digital age where language overcomes speech to reach the mobile screen. The outcomes focused on the existence of a linguistic accommodation of Algerian speakers to a new technology where formal and informal varieties are mixed up in an unstable diglossic situation leading to texting messages.

Keywords: Digital, language planning, Mobile, SMS texting.

1. Introduction

Algeria is a colourful sociolinguistic mosaic which is characterized by the existence of panoply of languages and varieties of languages, namely Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic, French, English and Berber with its regional variations. The Algerian national constitution stipulates that Modern Standard Arabic is the first official language of the nation, and is supposed to be used by all members of the speech community, in addition to Tamazight that was recently recognized as an official language in 2016. After independence, the Algerian linguistic map changed considerably; Algerian planners and decision-makers were extremely eager to promote Arabic as a vivid symbol of Arabic identity and Islamic values, in a country where French had played a major role in communication.

Virtually, the emergence of mobiles in Algeria, by early 2001, is associated with the creation of new language, which is a mixture of the local dialect, more exactly Algerian Arabic, French, Classical Arabic and new abbreviations, which were unexpected and unmeasured by local planners.

It is worth-mentioning that in his 2008 work *Texting: The Gr8 Deb8* (Crystal, 2008) devotes a whole chapter to the hype surrounding texting, noting that, as with the introduction of just about every new technological development

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in communication, critics cry out that texting will bring about the end of writing and of literacy itself. For example, he quotes a 2007 Washington Daily article by Eric Uthus dismissing texters as subpar users of language, "...obsessed with taking the vowels out of words and spelling fonetikally" (Gordon, 2011)

However, other linguists note that texting has brought about the concision and phonetic transparency that has long eluded spelling reformists. Emphasizing that the "notion that a word should always be spelled the same way is a much more recent invention than the language itself," Ammon Shea investigates the links between the phonetic spelling movement and the organic shift toward such spelling in texting. Because "text messaging... comes from the linguistic bottom," it has a better chance of affecting spelling conventions than top-down measures. However, it is important to emphasize that electronic language features are not a simple, uniform condensing of language. The numeric abbreviations and deletions in texting language are largely a response to the inadequacies and inconvenience of the phone interface, and may decrease as more sophisticated technology is developed. Baron adds that "part of the appeal of texting short hands is their novelty, and that that will fade (ibid).

Accordingly, the present article is an empirical investigation, based on the sociolinguistic analysis of SMS messages among Algerian teens from 15 to 20 in Sidi Bel Abbés town. It also examines the orthographic systems devised by Algerian speaking users of mobile.

The problematic raised here, is composed of the following questions:

- How is the Algerian speaker going to use his/her diverse linguistic background, which is basically composed of Algerian Arabic, French and Classical Arabic in order to translate his/her oral speech into written SMS language?

- What is the linguistic distribution of such languages/varieties of language in his/her messages?

- How is the Algerian speaker going to use the mobile's Latin keys in order to send his/her multilingual messages?

- More importantly, what is the role of language planners in the standardisation process of the local varieties, in order to adapt them to this technology, and how can we adopt technology to make it at the service of such dialects?

2. The Languages in Algeria

Language planning is a complex process which has been defined as involving deliberate language change in the systems of language code and/or use by organizations that are established for these purposes (Baldauf, 1989, p. 5). Language planning is a body of ideas, laws and regulations (language policy), change, rules, beliefs and practices intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop change from happening) in language use in one or more communities. That is, language planning involves deliberate, although not always overt, future-oriented change in systems of the language code and/or use in a societal context (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971).

In the simplest sense, language planning is an attempt by someone to modify the linguistic behaviour of some community for some reason. The reasons are complex, ranging from the trivial notion that one does not like the way group talks, to the sophisticated idea that a community can be assisted in preserving its culture by preserving its language. The actors are many, although at the macro-level some element of government is usually involved. The language modifications are also complex, ranging from a desire to modernise language so that it can deal with the vast technological changes that are occurring, to a desire to standardise a language often with an underlying political motivation – for example, in order to achieve unification, so that it can be understood by various sub-groups within a population who may speak different varieties of that language, or perhaps to provide a way of writing a language which has not previously been written.

Virtually, language planning does not take place in a vacuum but considers language facts in their social, political and economic, psychological and demographic contexts. Since all speech communities are continually undergoing changes both in the structure of the language varieties in use and in the functional allocation of varieties, and since the evaluation processes vary from community to community, it follows that language planning activities in any nation for any language will take place in a particular sociolinguistic setting which will, in part, determine their nature and scope (Crystal, 2008).

In Algeria, language planners classified Modern Standard Arabic as the primary language of the nation to be used in education, mass media, law, and – in general – communication. In fact, Modern Standard Arabic is derived from the language of the *Quran* and is a symbolic marker of Arabic identity with a great linguistic heritage and long history behind it. The Arabisation decisions taken immediately after independence were intended to promote this sense of the Arabic language. The oral vernaculars of Algeria have no particular place in the linguistic map, except for Berber, which recently gained important recognition in the language policy of the government. Such oral forms are stigmatized and are not considered useful for domains that, which a priori, require written forms, such as education, physical environment and administration.

When Algeria opened its markets to foreign investments from the early 2000s, a technological boom occurred which saw the establishment of large foreign companies in domains such as petrol, building, computing and telecommunications, including the operation of mobile phone networks. From this time, new technological products have had a considerable impact on the Algerian linguistic situation, and have contributed to the democratisation of the local dialects, which are being increasingly used in public domains especially for advertising, chat and short message service (SMS) text messaging.

3. The Mobile Phone Boom and SMS in Algeria

Until the early 2000s, Postes, Telegraphes et Telecommunications (PTT), a public company, had a monopoly on telephone communication in Algeria. However, following the decade of terrorism (1990–2000), Algeria has tried to refine its international image by opening its doors to the western world and has encouraged foreign investment in all domains.

In telecommunications, for instance, two major international telecommunications companies have been established in Algeria in order to provide competition in the mobile phone market together with the new public telecommunications operator Algérie Telecom, which was created after the restructuring of PTT in August 2000.

The first foreign mobile phone operator in Algeria, the Egyptian company Orascom Telecom got its telecommunications license in 2001 and operates in Algeria under the name of Djezzy. This Egyptian company was followed by the Kuwaiti telecommunications company El Wataniya, which created Nedjma telecommunications in 2003. The existence of commercial competition between these operators led to a fall in the price of mobile phones and mobile phones became accessible to most people. Consequently, Algerians of different ages and socio-economic status have been able to access new or used mobile phones. In the early 2000s, having a mobile was a form of a social demarcation, but now, it has become a general part of life. With the widespread availability of mobile phones, SMS text messaging has become an important part of the way Algerians communicate and nearly a billion text messages are sent in Algeria every month (Les Accros de l'internet, 2008).

Mobile phones are the most widely used communications technology among Algerians and about 92% of the population possess at least one mobile phone (Les accros de l'internet, 2008, statistics from 2007). The emergence of mobile phone communication using text messaging in Algeria is associated with the creation of new forms of language use. In particular, the rise of this new technology has become an important context for the use of Algerian Arabic, which has become the main medium of communication in SMS texts. It has also given rise to hybrid patterns of language use with a mixture of French, Modern Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic and some English words. This wide range of language mixture used along with abbreviations and new language conventions have not been considered by local language planners. Algerian Arabic evolved outside the parameters of Algerian language planning, having developed independently from language planners' strategies and schedules, but is now playing an important role in new forms of written communication.

4. Some Sociolinguistic Characteristics of SMS Language

SMS language is a 'novice language' (Rafi, 2008, p. 1) which has become an integral part of the communicative repertoire of the multilingual Algerian population. As with much online discourse, SMS retains both written and spoken language characteristics. Some notable features of SMS communication are outlined below.

4.1 Language Forms

SMS communication is characterised by short and often abbreviated syntactic and lexical forms, which save character space or touches of the handset keys compared with using the full forms of words (Doring, 2002, p. 7). This method of text production saves time, money and effort. Because SMS adapts language in this way, the language specific to SMS users often differs from the standard language and thus SMS communication has been considered as a secret code of youth or as a reaction against long sentences (Doring, 2002). SMS users

are very effective in encoding in modified forms of writing what they want their readers to perceive in their messages. Through the new written conventions of SMS, texters have developed a written form that mimics or replaces the ability to hear spoken utterances.

The language used in text messaging has developed its own unique style conventions. Punctuation is often omitted, as the end of a line can signify the end of an utterance. This involves a resourceful use of punctuation as Kortti (1999, p. 15) describes 'constructing paralinguistic markers quite ingeniously as well as breaking orthographical conventions in an inventive manner appears to be a personal stylistic choice'. New written representations of the sounds and compressions of standardised orthographies are a common phenomenon in SMS language. Letters and numbers are also often combined (or used alone) for compression and convenience, so that in English, for example, 'See you' can be texted as 'CU'. One 'spoken' aspect of text messages involves the creation of written representations of non-verbal aspects of face-to-face communication.

Emoticons, such as :-(, :-), and ;-), are a representation of body language which would normally be missing from written communication. These emoticons can be used to change the meaning of a text message just as much as body language can change the meaning of verbal communication in spoken discourse. Texters may also take advantage of phonetic representation of non-speech sounds in order to create different types of verbal effects in their messages such as using 'hehe' to signal laughter. According to Grinter and Eldridge (2001, p. 17), if text messaging shares similar properties to e-mailing, we could expect such innovations in language use to stabilise and become more widely known over a period of time.

4.2 Social Purposes

The most general consequence of SMS is to reduce the degree to which social relationships and social systems are anchored in space. Indeed, SMS provides opportunities to enlarge the number of potential communication partners available at any specific place and moment, and to distance oneself from current informal interaction fields by directing attention to remote partners. It appears that the mobile phone can help to enlarge the most peripheral layer of social relationships: the monarchy of 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) which are activated only under highly specific circumstances, for example, when searching for a job or an apartment (Ling, 2000).

To use Riesman, Denney, and Glazer's (1950) terminology, this capacity makes SMS especially useful for 'other-directed' persons who live in a world of multiple connections and relationships which may also be rather looser and more passing than the smaller number of stronger bonds maintained by more tradition-directed or inner-directed individuals. In contrast to mass media contacts, which typically originate outside the boundaries of primary social relationships, most SMS contacts originate within preceding relationships established through face-to-face interactions. Hence, SMS can be regarded as a technology that empowers such micro-social systems by allowing primary bonds to be continued during periods of spatial separation (Gergen, 2002, p. 237).

5. The Present Study

Given that new dimensions of language use have arisen in the context of SMS communication, the present article aims to provide an empirical investigation of SMS messages. The aim is to survey the language used in SMS messaging and to analyse it linguistically in order to highlight the relationships between such informal language varieties and language planning processes. It seeks to investigate how Algerians use their diverse linguistic repertoires to create written SMS language, to examine the role of Algerian Arabic and the ways in which languages such as Algerian Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic and French are used in SMS communication. It will also consider if there is a role for language planners in the standardisation of local Arabic varieties for use in this technology.

This study is based on the analysis of a total of 50 SMS messages collected from the mobile phones of respondents aged 18–25. This corpus of messages consists of messages they have either sent or received by the respondents. The respondents belong to different socio-economic backgrounds: students, workers and jobless people, and the sample was composed of 28 females and 22 males from different regions of Algeria. In reproducing the texts in printed form, the transcription has attempted to represent them as accurately as possible (i.e. exactly as they appear on the mobile's display screen). In the following messages, elements of messages in Algerian Arabic are written in bold, those in French in italics for texts, those in Modern Standard Arabic in bold italics and those in English are underlined. Each message is followed by its English translation.

5.1 *The Linguistic Aspects of SMS*

This section will deal with examples of the language features found in Algerian SMS texts. The purpose is to examine the language conventions found in mobile phone messages.

5.1.1 *Choice of the Script*

What is striking in the corpus of SMS messages is that, although the mobile phones used in Algeria have the capacity to use the Arabic script, the majority (59/60) of Algerian users preferred to use the Latin alphabet (that is the French language keys). This use of Latin rather than Arabic script is also found in email and Facebook (Rafi, 2008, p. 8). Using the Latin script to write Arabic requires new conventions to be developed as the Arabic script has a larger number of letters than the Latin one. Letters which do not exist in the Latin script are replaced by other symbols (see Table 1 for some common replacements).

I love you 3omri (I love you sweet heart).

In the SMS text above the word [3omri] is Arabic (meaning ‘my love, my heart’) and the writer uses the numeral ‘3’ to represent the Arabic letter, because the latter looks like a mirror image of the former. It should be noted that the Latin letter ‘r’ can replace both the Arabic letters (IPA/r/) and (IPA/ġ/). Similarly, ‘d’ can stand for both (IPA/d/) and (IPA/ /), ‘s’ for (IPA/s/) and (IPA/ /) and ‘t’ for (IPA/t/) and possibly for (IPA/ /). The reader has obviously no difficulties in

distinguishing between the Arabic letters that correspond to the Latin one. These conventions are almost universally understood now by Arabic speakers. This means that a spontaneous form of orthographic development has accompanied the adoption of SMS technologies.

Table 1
Common SMS Latin Script Substitutions for Arabic Script

Arabic letter	Phonetic transcription	Latin script replacement
ا	[ʔ]	[a]
ب	[θ]	[t]
ج	[ʒ]	[j]
ح	[h]	[h]
خ	[x]	[kh]
ز	[z]	[z]
س	[s]	[ch], [sh]
ش	[s]	[s] or [S]
د	[d]	[d], [dh]
ت	[t]	[t] or [T]
ث	[ʔ]	[ʒ]
ر	[r]	[r]
ق	[q]	[q] or [k]
هـ	[h]	[h]
و	[w]	[w], [ou], [u], [oo]

It is not only Arabs but also Russians, Greeks and Serbs who use Latin instead of their native scripts for technology-based forms of communication (Ladefoged & Maddieson, 1996). The difference is that unlike Arabic speakers, the other groups use Latin keys whenever their native language alphabets are not found on the mobile phone keys. However, for the Algerians, even with the existence of an option to switch from Latin to Arabic, they prefer using the Latin alphabet. In this they are unlike their neighbours in the Middle East, who generally seem to use Arabic alphabet. One reason for this choice may lie in the amount of exposure Algerians have to the French language and therefore to the French alphabet, in contrast to Middle Eastern Arabic speakers. Consequently, Algerians seem to feel more comfortable with the Latin alphabet.

5.1.2 Language Choice and Language Mixing

The Algerian texters are multilinguals whose linguistic repertoire includes a range of language and varieties of language namely Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic, French and English as well. This diversity is expressed much more at the oral than at the written level, since the latter was much more constrained by the Arabisation process and language planning formulations. The SMS texts reflect well the existing level of diversity in oral language through mixed utterances, which include a priori, sentences or bits of sentences composed of, in order of proportion, Algerian Arabic – the matrix or the base language, French and Modern Standard Arabic. A quantitative analysis of the 50 SMS texts found 29.30% of texts written in pure Algerian Arabic, 21% in pure French and 8% in pure Modern Standard Arabic. The Modern Standard Arabic messages involve more or less religious messages sent during Islamic

events or on occasions such as giving best wishes during the holy fasting month or during Islamic feasts. This, of course, does not exclude the fact that some texters may use Modern Standard Arabic to send their personal messages, as a matter of preference and ease.

The most common messages are written in Algerian Arabic mixed with French or vice versa, depending on the speaker's fluency. The proportion of messages written in Algerian Arabic/French mixed sentences represents 41.5% of the messages as a whole. The rest about 31.50%, are messages written in mixed Modern Standard Arabic and French. English is only present through some tags like 'hi', 'bye' or 'thank you', which represent 0.2% of the overall messages such as in the following examples:

M1: hello,cavakiraki (hi, how are you)

M2: sahatthank you (so thank you)

5.1.3 Reduced Forms

Shortenings (i.e. missing end letters), contractions (i.e. missing middle letters) and clippings and other clippings (i.e. dropping final letter) are common in the texts. For example:

M3: rani nekr3 fk

(I am waiting for you)

In the above message, number '3' is used to express the Arabic letter which does not exist on the Latin mobile keys. The sentences are written as heard, in order to gain space, time and money in writing messages. In M3, vowels [a] and [i] are omitted, in [ani] (I am) and [fik] (for you) which become [rni] and [fk], respectively. Note that there is no general consensus among Algerian and in general, among Arab texts senders about the use of common abbreviations, as it is the case of French or English, where entire Web Pages are devoted to explain the SMS abbreviations used in texting and chatting. This is due to the fact that Arabic abbreviations using Latin keys are still in the process of making. But still, there are some common abbreviations used especially for consonants (see Table 1), but for the vowels, it is up to the users, to or/not omit them in their SMS.

5.1.4 Acronyms, Initialisms and Non-conventional Spellings

Acronyms and initialisms are abbreviations that are formed using the initial components in a phrase or name:

M4: STP stenini

(Please, wait for me)

M5: j besoin 2 toi STP appel moi A+

(I need you please call me see you later)

In M5, the respondent has used 'j', 'STP' and 'A+' instead of 'j'ai (I have), s'ilte plait (please) and a+ (see you later) respectively, in order to shorten the message. The '2' is a non-conventional spelling which equates to French de (of), which is pronounced in the same way as French deux (two). Appel reflects the sound of the French 'appelle' (to call) but is a shortened form. This is phonetically significant since the word is understood as it sounds not as it is written.

5.1.5 Typographic Symbols, Emoticons and Non-Speech Sounds

The text messages have many symbols other than standard letter symbols. The table below is a sample of typographic symbols and emoticons used in order to express particular feelings such as happiness (☺), exclamation (!!!), or just to animate the message and transform it into a more expressive and vivid communication.

Table 2

Some SMS Symbols and Emoticons

Xxx ¼ 443	@ ¼ 20
!! ¼ 35	() ¼ 12
¼ 30	&¼ 255
:-) ¼ 20	§¼14
~ ¼ 11	¥¼ 42
?? ¼ 11	p ¼ 22
..... ¼ 22	l ¼ 44

A total of 90 typographic (that is non-alphabetic) symbols were found in the SMS corpus – almost all of which were kisses (that is x) or exclamation marks, usually in multiple sets (e.g. xxxxxx and !!!!!). There were 30 instances of emoticons – for example,slt 3am sa3id wa 3omron madid. ...!!! (Hi happy new year and long life ...) – and 25 instances of non-speech sounds like onomatopoeic, exclamatory spellings (e.g. haha!, arrrgh!, WOOHOO!, t’ra, Tee Hee, Oioisavaloy!, yeah, yep, yay!, rahh, ahhh, mchwa!, eh?, and woh!) and a couple of other typographical-cum-linguistic devices for adding prosodic impact in Arabic (for example, KHFYYYY KHFYYYY [khaffi] or meaning ‘hurry up!’ in the Algerian Arabic). In this example, the vowel [a] is omitted for the purpose of abbreviation, and the consonant ‘y’ is repeated in order to stress to urgency of the message. Finally there were in fact 52 apostrophes used across the messages (e.g. we’re, she’s, can’t, I’m, it’s) as in sltc’hayat, ¼ salutc’est Hayat, ‘hi it’s Hayat’. In this message, the sender abbreviates c’est (it is) into c’, using apostrophe’.

6. Language Use in Formal SMS

Language is always multifunctional and always dependent on context for its meaning and the types of SMS messages in the corpus ranges from formal to informal. Formal SMS are sent in ‘polite and correct’ forms of language and are usually composed in Algerian Arabic with French tags, or only in French. Formal SMS are less likely to use shortenings and non-speech sounds or emoticons. Since formality involves the use of formal languages, so, SMS texts are often sent in French as in the case of those SMS sent by the mobile operators. They can be also composed of a mixture of French and Algerian Arabic /Modern Standard Arabic. In fact, formality is not opposed to language mixing, which is a very natural and actually being gradually accepted at the political and sociolinguistic spheres. Examples of formal SMS include:

M6: ‘Le 10/03/2009 votre crédit a diminué en dessous de 150 DA. Veuillez recharger votre compte’

(On 03/10/2009 your credit fell below 150 DA (Algerian Dinar) Please recharge your account)

The above is a business SMS sent by mobile company to a customer. In such a kind of formal SMS, the language used is French, with no abbreviations except for the national currency DA (meaning Algerian Dinar):

M7: Merci 2 me donner le Ntel du doyen

(Thank you for giving me the telephone number of the dean)

In message M7, the sender is a teacher who addresses her SMS to her superior; the head of department, asking her the telephone number of the dean. The message contains few abbreviations – N tel‘Numéro de telephone) (phone number) is the only exception– and is written in French, which is a reflection of formality and prestige.

7. Language Planning in Relation to The SMS Language in Algeria

The use of Algerian Arabic as a means of communication in SMS gives a new role and importance to what has been always considered as a stigmatized variety notably Algerian Arabic. The SMS technology has moved written language into the domain of informal, ephemeral and private communication usually associated with spoken language and in so doing has introduced the language varieties normally found in informal spoken contexts into written communication.

The planning process of languages in Algeria has been much more concerned with the regulation of the written forms including Modern Standard Arabic, French, English and Berber and their distribution in various domains such as education, mass media and law. The codification and standardisation of Algerian Arabic has not been of concern for Algerian language planners, since it has been considered only a colloquial and not a written form. Because of the emergence of new means of technological communication, the Algerian Arabic variety has evolved as a new written form for mobile phones. The accommodation has been rapid and widespread and Algerian Arabic speakers have not relied on previously developed linguistic and orthographic norms, but have started creating their own linguistic norms, which include the use of colloquial forms of Arabic and language mixing, the development of a stock of linguistic forms, such abbreviations, acronyms, modified orthographies and representations of non-speech sounds, and the adoption of the Latin script in the place of Arabic script, with new conventions for representing Arabic sounds. The Algerian SMS language as a variety has developed its own conventions in an unplanned way through the establishment of practices of use – it is a form of self-regulating system in which practitioners moderate the conventions rather than conventions being established by language planning agencies. Moreover, it is one which does not orient to any particular language, but to the use of the entire multilingual repertoire of the communicators. In this sense, it is the mobile users who control language planning rules of SMS not the language planners themselves, since they establish their own rules of abbreviations and SMS conventions which, as any language, may change through time and from one generation to another. Such

language planning work has been done in an ad hoc way, without explicitly articulated norms, and is subject to change and on-going evolution.

There are however a few points of intervention where language planning could influence patterns of language use. The fact that Algerians prefer using Latin alphabet instead of Arabic language puts into evidence the importance of French language in the society, and reflects the texters' indifference towards the use of Algerian Arabic as a written form. It would not be appropriate to prevent the use of the Latin alphabet and force the Algerian texters to use Arabic keys in their SMS nor should Arab governments produce mobiles with only Arabic keys, in order to force or at least encourage the texters to use Arabic alphabet. If the Latin script is to be used for writing Algerian Arabic texts, Arab programmers and software engineers could consider the elaboration of common Arabic forms using Latin alphabet, in order to avoid the existence of two or three representations of the same Arabic letter such as the use of 'kh', '7' '5', which all correspond to , and '2', 'q', '8' and '9', which correspond to . Language planners will also need to consider more broadly what language planning work is needed for Algerian Arabic, given the spread of this variety into new domains.

8. Conclusion

The current linguistic situation in Algeria is primarily the outcome of many years of intensive campaigns of Arabisation and major linguistic, political and even financial decisions taken right after independence aimed at promoting the status of Modern Standard Arabic in order to restore to Algeria an 'Arab face' (*visage arabe*) (Grandguillaume, 1983).

French is a second language in Algeria – it is taught starting from the third year primary school – English is a foreign language taught starting from the first year of the middle school and it is actually finding grounds outside the educational institutions. The local dialects of Algerian Arabic are stigmatized varieties used *a priori* in informal settings.

The present analysis of SMS data has revealed the existence of a linguistic accommodation of Algerian speakers to a new technology based on existing practices of oral communication which are now being adapted to writing. It is a language variety which is based on Algerian Arabic rather than the official Modern Standard Arabic used in other written forms.

For the Algerian speakers, using the SMS texts is an innovative step for modernizing the stigmatized colloquial varieties using technologies. Thanks to mobile phones, these local varieties may gain a higher status in the Algerian linguistic ecology and be given more consideration by local language planners and decision-makers. The diglossic situation between Modern Standard Arabic and Algerian Arabic is therefore potentially unstable and it is possible that the Algerian Arabic variety may move from very informal contexts to more formal situations.

Notes

1. Rafi (2008, p. 1) identifies a novice language as one which is characterised by simple sentence structures or communication and has syntactic and lexical choices which resemble child language.
2. To gauge this, we conducted an informal survey among fifteen students from the

Middle East who use Arabic alphabet to send SMS messages, compared with 59 out of 60 Algerian students who use Latin keys for SMS texts. The remaining Algerian texter used both Latin and Arabic alphabets in writing SMS messages.

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