

Moroccan Arabic in advertising context: Analysis of oral and written messages

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Abstract: The outputs of the contact due to the presence and interaction of multiple languages in Morocco have been tackled by numerous sociolinguistic studies over the years (Ennaji 2002, Chekayri 2006, Caubet 2017b). This research attempts to illustrate the way this complex linguistic landscape affected the language of oral and written Moroccan advertising, wherein the alternation of registers and the functional expansion of the *dārija* became more detectable.

To this end, in this study I aim to explore the correlation between language use and target audience, after providing a general overview of the first advertising materials disseminated in Morocco since the beginning of the 20th century. The discussion on linguistic innovations in this field will be accompanied by an analysis of commercials that have been aired on 2M, Morocco's most popular television channel, since the 1960s-70s. This focus will allow us to emphasise the peculiarities of mostly oral advertising messages based on the target audience they seem to address. Further, the second part of the paper will be devoted to the reflection on the orthographic representation strategies used by speakers of Moroccan Arabic, by means of the analysis of billboards, which represent the so-called 'outdoor advertising'. Furthermore, such billboards, whose pictures have been captured in various parts of Morocco, provide us with an opportunity to observe contact phenomena of alternation, insertion, and code-mixing (Appel & Muysken 1987), and to evaluate their role in the effectiveness of the advertising message, as well as to provide some observations in their orthographic treatment.

Keywords: Moroccan Arabic, multilingualism, advertising, orthography, target audience

1. Introduction

The juxtaposition of different languages in the Arab countries is a concrete and persistent phenomenon which can be defined as "diglossia" when it pertains to the relationship between classical Arabic and dialectal varieties of Arabic, and as "multilingualism" when it involves additional languages, frequently of European origin or, in the context of the Maghreb, also Berber varieties. As Morocco is one of the countries where it is

inevitable to encounter a multitude of linguistic realities, this research aims at demonstrating how the coexistence and the alternation of various linguistic codes are reflected, both in written and oral forms, across all spheres of life, with a particular emphasis on advertising. Given that language serves as a primary tool for establishing a relationship between the advertiser and the advertisee, this study examines how Moroccan Arabic¹ is employed in advertising communications across television, radio, and billboards. Therefore, an initial overview of the role of Moroccan Arabic within the sociolinguistic landscape of Morocco, along with the early advertising tools that emerged in the country, is followed by a contemplation on the nature of advertising communications broadcasted through radio and television. The last section of the paper examines the strategies employed in the transliteration of *dārijā*, enabling an analysis of the various writing systems that are adopted within this context. The study concludes with an examination of the factors influencing the selection of one writing system over another, as well as an analysis of the interrelationship between content, language register, and the target audience, in order to get a clearer understanding of how multilingual advertising communication is handled in Morocco.

2. Methodology

This study emerges from the recognition that Moroccan Arabic, although traditionally considered as a colloquial, and hence predominantly oral, variety of Arabic, is nowadays being increasingly adopted in various contexts, both formal and informal. The initial paragraphs of the study, indeed, provide a more descriptive analysis of the linguistic choices of the audiovisual advertising, concentrating on a total of 34 advertisements from *Med Radio*, 23 from *Hit Radio*, and 37 TV commercials from *2M*. However, the functional expansion of the *dārijā* is also particularly evident in the streets of Morocco, where one can observe the frequent graphical representation of Moroccan Arabic on a variety of advertising billboards. Thus, recognizing the diverse transliteration systems employed, I began to capture billboards during my recent travels in Morocco. Consequently, this research emerges from an examination and a reflection on the various strategies adopted to write Moroccan Arabic, on the basis of 41 advertising billboards captured between Meknès, Ksar El Kebir, Rabat, Casablanca and Mohammedia in February and then in August/September 2024.

3. Moroccan linguistic panorama

Historical developments and contact between Arabs and indigenous populations, as well as the social changes that followed the process of urbanization that has affected North Africa in recent decades, contributed to the hybridization and further complication of the Moroccan sociolinguistic profile. Thus, the employment of a particular termino-

¹ In this study, the term “Moroccan Arabic” is used interchangeably with “dārijā”.

logical framework to elucidate the sociolinguistic context of Morocco presents a considerable degree of complexity. Indeed, the phenomenon cannot merely be categorized as simple diglossia, in which a colloquial variety coexists with what Ferguson (1959: 336) calls 'a super-posed variety' i.e. Standard Arabic. The sociolinguistic panorama observed in Morocco is significantly more heterogeneous and intricate, characterized by the confluence of foreign languages, including French and, to a lesser degree, Spanish and English, alongside the nation's official languages, Arabic and Berber. Terms such as 'multilingualism' (Ennaji 2005) and 'transglossia' (Durand 2018: 95) have recently been adopted to describe the expansion of languages that are extraneous to the cultural heritage of the community witnessing their spread. Indeed, this is a mainstream phenomenon that leads people to mix more languages and varieties almost instinctively. Within this framework, these languages enjoy different statuses and degrees of use. Moroccan Arabic and Amazigh varieties have been mostly limited to daily communication and excluded, at least until a few decades ago, from the intellectual and academic fields. On the contrary, Standard Arabic and French have served as languages of prestige, deemed appropriate for formal settings including educational and administrative functions.

Nonetheless, due to the emergence of technological innovations and the adoption of new communication tools, a noticeable linguistic dynamism is currently evident, which is reflected in the integration of informal registers in broader contexts and, occasionally, in the combination and/or alternation of various languages, as is the case in everyday exchanges. Morocco is presently navigating through diverse social and political dynamics that markedly shape the evolution of its linguistic landscape. As a result, an ongoing process of reconfiguration regarding the hierarchical positions and the ideologies linked to the diverse languages that, for various reasons, constitute the Moroccan linguistic landscape is currently taking place.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature of this new sociolinguistic reality that characterises Morocco, the following paragraphs will outline the key strategies adopted to promote the use of Moroccan Arabic in the private and public sectors, with the aim of integrating it into various facets of the society.

3.1. The expansion of Moroccan Arabic

Moroccan Arabic, commonly referred to as *dārijā*², serves as the primary language for the majority of the Moroccan population and is generally learned as a second language by Berber speakers. It is not only a means of everyday communication but also a crucial element in the cultural identity and social interaction within Moroccan society. It can in fact be considered as a *lingua franca* in Morocco, even though it has no legal status. Indeed, the contemporary sociolinguistic reality in Morocco is facing an extension of the use of the vernacular to different spheres. This phenomenon arises from a diverse array of needs and objectives, and is manifested through various channels and mediums, each tailored to meet specific communicative demands. The emergence of technology has un-

² For an explanation of the origin of the term *dārijā* and its subsequent diffusion within Moroccans, see Caubet (2017: 99-100).

undeniably played a pivotal role in reshaping national communication practices. However, it is essential to recognise that even prior to the Independence (1956), Moroccan audio-visual landscape was never characterised by monolingualism (Miller 2013: 92). Radio broadcasting was introduced in Morocco in 1928 with the first public radio (*Radio Maroc*), followed by many other radio stations that emerged during the Protectorate, and all of them used to broadcast in different languages³ (Miller 2013). Similarly, the first advertising messages were transmitted through different channels and languages, as we will see below.

That being said, the use and alternation of different codes and languages has never constituted a major novelty in the oral Moroccan audio-visual sector. What does, however, distinguish between the communicative practices of the first half of the 20th century and those of the more recent decades is the expansion of Moroccan Arabic into written context.

Until two decades ago, indeed, the role of the *dārija* was essentially that of an oral language, and the writing of it was very limited; the few examples of written production in *dārija* derived from old poetic traditions, such as *malḥūn* and *zajal*⁴. We also know that there existed so-called *majdubyāt* – poetic quatrains that were presumably produced by the famous Sufi mystic Abderrahman El Majdoub (1506-1568). These poems were composed and written down in a colloquial Arabic that was perfectly comprehensible across the Maghreb, and even today separate proverbs keep circulating across the Greater Maghreb, that is from Morocco to Libya. More recently, Moroccan vernacular resurfaced in dramatic compositions with Tayeb Saddiki and Ahmed Taieb El Alj, the first two dramatists that wrote modern theatre in Moroccan Arabic during the second half of the 20th century⁵. In this regard, it also worth mentioning that a new kind of poet started emerging within the local, until very recent, predominantly oral poetic traditions:

The artist, in his/her attempt to reflect the new reality of a society that now extends far beyond local tribal affairs increasingly begins experimenting – simultaneously endeavoring to attract a more worldly new audience without alienating the older traditional one – creating different kind of songs and, ultimately, poems. We thus now have a new generation of poetry within the tradition: authored, written texts. Authors now write down their poetry in a copy book, or *kunnash* (*kunnāš*), and, therefore see themselves as part of the literary Arab tradition or, perhaps more likely, part of the Magreb's centuries-old literary and music tradition. (Gintzburg 2022: 209)

However, as I already mentioned, it was mostly in the last decades that the use of written Moroccan Arabic experienced a significant shift, transcending its traditional boundaries and permeating wider cultural spheres. Nowadays, this phenomenon manifests

³ See Jaidi (2000) for a detailed analysis of the audiovisual media diffusion in Morocco.

⁴ Forms of dialectal poetry particularly widespread in Morocco and Algeria, and to a lesser extent in Tunisia and Libya since the 15th century. The term *Malḥūn* can be applied to sung and recited oral traditions (Gintzburg 2020: 206). See Pellat (1987: 247-257) for more details.

⁵ On the role of *dārija* in the theatre, see Amine & Carlson (2011).

itself in an appropriation of written *dārija* in diverse contexts⁶, such as social media and advertising, but also poetry and novels, as Aguadé (2003: 253) points out:

In many novels written in Standard Literary Arabic, the authors use the dialect in all the dialogues, looking for more realism.

An example of alternation between Standard Arabic and *dārija* can be observed in Muhammad Berrada's *Luṣba-t al-nisyān* (The game of forgetting), one of the most important novels of Arabic literature. In Morocco, indeed, this novel was included in the secondary education curriculum from 1995 to 2005 by decision of the Ministry of Education. In the field of poetry, it is important to mention Ahmed Lemsyeh, one of the founding fathers of contemporary Moroccan *zajal*, as well as Driss Mesnaoui (b. 1948), who employs the dialect to convey what Standard Arabic cannot express⁷, and many others⁸.

This evolution illustrates that the dialect is no longer intrinsically linked to notions of educational deficiency or social stigma; rather, it has emerged as 'a key element for the definition of a new Moroccan identity, or "Moroccanness"' (Caubet 2017b: 99). In the following paragraphs we will explore the transformation of linguistic practices within the field of advertising, examining the different forms and strategies through which advertising messages have been issued over the years.

4. The origin of advertising in Morocco

The concept of advertising traces its origins to the medieval Latin verb *advertere*, which means 'to turn or direct something toward'. Thus, the etymological origin of the term underscores the primary function of advertising: to capture and direct the attention of the audience (Danesi 2015). In essence, advertising encompasses various forms of public announcements aimed at informing potential customers about the availability, characteristics, and pricing of specific goods or services. Advertisers use a variety of media sources to reach customers effectively. Traditionally, advertisements were predominantly disseminated through print media such as newspapers and magazines. Another way adopted to convey advertising messages involved the utilization of billboards and posters, the so called 'outdoor advertising', which is still very widespread nowadays. However, with the advent of technology, the spectrum of advertising has expanded significantly. Television and radio remain powerful platforms providing audio-visual content that can engage audiences on a deeper level. Moreover, in the last decades, direct mail has transformed

⁶ For a comprehensive examination of the key orthographic features used by Moroccans when writing in dialect, refer to Aguadé (2006).

⁷ For further information see the interview with Driss Mesnaoui conducted by Deborah Kapchan (Kapchan 2022).

⁸ For a more detailed study, refer to Moscoso et al. (2024).

with the integration of personalised content, while social media platforms and websites have emerged as vital channels for targeting advertising.

In a multilingual country such as Morocco, the introduction of innovative tools has undeniably influenced the linguistic choices employed in the dissemination of various advertising messages. Because of this, to fully comprehend the evolution that has occurred within this domain, it is necessary to examine the historical context and origins of the initial mediums utilized for broadcasting advertisements.

Until the end of the Middle Ages, in many countries, the primary strategy employed for transmitting advertising communications was the oral repetition of information in crowded public spaces, so that the message could reach as many people as possible. In Morocco, this practice was very common among the merchants, and the figure of a barker, called *bərrāh*⁹, was often employed to perform this function (Boutahri 2018: 2). The utility of barkers can be attributed to the significant illiteracy rates among the population to whom the information was addressed. Orality, indeed, served as a mechanism to ensure that messages were accessible to everyone. For the same reason, government institutions frequently employed the figure of the *bərrāh* as a means of conveying public announcements and essential messages.

Alongside this figure, that persisted well after the Industrial Revolution, a new era of possibilities emerged in the 19th century. Although the immediate impacts of this phenomenon were predominantly experienced in Europe and North America, its influences gradually permeated other regions, including North African countries. In Morocco, factors such as trade dynamics and colonialism in the beginning of the 19th century played crucial roles in shaping the region's adaptation to industrial practices. Therefore, the introduction of newspapers at the conclusion of the 19th century marked an important evolution in the landscape of advertising media, gradually leading to the decline of the traditional role of the *bərrāh*. During the French Protectorate, indeed, this figure continued to operate predominantly within the rural regions of the country, highlighting the importance of oral communication in less urbanized areas, even as modern advertising methods began to take root (Boutahri 2018: 3).

As mentioned above, the latter half of the 19th century witnessed a series of initiatives aimed at establishing newspapers in Morocco. The primary objective of these endeavours was to persuade Moroccans of the advantages associated with the colonial occupation and modernism, in view of the forthcoming invasion. Thus, on November 7, 1904, Morocco saw the appearance of its first newspaper featuring advertisements, titled *As-Sabāh* (el-Ganbūrī 2010). This newspaper used the Arabic language in order to disseminate news about France, as well as to promote French commercial products, through advertisement often accompanied by illustrative imagery. The advertisements, indeed, were not solely focused on promoting colonialism. During the early 1900s, there were also annoucnes for medical practices, oils, and other beauty products. This naturally fostered the establishment of a communication network connecting Moroccan population with foreign producers.

Moreover, film, hotel and travel companies advertising posters were also quite prevalent, particularly during the period in which Morocco had the status of French Protec-

⁹ Literally, 'public crier'.

torate¹⁰. At that time “one of the oldest advertising materials were in the French newsletters coming from France and distributed in Casablanca and Rabat streets. The majority of those advertisements were offers of the hotels established by the colonizer in Casablanca” (Attar 2017: 7). The aim of these practices was above all that of convincing French people to move to Morocco.

Consequently, unlike the newspaper advertisements that targeted a Moroccan audience and employed Arabic language to promote foreign products, the posters and the newsletters distributed in the early 20th century predominantly used French as a means of expression, since they were directed at a French-speaking audience, in the form of an invitation to visit Morocco. Actually, roughly one-third of the posters from this era promoted the shipping line *Compagnie de Navigation Paquet*, which used to link Marseille to Tangiers and Casablanca twice a month (Lebouq 1911), and were headed by the sentence “Visitez le Maroc”.

The final years of the colonial rule in Morocco aligned with the emergence of the initial radio and television stations. As will be discussed subsequently, these developments contributed to significant transformations within various facets of the advertising industry, including the linguistic strategies employed.

4.1. The advent of the radio in Morocco

The development of the audiovisual tools represented a significant advancement in Morocco, as the high illiteracy rate meant that journalistic contents were only available to a small portion of the population. For this reason, one could argue that a true mass communication only emerged with the introduction of radio and television. However, that's not completely accurate either. In reality, the first radio station established in Morocco, named *Radio Maroc*, can be traced back to 1928, and it primarily broadcasted its French-language programs to foreign residents living in the country. In the 1930s *Radio Maroc* began offering programs in Arabic, and from 1947 onward, it expanded its broadcasts to include both French and Arabic across two separate stations (Miller 2013: 92). In the meantime, however, several new private radio stations began broadcasting in various Moroccan cities (Jaïdi 2000), employing different languages for communication. Then, following Independence, there was a notable Arabization process that entailed an increased use of the Arabic language across various contexts, including on the radio. As may be expected, this phenomenon did not result in the homogenization of the linguistic landscape but instead emphasized the multilingual nature of Morocco. This has given rise to the establishment of new radio stations that incorporated both French and Arabic (Standard and/or Moroccan dialect), as well as Berber¹¹. Meanwhile, the use of Spanish and English remained relatively limited. Nowadays, even with the proliferation of social media and other technological devices, the radio remains a vital advertising medium for Moroccans, because of its capacity to react to emerging trends. Among 39 radio stations

¹⁰ The French colonial rule in Morocco lasted from 1912 to 1956.

¹¹ For a more comprehensive overview of the different radio stations that arose after the Independence and the language practices they adopted, refer to Miller (2013).

currently operating in Morocco¹², *Med Radio* and *Hit Radio* stand out as the most popular in terms of listener numbers. These can also be accessed online, which is how I was able to observe the typology and the linguistic nature of the advertisements broadcast. According to an analysis of the languages most frequently used for advertising content in *Med Radio* and *Hit Radio*, I could detect that, from a linguistic perspective, these two differ in some respects and are similar in others. It is important to note, first of all, that neither radio station chooses to adopt a linguistic homogenisation method. The three languages that are the most frequently used in advertisements are French, Moroccan Arabic and Standard Arabic. Linguistic alternations and instances of code-switching between these languages are not uncommon. However, while in *Med Radio* there is a prevalence of Arabic, both Moroccan and standard, the advertising phrases of *Hit Radio* prominently feature a significant incorporation of French. Moreover, while advertisements in *dārija* are certainly present in *Hit Radio*, Standard Arabic is used only sporadically. Anyway, the predominant style observed in both stations is a multilingualism, where announces can blend up to three languages, that is French, *dārija* and Standard Arabic. The predominance of French in *Hit Radio* could be explained by the fact that this station, launched in Morocco in 2006, is nowadays reaching audiences in twelve African nations where French is spoken as a second language¹³.

Finally, English is represented by only a small number of lexical loanwords or expressions, and Berber remains completely outside the sphere of linguistic interaction. What distinguishes the two radio stations is the disparity in the quantitative distribution of these languages. Indeed, *Med Radio*'s commercials are more frequently produced in *dārija* or in a mixed Arabic, with frequent shifts between *dārija* and Standard Arabic. I registered only few advertisements that were produced entirely in Standard Arabic or in French.

Thus, the multilingual advertising system is nothing more than an accurate reflection of the sociolinguistic landscape in Morocco. Not surprisingly, French and Standard Arabic, the languages of the administration and/or formal communication, are employed to disseminate information regarding political debates, national and international events or festivals organised under the direction of the monarchy or governmental authorities. On the other hand, advertisements in Moroccan Arabic frequently incorporate French insertions, particularly in the context of technical terminology, mirroring real-life linguistic interactions. These lexical insertions, indeed, are not regarded as foreign terms; rather, they are considered integral components of the Moroccan lexicon, worthy of inclusion in dialectal communication.

4.2. The spread of the television

Morocco was among those Arab countries who were the first ones to launch television broadcasting, even though the first television channel in Morocco had a rather short

¹² Morocco has currently sixteen public and twenty three private radio stations.

¹³ *Hit Radio* broadcasts in Morocco, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Congo Brazzaville, Senegal, Togo, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Burundi, Chad, Niger and Comoros.

period of activity. The francophone channel *TELMA*, indeed, started broadcasting on February 28, 1954 but, due to financial issues, ceased its activities a little over a year later, in 1955. While the broadcasts on the channel were in French, there remained opportunities for public service announcements or advertisements endorsing commercial businesses operating in Morocco.

After this first experience, the launch of a public television station in Morocco did not occur until 1962. It was marked by a speech from King Hassan II during the Throne Day celebrations on *Al Oula* channel, known at that time as *TVM* (Télévision marocaine). During that period, Morocco initiated the policy of Arabisation, which resulted in the predominance of Standard Arabic in both radio and television. However, this approach did not last long, because as Hassa (2023: 263) points out:

In the early 1980s there was a gradual shift toward more bilingual Arabic and French media as the vision of Morocco as a monolingual Arabic country seemed inadequate to allow Morocco to be competitive in the emerging global market.

This discourse, nonetheless, pertains more to television shows than to advertising. Indeed, since advertising serves also as a medium for establishing specific cultural and social connections with the audience, the use of Moroccan Arabic in TV commercials has never been a novel concept. Consequently, since the 1960s, TV advertising, which at that time were in black and white, have been predominantly delivered in the form of dialogues or parodies in Moroccan Arabic. This did not imply a rejection of Standard Arabic or French; rather, it was common for these commercials to feature an accompanying illustration of the product that included a brief description in either Standard Arabic or French, even when the language orally used was *dārija*.

Furthermore, in the context of television advertisements for international clothing or technology brands, automobiles, or financial institutions, the preference frequently leaned toward French. This selection was undoubtedly influenced by social factors. It is noteworthy, in fact, that French and Standard Arabic were mainly featured in commercials targeting the middle or upper classes of the society, whereas Moroccan Arabic was the most employed register for the promotion of food and hygiene products. This means that the choice of the language depended heavily on the target audience.

The situation today has not changed much. The primary languages used in TV commercials continue to be French, Standard Arabic and *dārija*, with the latter being the most dominant. However, it seems that the primary linguistic distinction between the oldest advertisements and the contemporary ones lies in the way these languages are employed. In modern advertisements, indeed, the occurrences of code-switching and code-mixing¹⁴ are significantly more prevalent. Consequently, rather than producing different commercials in different languages, it's more likely to encounter multiple languages within the same advertisement. Numerous written messages are also presented during the commercials, maintaining a similar informal tone, as illustrated by examples (1) and (2).

¹⁴ For a better understanding of the code-switching and code-mixing model to which I refer, see Appel & Muysken (1987: 118).

(1) **بغينتو سمارتفون جديد؟**

[*bḡītu smārtfūn ždīd?*]

‘Do you want a new smartphone?’

(2) **يرضيك و فحياتك يهنيك Magix**

[*Mažīks yrđī-k w-f ḥyāt-ək yhannī-k*]

‘Magix pleases you and eases your life’

As shown in the above examples, in TV commercials the *dārija* is predominantly represented through Arabic script, and this equally applies to linguistic insertions, which are regarded as components of Moroccan Arabic. Moreover, it is evident that both in auditory and visual advertisements, the majority of instances involving code-switching occur when promoting technological products or highlighting innovations that were previously non-existent, such as telephone lines and Wi-Fi. On the other side, similar to the trends observed in radio communications, a more formal linguistic style, characterised by the intersection of *dārija* and Standard Arabic, or by the use of French, emerges in the advertisements of national or financial institutions, as well as in health awareness messages. Once again, it seems that Standard Arabic and French are being used to give greater seriousness to the communication.

From this analysis, it can be said that the advertising communications presented on television exhibit a linguistic behaviour that parallels that of radio, except that TV commercials frequently incorporate brief written messages that compensate the oral content, maintaining the same register as the spoken language used in the communication. The subsequent sections will delve into the characteristics of written advertisements, emphasizing methods for effectively representing Moroccan Arabic in a written format.

5. Graphic representation of Moroccan Arabic in the billboards

From the linguistic point of view, Moroccan billboards exhibit a considerable diversity. The innovation in this context is not much caused by the introduction of written *dārija*, but rather by the various graphical representations through which it is expressed. The absence of an official standardization of Arabic dialects, indeed, results in the use and mixing of different spelling systems for their transliteration. This coincides with the observations of Caubet (2018: 400), who noted that

more than fifteen years of experience in writing Darija, in Latin or Arabic script, have led to a situation where most connected Moroccans have now acquired fluidity in reading and writing Darija, through collective national effort”.

In the 41 billboards analysed for this study, *dārija* emerges as the predominant linguistic register. Only ten of these billboards lack any representation of Moroccan Arabic, featuring French and Standard Arabic mainly for the promotion of foundations, fitness

centres, automobiles, and insurance services. In numerous instances, instead, Standard Arabic is juxtaposed with *dārija* on billboards.

I was able to identify four systems that were used for transcribing *dārija*, where the predominant method was characterised by the use of Arabic letters, as is the case in examples examples (3)-(5).

(3) **كارط گيشي خلس و تيري فاي بلاصه بغطي**

[kārt gīšt xallaš w-tīri f ɻay blāṣa bgīti]

‘Credit card, pay and withdraw wherever you want’

(4) **الفiber ديال أورنج وصلات لباب داركم**

[l-fibər dyāl ɻorōnž waṣlāt l bāb dār-kum]

‘The Orange fiber has reached your door’

(5) **البنك الشعبي معاك خطوة بخطوة حتى تشي دارك وتحقق أحلامك**

[l-bank əš-ʃābi mʃā-k xatwa b-xatwa hta tšri dār-ək w-thaqqaq ɻaħlām-ək]

‘The Popular Bank is with you step by step until you buy your house and your dreams become reality’

Various strategies are implemented in these messages, aimed at providing a written language as closely aligned as possible with the oral register. In (3), a common occurrence in *dārija* transliteration is observed, where the Persian character گ is employed to address the lack of the *g* phoneme in Arabic. Indeed, this latter exists in various dialects of Arabic and is not only associated with lexical borrowing, as in the above example, but can also arise from a different realisation of the Arabic etymological *q*. Staying on the subject of lexical loans, their integration in a written text reveal that they are regarded as components of Moroccan Arabic. For instance, the verb تيري *tīri*, which comes from the French *retirer*, and the nouns كارت *kārt*, بلاصه *blāṣa* and فيبر *fibər*, from *carte*, *place* and *fibre*, respectively, are normally inserted within a communication in *dārija*. Additionally, the presence of emphatic *t* and *s* in كارت *kārt* and بلاصه *blāṣa* highlights that these loans are transcribed according to the pronunciation they acquired in Moroccan Arabic. Consequently, despite the absence of a distinction between pharyngeal and non-pharyngeal phonemes in the European languages, the word *carte* and *place* are graphically adapted to the phonology of Moroccan Arabic. In بلاصه *blāṣa* we can note also the replacement of *p*, absent in the phonemic inventory of Classical Arabic, by *b*.

The will of preserving a language as colloquial as possible manifests not only at the lexical level but also in the orthographic representation of Arabic prepositions. Thus, in Example (3), the preposition فـ *f-* ‘in’ is not separated by a space from the subsequent lexeme, as its counterpart في *fī* is in Standard Arabic. Its vowel, which is hardly heard, is not marked in writing. For the same reason, the Moroccan Arabic preposition لـ ‘to’, written as لـ, is directly linked to بـ *bāb* in (4). In the last example, the preposition مع ‘with’, followed by a second person suffix pronoun, marks the lengthening of *a*, as it happens in *dārija*.

These examples appear to highlight a degree of inconsistency in the transliteration of Moroccan Arabic. At times, the transliteration adheres to the conventions and rules of Standard Arabic, while in other cases, it aims to reflect the authentic pronunciation of Moroccan Arabic. Moreover, while lexical loans are adapted to the phonology of Moroccan Arabic in spoken contexts, a similar phenomenon occurs in the written form, which demonstrates that also in written advertisements, Moroccan Arabic can be a valid linguistic choice for those who want to expand their message to a wider audience. The use of *dārija*, which reflects the everyday habits of the majority of Moroccans, fosters a familiar environment with the target audience, which is a crucial factor in the advertising sector.

However, the Arabic script does not constitute a norm for the graphic representation of the *dārija*. As frequently observed on messaging platforms and on social media, the use of the Latin alphabet for writing in Moroccan Arabic is also an alternative. The primary reason for this decision stems from the fact that, with the spread of the first technological tools, keyboards lacked Arabic letters (Innaccaro & Tamburini 2021: 33). This absence compelled Arabs to resort to Latin letters for their communication needs. Subsequently, even after the incorporation of Arabic script into the keyboard, a lot of people, due to habit, have continued to use Latin script for the written expression of their dialect. Nowadays, when it comes to communication or conversation in dialect, this practice is still evident among Moroccans, especially young people. Seven of the advertising panels I captured feature Latin script used for conveying messages in Moroccan Arabic (examples 6-12):

- (6) *Kenzup dima f' jibek* (Kenz'up)
'Kenzup always in your pocket'
- (7) *Khalik hani* (Inwi)
'Take it easy'
- (8) *Wajdine la Fibre Inwi?* (Inwi)
'Are you ready for Inwi fiber?'
- (9) *Siiir b3id fine ma kenti* (Inwi)
'Go far away wherever you are'
- (10) *Excelo: berrrrra3 rassek* (Excelo)
'Excelo: treat yourself well'
- (11) *Partagi La7da, Machi Melts* (Pizza Hut)
'Share the moment, not Melts'
- (12) *Kayn sahd? Kayn McDo!* (Mc Donald's)
'Is it hot? There is McDo!'

At first glance, it is evident that these messages are predominantly aimed at a youthful audience, who exhibit a notable interest in the advertising products. More precisely, Kenz'up is a multi-brand loyalty program that allows people to shop and earn points; the following three advertisements are basically internet offers, while the last two messages are aimed at promoting a new burger and an ice-cream proposed by the chains Pizza Hut and Mc Donald's, respectively. The recognition that the primary users of the advertised services are predominantly young individuals has resulted in the decision to employ Latin characters for these Moroccan Arabic messages. Consequently, this choice reflects the spelling system that is most commonly employed by young Moroccans and stems from the awareness that it will not pose any comprehension issues for the intended audience.

Here, too, different strategies for writing the dialect are put into action. First, it is important to highlight that an *e*, which has not to be pronounced, appears at the end of the word *wajdine* and *fine*, in Examples (8) and (9), respectively. This convention is employed to prevent ambiguity. Indeed, Latin characters coincide with the French ones, and since the French phonological system permits the realization of the nasal [n] only when the latter is followed by a vowel, the word *fin*, which is also part of the French lexicon, could be pronounced as [fɛ̄] in (9). In this sense, the inclusion of the letter *e* at the end of the word facilitates the correct pronunciation of the nasal sound, ensuring that the Moroccan term is phonetically articulated as [fin].

In order to convey the same emphasis that certain words and phrases possess in oral communication, the term *sittir* in (9) is represented with multiple instances of the vowel *i*. This repetition of *i* is deliberately designed to evoke the popular Moroccan football chant that gained significant recognition during the 2020 FIFA World Cup (Berrada 2022).

Further, in Examples (9) and (11) we can observe another particular feature: the incorporation of numerical graphemes to represent certain phonemes that are absent in the Latin alphabet, yet are present in both Standard Arabic and Moroccan Arabic¹⁵. For this reason, *b3id* and *la7da* have numbers representing *f* and *h*, respectively. The choice to include these numbers is in line with the principle that these messages are addressed primarily to young people, since “Romanized script slow down reading and obstruct comprehension especially in the case of adult readers who are not familiar with the numbers used to substitute phonemes for which English graphemes do not exist” (Al-Jarf 2021: 26). Moreover, it is noteworthy to observe that, while both Examples (7) and (9) are advertisements from Inwi, Example (7) does not employ the numerical grapheme “5” to denote the sound [x]. This distinction likely arises from the prevalent practice on social media, where the sound [x] is more commonly represented by the letters *kh* rather than by a numeral, although the latter remains a viable alternative. This phenomenon illustrates that advertisements often favor the most widely recognised and familiar spelling conventions, rather than adhering to a singular, fixed orthographic system, thereby catering to the preferences of their target audience.

¹⁵ Apart from “7” indicating *h* and “3” representing *f*, there are other numerical graphemes used to compensate the lack of some Arabic phonemes in the Latin alphabet (Durand 2009: 32). In particular, “2” for the glottal stop *?* and “9” for the uvular *q* are very frequent. In some rare cases, instead, “4” and “5” represent *g* and *x*, respectively.

From the lexical perspective, a colloquial register predominates, and nominal and verbal insertions from French are adapted to the morphological structure of Moroccan Arabic, as illustrated in Example (11) with the verb *partagi*. A further linguistic phenomenon to observe is the inclination to drop the *l*- of the article or the Arabic *li*- preposition, also reduced to *l*- in *dārija*, before a noun starting with *l*. In Example (8), the preposition *l*- would typically follow the participle *wajdine*; however, due to its position before the French article, it is omitted. This practice similarly applies to Example (11), where it is probable that the term *la7da* incorporates an assimilated article not graphically represented. This phenomenon may arise from the observation that, in spoken language, the article or preposition *l*- would have been naturally assimilated, thus remaining unperceived prior to a word beginning with *l*.

These examples demonstrate that there are no established conventions for writing in *dārija*. Instead, the objective is to grant familiarity by considering the predominant writing systems employed by the intended audience.

In certain instances, the use of multiple languages is accompanied by a change in spelling, resulting in each language being represented by a distinct writing system (examples 13-16):

(13) *WiFi Fibre, L'Max debit [l-kull maġribi]* (Inwi)
 ‘For every Moroccan the maximum speed, WiFi fiber’

(14) *#inwi_m3ak avec la vitesse supérieure de la fibre* (Inwi)
 ‘The fortune + fiber, #inwi_with you with the fiber’s highest speed’

(15) *KitKat [xud l-ək] خد لك break [xud l-ək]* (KitKat)
 ‘Take a break, take a KitKat’

(16) *La fibre d'Orange [kull-na mbbarr̩in b]* (Orange)
 ‘We are all doing very well with Orange fiber’

These messages incorporate an alternative spelling of a foreign noun or phrase. In Example (14), it is noteworthy that the slogan of Inwi (*inwi_m3ak*), although presented in Moroccan Arabic, is rendered in Latin script, adhering to the aforementioned writing conventions. In other cases, the Latin orthography is employed to preserve the original spelling of foreign terms incorporated into these sentences. In (13), an explanation for the fall of *e* in the French masculine article *le*, could be found in the fact that often in the French oral language, one tends to lose the pronunciation of the schwa, so that [lə] becomes [l]. Thus, the French article comes to coincide with the Moroccan article *l*- . In Example (15), instead, the introduction of *break* appears to be primarily driven by the intention to establish two analogous phrases within the message, creating thus a parallelism. Naturally, the interdental sound present in the Arabic verb *أخذ ʔ-x-d* transforms into an alveolar occlusive sound, as is typical in Moroccan Arabic¹⁶.

¹⁶ Interdentals have undergone a phonological merger in Moroccan Arabic, whereby /t/ > /t/, /d/ > /d/ and /d̩/ > /d/. Some exceptions can be found in the north-eastern Morocco. For further details, see Guerrero (2023).

This system arises from the desire to maintain the Latin spelling system for the languages that use it, such as French and English, while for *dārija*, which is an Arabic dialect, Arabic letters are employed. In this way, the phenomenon of code switching, which is very common in Moroccan linguistic landscape, becomes even more prominent, particularly when it comes to contents related to technology.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I examined the evolution of linguistic choices that emerge in the Moroccan advertising oral and written communication that took place over several decades. The findings demonstrate that advertising messages exhibit considerable linguistic diversity, thereby highlighting the intricate sociolinguistic environment of Morocco, where multiple languages coexist and interrelate. However, since for advertising communications it is essential to forge a connection with the target audience, the linguistic choices made within this context are never random. It is important to highlight that, although Berber is recognized as an official language, its presence in advertising remains nearly nonexistent. In the context of television commercials from 2M, Berber appears solely in the daily schedule summary to denote graphically the days on which specific programs will air and is accompanied by Arabic and French. The analysis revealed that neither radio, nor TV used Berber for oral advertising. Moreover, none of the 41 billboards analysed in this study used Berber alphabet for written messages. Undoubtedly, the reason for this lies in the fact that the use of Berber would limit the accessibility of the message, as this language is not understood by all Moroccans. Indeed, the primary objective of advertising is to influence a broad audience; consequently, as this study clearly indicates, Moroccan Arabic is the dominant language utilized in the advertising sector. This language serves as a conduit for Moroccan culture and is comprehended by nearly the entire Moroccan population. It also fosters a sense of familiarity among the addressees.

Conversely, throughout the period of the French protectorate and its aftermath, Morocco adopted the French language within its administrative and educational environments. The current circumstances remain nearly unchanged, which explains the preference for French and Standard Arabic in highly formal settings. Thus, the present study highlights that advertisements endorsing activities organized by governmental entities or national institutions, as well as communications disseminated by the Ministry of Health and/or Education, aim to uphold a degree of seriousness and formality, which is achieved through the use of Standard Arabic and/or French. Also, as far as written messages are concerned, both on TV and billboards, Standard Arabic and French do not pose any problem, as they have their own officially recognised writing system.

The dynamics change when one aims to compose a message in Moroccan Arabic. Given that this dialect lacks any official status and doesn't have a standardised writing system, it leaves the possibility of adopting and/or mixing different systems. This lack of a standardised written system for Moroccan Arabic, however, does not diminish its presence on billboards. In this study, out of the 41 advertising panels that were captured, *dārija* was found in 31 of them, which represents 75% of the cases. However, what this

analysis revealed is that the selection of an orthographic system is intricately connected to the target audience of the advertisements. The representation of *dārija* in Latin script is evidently prevalent in advertisements targeting products that appeal to young people. This approach is grounded in the understanding that it will not hinder comprehension among the intended audience. Indeed, among young Moroccans, the use of Latin characters in messaging applications and social media platforms is very common. Consequently, the use of the Latin alphabet for writing *dārija* can be interpreted as a means to establish a better connection with the target audience, as well as to attract their attention, as this is a fairly recent practice in the advertising context. In contrast, when it comes to marketing products that may appeal to a broader audience, Arabic script is predominantly used for writing in *dārija*. This form of writing is particularly accessible to individuals who may not be accustomed to engaging with social media platforms.

The acknowledgment of the significant role that *dārija* plays in Morocco is undoubtedly a contributing factor to its increasing popularity in written contexts, in advertising and elsewhere. In recent years, indeed, the recognition of *dārija*'s status as a vehicle of Moroccan identity led to a notable expansion in its functionality. Consequently, written Moroccan Arabic is now an essential communication tool that can be utilized across various domains of social and cultural life. Within this framework, this study confirms that there is a redistribution of roles among the different languages that shape the socio-linguistic landscape of Morocco.

Appendix

The appendix illustrates the advertising messages featured on the 41 billboards that were captured and used for the present study.

Messages without any representation of Moroccan Arabic	
Message	Translation
<i>Shoppez malin avec votre carte CIH Bank chez Celio.</i>	Shop smart with you CIH Bank card at Celio.
<i>Fitness Park: rejoins-nous! 190 dhs le premier mois, puis 290 dhs/mois.</i>	Fitness Park: join us! 190 dhs for the first month, then 290 dhs per month.
<i>Allianz: Partenaire Mondial d'Assurances. Ensemble pour aller plus loin!</i>	Allianz: Global Insurance Partner. Together to go further!
<i>Al boraq: découvrez le confort inégalé à bord de nos trains al boraq.</i>	Al boraq: experience the unmatched comfort on board our al boraq trains.
<i>Volkswagen: le future démarre aujourd'hui. Nouveau Touareg 3.OTDI 259cv BVA.</i>	Volkswagen: the future starts today. New Touareg 3.OTDI 259hp BVA.
<i>Simplifiez vos paiements avec Attijariwafa Bank et Google Pay.</i>	Simplify your payments with Attijariwafa Bank and Google Pay.
<i>Aswak assalam: des promos bien étudiées pour la rentrée.</i>	Aswak assalam: well-designed promos the back-to-school.

Inwi: <i>les forfaits entreprises les plus généreux en internet. Sans engagement.</i>	Inwi: the most generous internet corporate packages. Without commitment.
حولوا أموالكم نحو حسابكم في الحين مع بنك افريقيا. [hawwilu ʔamwāla-kum nahwa hisābi-kum fi l-hīn maṣa bank ʔifriqya]	Transfer immediately your money to your account with Bank of Africa.
مؤسسة محمد الخامس للتضامن تساهم في عملية مرحبا 2024. سعداء بباستقبالكم. [muḍassasat muḥammad al-xāmis li-l-taḍāmun tusāhim fi ʔamāliyat marhaba 2024. suṣadā? bi- piṣtiqbāli-kum]	Mohammed V Solidarity Foundation contributes to the Welcome 2024 process. Happy to receive you.

Messages featuring Moroccan Arabic	
Message	Translation
ALSA الحل الارسع للكوتي ديالك [Alsa l-hall l-ʔasraʃ l l-gūti dyāl-ək]	Alsa is the fastest solution for your snack
باقلليل...شري الكثير (BIM) [Bīm, b-əl-qlīl...šri l-kīr]	With less, buy more (BIM)
كارط گيشي خاص و تبرى فاي بلاصه بغطي [kārṭ gīš xallaṣ w-tīri f ʔay blāṣa bgīṭi]	Credit card, pay and withdraw wherever you want
الفiber ديال اورنچ وصلات لباب داركم [l-fibər dyāl ʔorōnž waṣlāt l bāb dār-kum]	The Orange fiber has reached your door
البنك الشعبي معاك خطوة بخطوة حتى تشيري دارك وتحقق أحلامك [l-bank əš-šašbi mṣāk xāṭwa b-xāṭwa ħta tṣri dār-ək w-thaqqaq ʔahlām-ək]	The Popular Bank is with you step by step until you buy your house and your dreams become reality
وفالسلف: إيلا لقتي ما رخص نردو ليك الفرق [wafasalāf: ʔīla lqīti ma rxāṣ nruddu l-ək əl-farq]	Wafasalaf: If you find something cheaper, we'll refund the difference
جواز : أش كتسناؤ دوز...وبراحتاك فوز [žawāz: ʔaš ktsennāw? dūz...w-b-rāḥt-ək fūz]	Jawaz: what are you waiting for? Go by and get your peace
البريد ببنك: خليك قريب ليهم. مع البريد بنك وريا توصلوا بفلوسكم بسرعة وأمان [al-barīd bank: xallī-k qrīb lī-hum. mṣā l-barīd bank w-rīya ttwaṣṣlu b-flūṣ-kum b-surṣa w-ʔamān]	Al Barid Bank: stay close to them. With Al Barid Bank and Ria you get your money fast and safe
لافاش كيري ديما مرا فاقانا [la-vāš-ki-rī dīma mrāfqa-na]	LaVacheQuiRit is always with us.
اتصالات المغرب: عيطة لحبابك مع نجمة 22 [pittisālat al-maġrib: ʃayyt l-hbāb-ək mṣā nəżma 22]	Maroc Telecom: call your loved ones with star 22.
Ikea: تخفيضات حتال 80% كل ما غتحاجو لداركم بسعر منخفض [rikīya: taxfiḍāt htāl 80%. kull ma ġa-təħtāżu l-dār-kum b-siṛr munxaṣṣid]	Ikea: discounts up to 80%. everything you need for your home at a discount.
خلص فواتيرك وخلي بالك هاني مع [xallaṣ fawātīr-ək w-xalli bāl-ək hāni mṣā ʔem ti kāš]	Pay your bills and let your mind rest with MT cash.

CIH Bank: خصل الضربيه ديلك فابور وغير بكليك [se-i-āš bank: xallaš əd-darība dyāl-ək fabūr w-ġīr b-klīk]	CIH Bank: pay your fee for free and with just one click.
قطع الكار سهولة من دارك [markūb.ʔem-ʔa qatṭāč əl-kār b-suhūla mən dār-ək]	Markoub.ma: book your coach with ease from home.
ONCF هاد العطلة غاشوف كلشي مع بطاقة Yalla Morocco [hād əl-ħoṭla ġa-tšūf kull-šīt mħa biṭāqa-t yalla morōkko]	ONCF During this holiday you will see everything with Yalla Morocco card.
النفط طبع. كلين لعب 1x2 وكلين لعب العاقدة [kotē-ē-spōb: ən-nīvū ħlaġ. kāyñ laħb 1x2 w-kāyñ laħb əl-ħabāqira]	Cote&Sport: the level has risen. There are 1x2 games and there are games for geniuses.
الهمزة [al-hamza] + Fibre, #inwi_m3ak avec la vitesse supérieure de la fibre	The fortune + fiber, #inwi_withyou with the fiber's highest speed.
خد لك [xūd l-ək] خد لك break [xūd l-ək]	Take a break, take a KitKat.
كترت بها وليداتي كاملن Dalaa [dalāħ kabbart bi-ha wlīdāt-i kāmlīn]	I raised all my children with Dalaa.
كنا مبرعين ب Orange: la fibre d'Orange [ʔorōnħ: kull-na mbarrħiñ b la fibr d orōnħ]	Orange: We are all doing very well with Orange fiber.
اتصالات المغرب: بلا حدود scroolé [ʔittisālāt al-mağrib: skrōlē blā hudūd]	Maroc Telecom: scroll without limits.
Inwi: WiFi Fibre, L'Max débit [l-kull mağribi] لكل مغربي	For each Moroccan the maximum speed, WiFi fiber.
Inwi: Khalik hani	Inwi: Take it easy.
Wajdine la Fibre Inwi?	Are you ready for Inwi fiber?
Inwi: Siiir b3id fine ma kenti	Inwi: Go far away wherever you are.
Pizza Hut: Partagi La7da, Machi Melts	Pizza Hut: share the moment, not Melts.
Mc Donald's: kayn sahd? Kayn McDo!	Mc Donald's: is it hot? There is McDo!
Excelo: berrrrra3 rassek	Excelo: treat yourself well
Kenz'up dima f' jibek	Kenz'up always in your pocket.
Richbond: 7it testahlou ahssan ne3sa	Richbond: as you deserve the best sleep
Lamacom: امم...تير عکووم [ʔammm...tbarraħ-kum] N°1 des ustensiles de cuisine au Maroc	Lamacom treats you very well. Number 1 kitchen utensils in Morocco.

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