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**PAPER**

# English in a multilingual Algeria

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**Abstract**

The presence of English in the former French colony of Algeria has been dramatically increasing. The impact of the language in Algeria has fluctuated due to sociopolitical instability in the late 1980s and 1990s. Prior to describing the impact of English, some general background about the country is provided, along with a brief historical overview of the linguistic diversity. Historical highlights of the spread of English in Algeria are also described. A profile of the users of English in the Maghreb nation is detailed as well, before discussing the various uses of English in various domains. The competition between English and French for linguistic territory is also discussed.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

There has been a rapid diffusion of English in Algeria. For example, the US Embassy in Algeria and Berlitz Center launched a new language program in the summer of 2013. The program offers 'free English language classes to all ages regardless of their current proficiency levels.'<sup>1</sup> From 2009 to 2012, the oil company Anadarko sponsored a British Council-led program, in cooperation with Algeria's Ministry of Education, to train 69 English teachers through the program 'English for the Future' (*Liberte*, 2012a). In 2012, ETS Global, a subsidiary of Educational Testing Service, conducted a seminar on English language training and testing among Algerian businesses and schools of management and engineering (*Liberte*, 2012b). Given the dramatic increase in the status and functions of the English language in (traditionally French-dominated) Algeria, this article sets out to describe key aspects of the spread of English in this linguistically diverse country.

Documenting the ways in which English has spread in Algeria is important to several stakeholders. First, foreign ELT professionals could benefit from becoming aware of the context in which they work. Second, local policy makers could take stock of such a synthesis and better understand the extent of the presence of English in society beyond business and education to help continue making informed decisions. Additionally, highlighting the political, business, and educational implications of political leaders' language policy decisions could raise awareness among the political elite about the impact of their choices. Documentation of the spread of English in Algeria would address a major gap within the world Englishes research and scholarship identified by Berns (2005). She points out that, although there is a much greater understanding of the spread, functions, and status of English and its users in the international context, previous research has focused primarily on the Inner and Outer Circles. Restricting the scope of research to these two circles and neglecting the Expanding Circle limits our understanding of English, which is a problem this article helps address. Specifically, Berns (2005) has outlined a research agenda for Expanding Circle research and scholarship to address the

problem of lack of research on, for example, the context of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The Middle East and North Africa region is particularly under-represented in world Englishes research. Berns's (2005: 91) proposed research agenda includes, for instance, 'drawing profiles of countries and regions where none have yet been done.' One of the countries where no sociolinguistic profiles have been done is Algeria. In fact, according to Sayahi (2014), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)-French competition has allowed English to flourish in not only Algeria but the larger Maghreb region as well, but only Tunisia received significant attention. English in Morocco was relatively recently studied as well (Marley, 2005). This article profiles the roles of English in Algeria in a comprehensive up-to-date synthesis.

I use newspaper sources, previous literature on aspects of the presence of English in the region, intelligence reports, government documents, popular sources such as social media and other online venues, and personal experience to shed light on the unprecedented phenomenon of the diffusion of English in the former French colony. Following the practice of other articles providing a sociolinguistic profile of a society (Berns, 1990; Bernstein, 1971; Ferguson, 1966; Kachru, 1983), this article begins with a discussion of the demographics of the region. It then moves on to describe the various linguistic influences on the indigenous Berber languages of the region.<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, a brief historical synopsis of the main aspects of the presence of English in postcolonial Algeria is presented. Details regarding the profile of English users in the region precede a description of the variety of regulative, interpersonal, creative, and instrumental functions English fulfills in Algeria; attention in the section on the instrumental function here will highlight challenges in English language teaching/learning. With increased presence of English comes an intensified rivalry with French, which has been entrenched in the country for a long time. The dynamics of this rivalry and its impact are discussed. It is important to include the role of French in Algeria because of the potential of this language in keeping English influence limited and in remaining a dominant language in its own right.

## 2 | GENERAL BACKGROUND

Algeria (Figure 1) is a culturally and linguistically diverse North African country. Its population is around 38 million and its size is over 2 million km<sup>2</sup>. There are two main distinct groups of people among the Algerian population: Algerian Arabic speakers and Berber speakers. Among the Berbers, there are the Chaoui, the Kabyles, the Mozabites, and the Tuareg ethnic groups. There are also several varieties of Algerian Arabic, though there is less variation amongst them compared with variation among the Berber varieties. About 30% of the Algerian population consists of Berber native speakers (Chaker, 2007). Language users speak a variety of Arabic known as Derja, a variety of Berber, and/or French. Code-switching using a Berber variety, Derja, and French is common among Berber speakers. The majority of native dialectal Arabic speakers do not speak Berber; thereby code-switching among dialectal Arabic and French only.

## 3 | A HISTORY OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN ALGERIA

To better understand the sociolinguistic situation in Algeria, a brief historical overview of linguistic diversity in the North African Maghreb region, where Algeria belongs, is provided. During the pre-Islamic Berber era, according to Fitouri, the Maghreb emerged as a political and cultural community before 215 BC (as cited in Ennaji, 2005). Massinissa was one of the most well-known kings who united Berber tribes at the time and developed agriculture (Ennaji, 2005). Following an invasion by the Vandals, extended contact between Berber and Latin occurred between 215 BC and 440 AD, when the Maghreb became Roman territory. Colonies were set up to export grains to Italy. According to Ennaji (2005), Latin was introduced to the region, but did not have a lasting influence because the Romans were more interested in trade and less so in assimilating the locals and imposing their language. In 534 AD, the Byzantines, coming from Europe, occupied the Maghreb (Ennaji, 2005).



**FIGURE 1** Map of Algeria [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]  
Source: CIA (2017).

The Arab-Islamic period began in 647 AD when Arabs conquered the Christian Byzantine Empire in the Maghreb. The indigenous local Berber populations were Arabized throughout the centuries partly 'because Islam brought with it a strong language, a great literary culture and a relatively advanced system of administration and education' (Ennaji, 2005: 17). Many Berbers gradually moved to cities, spoke a local variety of Arabic, and started identifying themselves as Arabs and Muslims (Ennaji, 2005). The French colonized Algeria from 1830 to 1962, while imposing a protectorate on Morocco and Tunisia for a while during this period (Ennaji, 2005). It is worth noting here that while colonization refers to a total control of Algeria and its annexation with France, the protectorate implies some degree of autonomy for the locals in Morocco and Tunisia. Algeria, in fact, was a department of France. Like the Arab-Muslims before them, the French brought advanced administration and education systems. Unsurprisingly, among all of the Maghreb's conquerors, the Arabs and the French have had the greatest impact linguistically and culturally due to bringing these advanced educational and administrative systems and working towards imposing them long-term (Ennaji, 2005).

## 4 | THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 4.1 | 1950s-70s: English language teaching, policy and planning

Research on policy, teaching and planning in Algeria provide illustrations of key developments in the mid-twentieth century. A useful perspective on the status of English after independence in 1962 is Hayane's (1989) analysis of English textbooks and teaching manuals. He used textbooks published in France from 1962 to 1975, when the first Algerian textbook appeared. Comparison of the French-produced and Algerian-produced manuals highlights their writers' respective cultural and pedagogical values. Hayane (1989) found that the Algerian textbook writer, stung by their painful memories of and experience with French colonialism, seemed to view English with suspicion, for fear of a neocolonial experience similar to that of France. Thus, they stripped the language of British cultural content and inserted cultural information they deemed to be Algerian instead. In a survey of Algerian

students about this move, he learned that students denied wanting their culture to be reflected in English textbooks. Rather, they indicated that they wished to see a comparison of the Algerian and British cultures. Hayane concluded that political factors such as tinkering with the cultural values to be reflected in the textbook should not interfere with pedagogical considerations. He further recommended that the country should promote Algerian Arabic and Berber and encourage the study of these local languages to improve foreign language teaching, including that of English.

## 4.2 | Early 1980s: The vibrant presence of English

In the British Council's 1984 report, a comprehensive sociolinguistic profile of English in Algeria described English as a third language (British Council, 1984). The profile was needed for those involved in overseas training, technology transfer, and to a lesser extent primary and secondary education. Some fields in higher education required a reading knowledge. At that time, there were many teachers who were British expatriates and the Algerian government wanted to recruit more. This effort was met with such problems as transfer of Algerian currency to the UK, lack of multiple exit visas, and university requirements for a PhD degree. Besides formal education, many organizations taught English to their employees to facilitate communication with colleagues overseas such as Radio Television Algérienne, Ministry of Defense, and Institute of Petroleum Studies. The British Council also reported that some individuals, including Francophones, argued for making English the primary foreign language to be taught. English as a first foreign language is believed to have the potential to help raise the quality of education in Algeria and promote social progress since English was recognized as the language of science and technology. English in Algeria enjoyed British and American support in the 1980s. The former ran a Direct Teaching of English Operation in Algiers through the British Council, which also helped with teacher-training and provided scholarships for study in Britain. Also, Radio Television Algérienne broadcast *Follow me* and *On we go*, two British TV productions. America's embassy operated the American School and a Cultural Center that had a library. At the time, two Fulbright lecturers were teaching English in Algeria, and Algerians were awarded scholarships for study in the US every year. Even now in 2016, after a break in the 1990s due to a civil war, many Algerians still receive scholarships from the United States, as will be explained later.

## 4.3 | Late, 1980s-90s: The oil slump and the Algerian civil war

In the late, 1980s, when oil prices fell dramatically, Algeria experienced severe economic, political, and social unrest. Today, 60% of the budget comes from oil revenues (CIA, 2017) and the heavy reliance on oil is not new. When oil prices fell in the 1980s, known as the Black Decade, uncertainty about the future set in. This time was marked by a period of civil war and a dramatic reduction of the presence of English. British and American influence waned, possibly in part because of a lack of safety to their personnel. Even though classroom instruction time remained the same, the presence of English was confined to public schools. All other support and activity disappeared due to the war. Despite this decline, the government, according to Benrabah (1999), attempted in the mid-1990s to replace French with English in fourth grade in some schools by offering English as an option alongside French. However, this experimental program failed as most parents chose French over English. Benrabah (1999) speculated that one reason for parents' rejection of English was their perception that French was easier to acquire in Algeria and was more useful for socioeconomic prosperity. The impetus for the government's move could be seen as a compromise with religious conservatives, to whom English serves as a tool to show solidarity with the Arabic-speaking Middle East (Benrabah, 1999).

## 5 | THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH SINCE THE 2000s

The foregoing historical overview outlines the initially flourishing ELT industry and then its decline in Algeria in the, 1900s. This section will sketch how activity picked back up, culminating in the current resurgence of English. A description of the cultural and academic programs the British, French and American embassies promote provides insight into

**TABLE 1** Exchange programs offered by the US Embassy to Algerian citizens

| Program name   | Description   |
|--|---|
| 1. Study of the United States Institutes-Global Student Leaders Program (SUSI) | The SUSI program is a fully funded five-week intensive academic program in the US for undergraduate student leaders. Participants develop leadership and collective problem-solving skills, while exploring and gaining a deeper understanding of US history and culture. The Institute consists of hands-on leadership training workshops, group discussions, teambuilding, effective communication, and management skills. Community service projects, optional home stays and other opportunities for interaction with American peers, and other cultural activities are also included.  |
| 2. The Near East and South Asia Undergraduate Exchange Program (NESA UGRAD)    | The Near East and South Asia Undergraduate Exchange Program (NESA UGRAD) is a part of the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (Global UGRAD Program), a scholarship program managed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, US Department of State for emerging student leaders from underrepresented sectors around the world. Launched in 2007, NESA UGRAD provides a substantive exchange experience at a US college or university for students from the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Participants engage in one year of undergraduate, non-degree studies at a diverse network of accredited two- and four-year institutions. Participants engage in local community service projects and take part in cultural enrichment activities. Host institutions provide participants with academic skill development classes. NESA UGRAD is administered by American Councils for International Education on behalf of the US Department of State. |

the spread of English in a competitive linguistic environment. According to Abid-Houcine (2007), while French is still omnipresent, English enjoys tremendous favor among Algerians, a situation not unlike that in Morocco (Marley, 2005). In 2004, France launched a massive program to train 2,000 Algerian French teachers, culminating in as many Master's Degrees. The French Language Doctoral School is implemented in several Algerian universities, offering degrees officially recognized by France and Algeria. Algerian and French professors supervise theses and dissertations. The brightest students receive scholarships to further their studies in France. In addition, the French Embassy donates books to university libraries and supports the publication of books in French (Abid-Houcine, 2007: 6–7). The UK also engages in academic and cultural exchange with Algeria. For example, according to the HuffPost Algérie (2014), eight of the prestigious Chevening scholarships were granted to outstanding Algerian professionals for MA programs in British universities. One of the goals is to build a professional network and promote development in Algeria. Some of the most encouraged specializations include economics, politics, and various engineering programs. Britain also plans to prepare 500 Algerian PhD students in British universities between 2015 and 2020.

Algeria and the US cooperate largely in the areas of hydrocarbons, such as Algerian export of oil to the US and the fight against terrorism. However, the involvement of the United States Embassy's Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs in promoting American English and culture receives little attention. The reality is the US Embassy in Algeria is very active in this regard. In fact, the Public Affairs Section hosts a booth at the Annual Algiers International Book Fair. In 2013, an astounding, more than a million visitors in a country of 40 million hailed from different *Wilayas* (or 'provinces') to learn about the Embassy's Information Resource Center, American Corners, and EducationUSA. Hundreds of Algerian students enquired about studying in the United States, and were introduced to the Embassy's social media and YouTube pages (Embassy News, 2013). The United States Embassy has advertised 13 academic, cultural, and professional programs offered to Algerian citizens at the time of writing this paper. The United States Department of State Bureau of Cultural and Academic Affairs, broadly defines its goals as follows:

*The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' youth programs empower the next generation and establish long-lasting ties between the United States and other countries. Exchange programs focus primarily on secondary schools and colleges to promote mutual understanding, leadership development, educational transformation and democratic ideals. (Exchange Programs, 2013)*

For insight into the role of the United States in the spread of English in Algeria, Table 1 highlights two of the 13 programs that the US Embassy offers to Algerian citizens. I selected these two particular programs because they are

focused on promoting mutual understanding between cultures. Additionally, my sister and I participated in one of them, NESAS UGRAD, and thus I am very familiar with it. Common across the many programs is the focus on increased mutual understanding between the people of the United States and those of other countries. One key take-away from Table 1 below (reproduced word for word) is that one of the forces behind the spread of English in Algeria is the US Embassy's involvement in cultural and academic exchange programs. These programs are aimed at the building of a strong civil society that could cooperate with the US, develop participants' home countries economically and beyond, and reduce conflict in the region.

Such opportunities are also available for study in France, as well as other European universities. Erasmus Mundus is just one example. It describes itself thus:

*Erasmus Mundus is a cooperation and mobility programme in the field of higher education that aims to enhance the quality of European higher education and to promote dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with Third-Countries. In addition, it contributes to the development of human resources and the international cooperation capacity of Higher education institutions in Third Countries by increasing mobility between the European Union and these countries. (Erasmus Mundus, 2017)*

From my personal experience, I have observed a friendly competition to recruit Algerian students to European and American universities, aiming at improving ties between various countries, promoting education, socio-economic well-being, and mutual understanding, and reducing conflict.

## 6 | ALGERIAN USERS OF ENGLISH

A helpful concept in gaining insight into the nature of Algerian users of English is that of a 'cline of bilingualism.' According to Kachru (1978, 1990), standardized or educated English users of a given region usually speak a sub-variety of that educated variety. Examples of these sub-varieties in Algeria, as referred informally to by some, include Berglish and Derjish. These two terms refer to the combination of Inner Circle British or American English combined with linguistic characteristics of local Algerian languages like Berber and Derja. An equivalent of these English sub-varieties in Algeria could be compared to Konglish in the Republic of Korea. On the cline of bilingualism, the competence of Derjish users could be measured to be closer to zero since the competence of its users tends to be basic. While they have a limited ability to use the language, they usually are unable to use it in such serious circumstances as a lengthy professional phone call in the workplace. Professionals in the oil and gas industry in Algeria's southern Sahara desert, however, tend to be on either the central or ambilingual point of the cline as they need English fairly regularly for professional purposes and in many instances receive formal language training to be able to reach the required level. In this section, I explore the characteristics and circumstances of various Algerian users of English to provide the reader insight into their cline of bilingualism as defined by Kachru (1978) and applied in Berns (1988, 1992). I describe the forces that shape the formation of Algerian groups of English users and delineate their characteristics.

### 6.1 | The oil and gas industry as a driver of demand for English by Algerian users

As noted above, the towns of Hassi Messaoud and Hassi R'mel in the Sahara Desert in the south of Algeria are home to a great deal of advanced English users, most of whom work in the oil and gas industry. In fact, among all industries nationally that demand the most English proficient users, the oil and gas industry produces an astounding 96.5% of the demand. Major companies in this industry, where English is important, include Sonatrach (Algerian company), Anadarko (American company), and Total (French company). Only 5% of companies surveyed from many industries indicated that they require fluent English, 36% require intermediate, 25% require what they deemed to be good English, and 34% require a basic level (Euromonitor, 2012). Outside of the oil and gas industry, English users of large companies with such professions as secretary, manager, and director tend to earn more than non-English users for the same job (Euromonitor, 2012), but English is not as necessary as it is in the oil and gas industry.

## 6.2 | Government as a driver of English demand by Algerian users

In addition to the oil and gas industry, another area that prompts an increase in the number of users of English is government investment in the quality of English instruction. Pupils now start learning English from 6th rather than 8th grade in public K-12 schools and human resources are provided by the authorities to support the change. Furthermore, private language centers, the US Embassy, and British Council support of various English education programs, contribute to the rise in the number of users since the end of the civil war of the 1990s. Facilitated by the Algerian government's Communications Ministry, the advent of the Internet and mobile technology has also facilitated access to online resources and platforms for English learning and use thereby driving up the number of Algerian youth using English.

## 6.3 | The Internet as a driver of demand for English by Algerian users

While the bilingualism cline of Algerian English users has historically been largely driven by top-down government policies in education and dynamics in the oil and gas industry, the Internet today is a bottom-up platform for Algerian English users to reach the higher ends of the cline. The advent of such social media spaces as Facebook and YouTube offers a platform for Algerian youth to express themselves in English and become users of this language in an unprecedented fashion. The cline of English user proficiency on social media tends generally to be a function-based sub-variety of educated English and hovers on the lower end around zero, but some users of English are found to be on the central point or the higher ambilingual point. For example, there is a Facebook group of the *Algerian Association of Teachers of English*, and many of these teachers are highly proficient in English. While some Algerian English teachers panic the day before a lesson and, using fragmented sentences typical of online language use, frantically ask their fellow teachers for ideas on how to conduct a given lesson, others seem to be comfortable with their role as English teachers and deploy their educated English. In the extract below, an Algerian English user, an anonymous teacher of English on Facebook using excellent English, describes the struggles of an Algerian learner to become proficient in the language:

*I've been trying to master English for years, but in Algeria, the kind of publication you find in English is way different from the kind of publication you find in French. In English you only find some novels and short-story books, and a few other titles that are usually very, very expensive. Novels and short-story books are, in contrast, cheaper, and sometimes, they're even printed in Algeria to sell them at an even cheaper price and encourage people to read. However, an English-book environment where there are just novels and short-story books is a very poor environment that's not very inviting to a reader who likes to read a bit of everything. No newspapers, no magazines, no science or history books. That's what would lead an Algerian English-speaking reader to frustration and to read books about other stuff either in French or (to a lesser degree) in Arabic [sic]. This is one of the hurdles that the expansion of English is facing on a sociolinguistic level.*

While historically overshadowed by French in all domains of use, today, Algerian users of English seem to have found space for expressing themselves in English throughout many kinds of Internet communication.

## 6.4 | English among school teachers

Another significant group of Algerian users of English, supported by the above-mentioned forces, is the teachers of the language. Toward the end of my second year as an English major in Algeria, where a bachelor's in English was a three-year degree, I became anxious about my preparedness to be an English teacher with my proficiency at the time. This is a typical concern of many Algerian English teachers, illustrated by the earlier quote of the English teacher's Facebook comment. Because French is the main outlet for Algerians toward the West and there are strong economic ties with France, many domains, including the media landscape as the teacher lamented, offer little for Algerian English users to develop English proficiency as effortlessly as Algerians do in French. However, my observation of the posts of English teachers on the Facebook group indicates that the teachers tend to be on the higher ambilingual end of the proficiency cline. While some might post fragmented sentences, this is typical of online language use and I do not believe it says much about their ability to use educated English.

## 6.5 | Affluent or educated Algerian elites as English users

Aside from the democratization of access to English through public schooling by the government and access to the Internet, it is mostly affluent and educated Algerians who use English. In fact, 86% of affluent respondents to a Euromonitor survey are able to speak English at an intermediate level, while only 15% of respondents of a lower socioeconomic status speak it at the same level of proficiency (Euromonitor, 2012). Furthermore, 74% of educated survey respondents consider English to be important (Euromonitor, 2012). It is thus, mostly educated Algerians who use the language, including students. While they are not necessarily affluent, albeit a great deal are, these educated English users usually manage to develop English proficiency.

## 6.6 | English among university students

Borni (2017) explored English-using Algerian students' use of the language outside of the classroom. Surveying 30 English Master's students, the author reports that 89% agree and strongly agree that it is important for Algerians to learn English. The author adds that 70% use English at home, while the rest do not, mainly because they use *Derja* instead and do not know anyone else with whom to use English. While 53% of respondents do not use English with 'native speakers', 46% do so sometimes, which is still a large segment by Algeria's standards. The majority of participants (70%) set their phones in English and use the language in public. In terms of feeling capable of communicating about daily activities, 76% reported the ability to do so well. In relation to French, 96% of participants believe that French is dominant because of colonization, and 86% agreed and strongly agreed that, if English were to gain the status of primary foreign language, Algerians would use it more than French. Perhaps explaining the hesitance of some to use English in public or with family in Algeria, 56% responded that doing so would be disrespectful. Culturally, of all the respondents, 76% are not concerned about losing one's identity by using English. Also, at a time when some have argued for an Islamic English (Mahboob, 2009), 53% of the largely Muslim respondents do not believe that the language belongs to non-Muslims. Furthermore, an increasing number of students, an important segment of the Algerian population of English users, join language centers to learn English, believed to open doors to study abroad, travel abroad, and enjoy better living standards. While 84% of Algerian students study in France and 2% in Canada (mostly in French-speaking Quebec), 14% study in other countries, including the US and Malaysia (Euromonitor, 2012). These students are usually proficient in English for the purposes of their education. For instance, I know of three Algerian students in the United States and they come from Algiers and Constantine, two of Algeria's largest cities. It is usually urban youth as is the case with these three students who are most proficient in English and study abroad in non-French or MSA speaking countries.

## 6.7 | English among Algerian scientists

Slougui (2009) argues that, in addition to issues of funding, brain drain toward Western countries, and a lack of various material resources in Algeria, Algerian scientists face language difficulties when attempting to publish in English. Due to the use of English as an instrument for scholarship and research in Algeria and beyond, user proficiency in the language is required. In fact, out of 1,410 national projects published in Algeria between, 1998 and 2003, 681 (48%) were published in English, followed by French with 528 (37%) (Slougui, 2009). However, despite English being the language in which most scientific publications by Algerian scientists are produced, a great many Algerian scientists have a reading knowledge only in English, and writing is more difficult to them. It is worth noting, however, that despite the trivial number of scientific publications (1,410 between 1998 and 2003), these numbers show the importance of English among Algeria's scientific community. To put this in perspective, while French dominates heavily in business and even as an instrument of conveying scientific knowledge in classrooms, English is the language Algerian scientists end up using to publish the most professionally. Thus, Slougui (2009) argues that there is work to be done to meet Algerian scientists' discourse and language needs in English so that they can reach their full potential and publish in English internationally. Bringing these scientists to the higher end of the bilingualism cline so that they can publish as

comfortably in English as many are capable of in French requires continued support by all parties involved in English education.

## 6.8 | English among journalists

Algerian journalists predominantly use MSA and/or French, and in a few instances use English. For example, the *Algerian Press Service*, the government's official press agency, employs English-using journalists. Reading the English news articles they publish, it is observed that the writing proficiency of the journalists is advanced. It is unclear whether English native-speaking expatriates are employed as well by the agency, but it seems most likely that Algerian journalists are employed in the context of such an Algerian government job. Private newspapers using MSA also tend to employ journalists with an intermediate to advanced English proficiency to run an online version of their newspapers in English. *Echourouk* and *Ennahar* newspapers are prominent in this area. The journalists from these two newspapers tend to share British Council content for learning English, for example, but generally news articles written in English are sporadic and the English online pages are either not regularly updated or completely inaccessible at times.

## 6.9 | English among Algerian tourism professionals

Algerian tourism professionals use English to varying degrees of proficiency on the bilingualism cline. For example, in the summer of, 2009, I went on an Algerian road trip with my father and two American friends. We visited a variety of ancient Roman ruins across the country. In one of the historic sites, the Algerian tour guide spoke to my father and me in Algerian Arabic because we too are Algerian. However, he insisted that he is proud of his limited English proficiency because it is important for his profession. While tourism in Algeria is not as developed as in neighboring Morocco and Tunisia, the tour guide indicated that he still gets tourists every once in while with whom he uses English. French is the main language of tourism in Algeria because it is mainly French tourists who visit the country, but English is used to some extent as well with tourists from non-French speaking countries. Whereas I spent a great deal of time translating to my American friends from Algerian Arabic to English, the tour guide was happy to speak in English with them at times. This anecdote is intended to illustrate the dynamics of English use among tourism professionals in Algeria. Additionally, it is possible tourism professionals employed by the national office of tourism and high-end hotels in the capital city Algiers are proficient in English due to their higher exposure to a diverse visitor population, including diplomats.

## 6.10 | English among administrators and government officials

While most Algerian administrators use MSA or French as official and de facto official languages respectively in their profession, some use English. For example, the administrators in the Algerian consulate in New York and the Algerian Embassy in Washington DC use English. Despite their ability to use English around, in my estimation, the central point of the bilingualism cline, the officials sometimes respond in French or Algerian Arabic on the phone. I sometimes even use Algerian Arabic, Berber, English, and French in the same phone conversation with an Algerian consular official in New York. Further, due to the international status of English, it is possible that Algerian officials in many foreign countries use English when neither party knows the language of the other. It is also likely that even officials in administrative offices located in Algeria use English when interacting with foreigners without another shared language or while on business trips abroad, outside of Francophone regions.

## 6.11 | English among music artists

Algerian artists are also English users at times. For example, an Algerian rap artist named Zed-K on YouTube sings a song titled *Down* and includes several English words throughout the song. Another Algerian group of rappers call their band *Desert Boys*. A YouTube channel is called *Blidian [Algerian city] Thugz*. Further, another rapper's interview

on Ennahar TV in, 2017 went viral after comparing himself to 2Pac. The rapper's name roughly translates as *Anouch Mafia the American* due to his American rap style. While these Algerian artists, specifically rappers, have an English proficiency that is approximately measured to be toward the bottom of Kachru's (1978) bilingualism cline, they still use English to the extent they can for their purposes. The users capitalize on the prestige of English and the cool image associated with American rappers among their Algerian audience to reach Algerian youth with an Algerian national message, including such topics as poverty and politics in Algeria. Moreover, at a concert in France, Rachid Taha, another Algerian singer, adapted a song by the British rock band *Clash*. The song is *Rock the Casbah* and, while the chorus is in English in Taha's version, the singer used Algerian Arabic for the rest of the song. The way the singer skillfully used English and Algerian Arabic in the adapted song seems appealing to some listeners, compared to the original British and English-only version. As one person commenting on the YouTube video asserted, 'This tops the original English version.' While some YouTube commenters disagreed and found the song poor and the Algerian Arabic hard to understand, others found positivity and meaning in Taha's version: 'Always love it when cultures integrate. Music is the universal language of love, acceptance and peace.' It is unclear to what extent other professional artists use English and how they use it in relation to other languages in their linguistic repertoire. What is clear is that the majority of Algerian musicians perform in France and Quebec and mostly use Algerian Arabic, Berber, or French, while English is sporadically but increasingly used thanks to its prestige and that of its, usually American and British, speakers.

## 6.12 | English-using Algerian diaspora

Whereas the overwhelming majority of the Algerian diaspora is in France, the United States is an increasingly attractive destination. Thanks to the American Diversity Visa program, commonly known as the lottery visa, over a thousand Algerians make the US their new home every year, many of whom the author of this article has met personally. They tend to be young, male, recent university graduates, and have limited English proficiency. A challenge many of them face is the recognition of their Algerian degree in the US. Many engage in low-skilled labor at Walmart, in restaurants, hotels, zoos, and warehouses until they start their own business one day or get a satisfying full-time job if they wish to change jobs. Algerians in the US have a Facebook page called *Algerian Community in USA* with 29,831 members at the time of writing. They usually post in English, but sometimes in Algerian Arabic, French, or a mix. On the bilingualism cline, they tend to be closer to zero in English. However, some take free English classes in their local community. For example, a friend of mine, a new Algerian immigrant in the US, invested over 100 dollars in an English textbook and a small registration fee to learn English in his community. As part of his job at Walmart, he manages to communicate with a basic level of English for the purposes of his job, and when oral communication does not work, his English-speaking supervisor demonstrates how to carry out instructions using such semiotic resources as body language and pointing at items in the surrounding physical environment. English seems to have never been a major concern for him in preparation to come to the US and even while currently living and working in the US. While rare, some Algerian Americans formally study English in a university ESL program, and later study in a community college or university. Once they improve their English, they might have additional job prospects and improved living standards if they wish to pursue them.

## 6.13 | English and gender in Algeria

As far as gender, as in many aspects of Algerian users of English, it is hard to estimate given a lack of information. Traditionally, only men going to the south to work in oil and gas companies use English, and, in the oil and gas industry, it is mainly men who are proficient in the English language. However, in the Department of English where I studied in Algeria, out of approximately 40 students in my 2006 cohort, a mere five or so were male. In Algerian higher education, it seems that it is mostly women who study English language and literature. Men do dominate the science and technology fields however, and usually have at least a reading knowledge of English, especially at the postgraduate level.



**FIGURE 2** Algerian *Desert Boys* rap band wearing Chicago Bulls hats [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

## 7 | THE USES OF ENGLISH IN ALGERIA

The functions English plays in the Algerian context illustrate its diffusion in the former French colony. Specifically, English is used to convey prestige, is used for interpersonal communication in formal and professional setting, serve the regulative, creative/innovative functions, and instrumental function.

### 7.1 | The interpersonal function of English in Algeria

Although Algerian Arabic and Berber are predominant in creating and maintaining interpersonal relationships in person and online, English is used, albeit to a limited extent and to varying degrees depending on the context. Algerian participants of a Euromonitor (2012) survey indicate that some of their reasons for learning English include use of the Internet and interaction with people from around the world. To better understand this survey result, a description of how Algerians use English online is provided. In addition, the interpersonal function of English is also fulfilled by the use of the language for professional communication, prestige, status, and modernization, all of which are also described as part of a description of the interpersonal function.

### 7.2 | Prestige and status

The prestige and status of English are widely capitalized upon to convey certain values in Algeria. Businesses do not hesitate to take advantage of the values associated with the English language. For example, a small business in a small town in the Kabylie region in northeastern Algeria calls their coffee shop *Black and White Café*. A fast food restaurant calls itself *Las Vegas*. The membership of an intramural soccer team at the University of M'hamed Bougara call themselves *Hell Boys*. In addition to groups and businesses, individuals also take advantage of English as a symbol of prestige and its use to project a certain status. To show social status, I was once told, a young man had gone so far as to get his haircut with the letters *USA* cut into it. Several young men can be seen wearing hats and shirts of American sports' teams, mostly basketball teams, including the Chicago Bulls, as Figure 2 illustrates. These examples reflect the prestige that is associated with American English and American culture. Additionally, English in Algeria has come to be regarded as synonymous with modernization and the idealized lifestyle portrayed by the Hollywood entertainment industry. It serves as a way for the people to convey linguistic sophistication, membership in an elite group of intellectuals and celebrities, and a modern and open lifestyle consistent with that portrayed in American movies and television shows. Algerian and Tunisian soccer game commentators do not hesitate to scream 'goaaaaal' or 'fantastic' in English when a team scores, even though the MSA term for 'goal' is 'haddaf.' In addition, a popular Algerian YouTube video blogger called Anes Tina produced a video with the words *Tina as way of life* written into the front of his shirt. Another example is the small business opened by a friend of mine recently,

called *Hamdi Works* (pseudonym used for last name). Despite having a written chat with him in French, my friend insisted that his business is efficient because he believes that 'time is money,' which he expressed in English. The anecdote illustrates a trend in Algeria where businesses capitalize on the prestigious status of English to convey a modern image of effectiveness and great service. In addition to small businesses, English serves as an essential communicative tool for Algerian government officials and employees in a group of large multinationals based in Algeria, where English is used professionally.

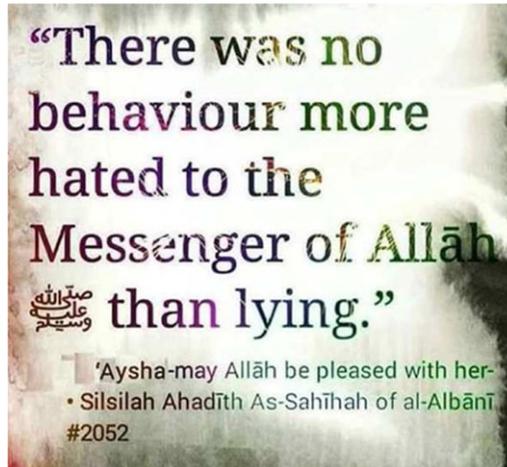
### 7.3 | Formal and professional use

English in Algeria is used as a link language for international and local diplomatic and business communication. Although French dominates local communication in the business world in Algeria, English is widely used by American and British multinational oil and gas companies in the south of Algeria to accomplish work-related tasks. BP, formally British Petroleum (BP, 2017), for example, engages in English language training in Algeria. They also train local Algerian citizens in such fields as plumbing and electricity so that BP can recruit local employees who are skilled in their job and proficient in English. This training not only allows BP Algeria to recruit locally; they also discourage migration toward coastal cities in the north. Internationally, English is also used when French and/or Arabic are not common to speakers. English is also used among administrators when interacting with foreign officials with whom there is no other shared language. As to business in general and tourism in particular, 56% and 76% of a group of 30 Algerian university students studying English respectively believe that more tourist activity and business with the US and the UK would enhance English use in Algeria (Borni, 2017). Due to Algeria's reticence to fully transition to a free-market economy, there is an untapped potential for English to gain a foothold in the Algerian linguistic landscape. Such potential is expected to materialize as Algeria transitions slowly to a free market economy (Benrabah, 2013). While English is somewhat present in professional settings and is increasingly synonymous with prestige and modernity, and aside from education, the most exciting area for the growth of English use in Algeria is in fulfilling an online interpersonal function among Algerians.

### 7.4 | English for the online interpersonal function among Algerians

While Euromonitor (2012) found that Algerians want to use English and the Internet to communicate with people around the world, my analysis of Algerians' English use in online spaces shows that they extensively use English with other Algerians too. Most of the themes coded by examining a Facebook page's (*I am DZ [Algerian] and I speak English*) content illustrate the interpersonal function of English in Algeria, mostly among Algerians and about local issues. One of the most common themes has to do with religion, specifically Islam. Quotes from the Quran and by the prophet Mohammad are prevalent. An example is in Figure 3. Group members also discuss issues of national interest, like public university student campus life. As can be seen in Figure 4, one student posted a picture of the meal he was served to shed light on the poor quality of food in Algerian public university food courts. In a post that generated 50 comments, fellow students expressed empathy about how they also suffer from poor university dining court conditions, writing 'I feel ya [sic],' 'at least you have forks,' and 'same here.'

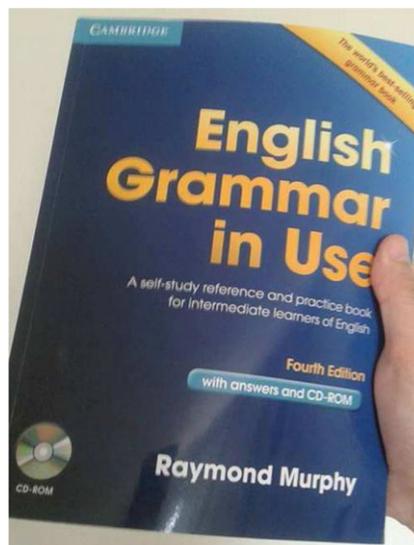
Another theme that emerged is romance and friendship, where a seemingly male user would post such a question as 'Hi girls I need to talk.' Funny memes and jokes are also regularly posted along with smiling emoji, and many comments. Moreover, English learning questions are sometimes posed, with users quarrelling over correctness, usually between a US and British version. One group user shared the picture of the textbook in Figure 5 below, widely used in Algeria to learn English. In fact, my grammar teacher when I was an English major in an Algerian university used the textbook. Group users commented on the textbook photo, sharing photos of books they are reading, and suggesting that they learned English using music and movies rather than books. Another group member asked if members speak English fluently and requested honesty in reporting one's English linguistic proficiency assessment. In over 150 comments under this post, answers ranged from 'perfectly fluent,' to 'still learning,' to 'I will, God willing,' to 'no, I [sic] still a beginner.' Games posted on the Facebook page include a



**FIGURE 3** An example of the use of English for religious purposes [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**FIGURE 4** A post prompting a discussion of student campus life in Algeria [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**FIGURE 5** Textbook photo with a question asking how Algerians learn English [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

request to write an English word that starts with the last letter of the last word a commenter posts. In a different Facebook page named similarly (*I am DZ and I speak English*), posts are by a page administrator rather than anyone in the public as in the open-to-public version of the page described above. Themes tend to be similar and include soccer, Islam, English books and politics. This second version of the closed-to-public page managed by an administrator has 186,700 followers. English used in it is polished and posts are of general rather than personal interest.

A YouTube content analysis of the comments section was also conducted to gain further insight into the dynamics of the interpersonal function of English among Algerian users of the language. Unlike what Kasztalska (2014) finds in Poland in a similar analysis there, some Algerians tend to be protective and look down upon those who criticize Algeria, especially using such a powerful language with a wide audience reach as English. In a response comment to a YouTube vlog on the topic of Algerians' pet peeves, an Algerian English user writes: 'you don't need to count the bed [sic] Algerian behaviors in front of the whole world / we call those behaviors kinda cultures dears [sic].' In other YouTube comments, English users responded to a video of an Algerian national TV segment interviewing the person behind the launch of the Facebook group *I am DZ and I Speak English*. Comments revealed a great deal about the main themes discussed using English for the online interpersonal function in Algeria. Below is a selection of such comments followed by my analysis:

- (1) TOGETHER TO BUILD OUR ENGLISH ALGERIA [emphasis not added]
- (2) God bless you..we [sic] must fight to make english [sic] number one in ALGERIA and istop [sic] using that french [sic] dead language.....even the Arabic is more powerful than French in the world.....French is number 9...Arabic is number 5.....
- (3) my english [sic] and my accent is beettttteeerrrr [sic]
- (4) pour ceux qui critiquent son accent du français ... bah il parle correctement et c'est le plus important, ce n'est pas un problème d'avoir un accent non parisien ... Les canadiens ont leur accent pourquoi pas les algériens. Translation: For those who criticize his [referring to the accent of the young Algerian who created the popular Facebook group mentioned above] French accent, uh he speaks correctly and that is the most important. It is not a problem to have a non-parisian accent. Canadians have their own accent, so why not Algerians?
- (5) sbhan Allah 3erbya ma frahach francais 3fasha ga3 lenglais ana 3endi 15 ans je vous jure nehder khermenou les profe"s ki ysem3ouni ma ye3e9louch belli algerien lol  
Translation: "God almighty, he hasn't worked out Arabic, totally destroyed French, and I have 15 years of experience with English, and I swear to you, I speak better than him. The professors who hear me in English think I must not be Algerian lol"
- (6) nice initiative ... just try to improve your pronunciation and your accent. From your vids I observed that you've a lack of vocabulary I mean you still do not speak English instinctively, words do not come naturally. You plan to animate a show in English you've to be relentless in it. You have to read more and not watching much movies, listening is good but reading is better. Some said you've a US accent, it's not really so you're just trying to imitate them but in the wrong way. Good luck.

As can be seen from the sample of comments, one theme is a fierce competition with French that almost always emerges when discussing English. In addition, another theme is who has the 'better' English. In fact, one user (#5) utilizes Algerian Arabic and French to make an argument about how amazing his English is! This user also illustrates findings reported in Seargeant and Tagg (2011). That is, user #5 uses Latin characters and Arabic numerals to refer to Algerian Arabic phonemes. An example is the use of '3' as a sign for /s/ and '9' as a sign for /q/. A discussion about the English language has, thus, proved to be an opportunity to showcase the Algerian's multilingualism in a computer-mediated discourse. Some voices of reason, as in the fourth user, argue against the native speakerism that characterized some of the comments. As in user #6, some go into detail and try to help their fellow English users learn English. In addition to the above-mentioned presence of English, a group called *Algerian Youth Voices* has been active in promoting the language through podcasting, video blogging on YouTube, and social media outreach through

**Algerian Youth Voices (AYV)** : Is the first English Online Audio Broadcasting in Algeria, founded by the US Embassy Algiers.

An initiative launched by **Delia Dunlap** an English Teacher Trainer and **Yowei Shaw** a radio producer in Philadelphia

**AYV** is a group of 18 young independent audio producers and reporters belonging to nine associations from different cities in Algeria .

The purpose of the organization is to produce a high professional quality of audio broadcasts for podcast and/or online radio in English .

**AYV** aims to be a perfect space for youth to have the opportunity to be heard and share their stories professionally.

The nine Associations are :

American Corner Algiers / IRC : ( Mourad Yazli and Selma Mouloudj )

American Corner Constantine : (Ibrahim Boucherit & Achwak Hamaizia)

American Corner Oran : (Abdessamed Damech& Saliha Messaadi)

American Corner Ouargla : (Abdelbaki Benachoura & Ahmed Faycal Tebbal )

Bejaia English Student Team – BEST – Bejaia.( Rachid Amzar & Abderrahim Fatma Zahra – Sarah )

CASL- Batna : (Maache Amani & Ibtissem Rouabah )

Club of Badji Mokhtar University- Annaba : ( Wissem Kheroufi & Boumaza Zineb)

Tamkeen -Djelfa : ( Khaled Halloub & Moumen Bilel Abedessamed)

Youth Capacity Development (YCD) – Biskra : ( Djazil Zehani & Aziza Benlamoudi)

**FIGURE 6** About Us page of *Algerian Youth Voices*

Facebook. Figure 6 is from the group's 'About us' page and provides a description of the group. There are a wide range of topics discussed in the group's podcasts, including literary topics such as the video titled *Life by Mark Twain*. Additional themes include podcasts on Islamic fasting (Ramadan) and the value of mothers, themes that are related to religion, highlighting once again the connection between English and Islam in Algeria as shown in the thematic analysis of the Facebook group *I am DZ and I speak English*. Another theme discussed by the podcast hosts is scholarships to study in the UK and the US. Personal stories and experiences of individuals are regularly shared as well.

While the thematic content analysis is far from comprehensive and is a limited exploratory study for illustrative purposes only, findings of English content produced by some Algerians in online spaces suggest that English is used to communicate about a variety of topics thereby solidifying its interpersonal function. While I have not observed characteristics that would lead me to believe that there might be an Algerian English variety from a linguistic perspective, there certainly seems to be an increasingly strong functional variety of Algerian English. A case in point is the naming of the podcast *Algerian Youth Voices* for communication among Algerians who speak English and foreigners who might be interested in the content. This type of activity is likely to expand as attempts to use English in the media seems to be on the rise.

## 7.5 | Instrumental function

Although English is not presently the main language of instruction in most public and private educational institutions in Algeria, its status has been changing since the early, 2000s. In the public education sector in Algeria, at the K-12 level, MSA is the main language of instruction. The start of the teaching of English as a foreign language, however, has been moved from the second year of middle school to the first year of middle school following educational reforms. In addition, English is the main language of instruction only at The Institut de Genie Électrique et Électronique (IGEE), which trains electrical and electronics engineers in English. A government document that describes the English

curriculum for the all-important final year of Algerian public high schools sheds further light onto the use of English as an instrument for learning in education. Prepared by the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale (2006), the document indicates that the goal of teaching English is to allow Algerians to exchange scientific and cultural ideas and experiences with speakers of English. Critical analysis, national values, universal values, tolerance, respect, and openness to the world should be promoted. ELT objectives should include linguistic and communicative ones, such as acquiring syntax and pronunciation, and being able to use the language to pursue higher education in English. Methodological and technological objectives include being able to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, reflect, develop computer literacy, use the Internet, and do research. Socio-cultural and socio-professional objectives comprise integrating inter-disciplinary knowledge, encouraging curiosity about various Anglophone cultures, and transition to the 'real' world.

To provide insight into preparing students to use English as an instrument for their education, Benadla (2013) shared some of the challenges she encountered in a middle school classroom, teaching English three times a week. Since project work is a staple of the competency-based approach (CBA), some learners make money by selling papers on their peers' research project topics. What is incredible about this practice is that even though these students were paid to prepare the project for their peers, they did not write the paper but went instead to an Internet café and asked somebody else to copy and paste information onto a Word Document and print it nicely. Once this is done, the student hands the paper in to the teacher without reading it. Another challenge that the author discusses is that some teachers still talk about teaching the grammatical form of the simple past, instead of speaking of language function, such as teaching narration. Despite the fact that language function is a major component of CBA, some teachers are still keen on teaching form. Another ingrained practice is that of trying to finish the syllabus before the inspector's visit, regardless of whether learners have achieved the objectives. Listed as part of the reason why the communicative approach initiated in the 1980s failed, Benadla (2013) also states that attempting to finish a given amount of work within a certain timeframe as opposed to concern over student learning seems to still plague the Algerian classroom. Tests were used to coerce students into studying instead of assessing their progress. Furthermore, teachers, who feel overwhelmed with the amount of content they were asked to cover, teach several large classes. Instead of doing a thorough needs analysis while the curriculum was being developed to determine how much content to cover, educational authorities found themselves telling teachers which units to omit instead of simply revising the curriculum to account for how much content teachers can realistically cover. In the private sector, The Hopeland Institute's Madrasah Ardh Al Amal is a trilingual school where MSA, English, and French are used to teach children from kindergarten through middle school. This school is unique in Algeria and sharply contrasts with monolingual public schools, where MSA is the only language of instruction. Further, there are a growing number of English-medium private schools that offer English language education in both Algeria and Morocco. ALC Algerian Learning Centers and Berlitz Center are just two examples among many. These schools are mostly only accessible to the affluent segment of the population, however (Euromonitor, 2012).

According to the HuffPost Algérie (2015), researchers hailed from a wide range of backgrounds to share expertise regarding the communicative approach to teaching English. Workshops, presentations, and colloquia were organized by the British Council as part of a conference, bringing together Algerian researchers and teachers of English to collaborate amongst themselves and with colleagues from the United Kingdom. Unheard of during the 1990s due to the Civil War, such conferences and initiatives by the British Council are common nowadays. With the overview of the instrumental function of English, I move on to the diffusion of English in relation to two more types of functions: Regulative and creative/innovative functions.

## 7.6 | Creative/innovative function

As noted above, English is used in signage for advertising purposes. Although most print and visual commercials and advertisements are in MSA and/or French, English has started to infiltrate the marketing world. For example, 'honey time' is written on blankets in a store in Algeria, while 'my secret stuff' can be seen on pencil cases for sale. Marketers seem to believe that when the consumer sees English words on a product, the consumer is likely to buy the product due

to the prestige value associated with English and the likelihood that consumers would find it cool. English is also used in various media. Algerian newspapers *Ennahar Online* and *Echorouk Online* publish articles in English, in addition to publishing in MSA, which is the main and original language of the two newspapers. Algeria's, Morocco's, and Tunisia's official government press agencies also have versions in English. In addition, *50Fifty Magazine* has published three issues in English since it was launched (2017), including articles about a diverse set of topics. This unique initiative in Algeria has attracted many young Algerian users of English who have already submitted contributions in English for the magazine. This is how the publishers advertise the magazine on their website:

*How many ways are there to develop your English whilst learning a million other things simultaneously? Read our wide variety of original magazine articles, interviews and reviews! Share tips and questions on the forum or make new friends and fellow learners on 'Speaking English.' Just register to access all our resources for free! Are you a budding author? Write for us or enter our competition to win prizes! Want to advertise your business on an international scale? Contact us. There really is something for everyone at 50/Fifty! (50Fifty Magazine, 2017)*

Moreover, A3, an Algerian satellite TV station, now subtitles American movies in Arabic. Many Algerians are excited to claim that they can speak English after watching several movies in English. This suggests that the media play a role in language learning. An example of lexical borrowing is *STARS*, the name of an intramural soccer team in an Algerian university. Language users also engage in mimicking. For instance, *Majic* is a word that creatively uses the letter *J* in the middle of the word because of phonological interference from French, and uses the letter *C* word-finally due to borrowing from the English version of the word. While I was reading articles in French in relatively new Algerian news websites that I discovered in, 2015, the words *himself*, *day to day*, and *leadership* were used instead of their French equivalents *lui-même*, *au jour le jour* or *jour après jour*, and *qualités de dirigeant* respectively. When a young Algerian entrepreneur asked Algeria's wealthiest CEO a question regarding the future of his businesses, his question was sprinkled with English vocabulary in a way I have never seen before among Algerians. Such examples are seen increasingly on private media and business circles. Although just anecdotal evidence has been provided here, this phenomenon merits more systematic research into the nature and extent of lexical borrowing in Algeria's multilingual context. In spite of the real and perceived usefulness of English in Algeria, the status of this language is not unchallenged. In fact, English plays a role in a sociopolitical struggle between those who favor a greater role for English and those who fear its dominance.

## 8 | SOCIOPOLITICAL OBSTACLES TO ENGLISH

Before progressive education reforms that favored multilingualism since the early 2000s, Francophone and English studies scholar Miliani (2000) lambasted what he considered a political government move to favor English over French in Algeria, with the move itself and Miliani's passionate reaction to it capturing the obstacles of English to displace French. He argued that the now discontinued, 1993 government move, mentioned earlier, to start teaching English starting from fourth grade is an example of 'cultural slimming' (Miliani, 2000: 14), contributing to the creation of a utopian homogenous Arab-Islamic nation. Rather than focusing on such important matters as facilitating creative learning using languages students are already proficient in like French, officials were concerned with superficial foreign language policy changes while students in universities merely engage in dictation exercises and reading handouts, then repeating knowledge they received in exam sheets. I do personally remember when taking English classes in Algeria, some teachers would simply read aloud information on, for example, the history of English and my classmates and I would write down what was being read. When unable to keep up, classmates would ask the teacher to repeat to make sure we write everything down to be able to prepare for the all-important end-of-the semester exam. Miliani (2000) argued for a language-in-education policy that meaningfully addressed a source of poor education, which he considered to be 'bilingual illiteracy' in French and MSA, attributing positive attitudes toward English as responsible for the 'ostracization' of the French language. In light of such circumstances, only 0.33% of 2 million pupils over the course

of 4 years chose to study English over French in primary school in 1993–1997. Miliani (2000) concluded with a call for French to regain its status as a primary foreign language to show sensitivity toward Algeria's sociolinguistic reality. Today, with French being taught in third grade instead of fourth and English in sixth instead of eighth, English has gained ground but has not entirely supplanted French.

After the introduction of CBA, in contrast to Miliani's (2000) and Benrabah's own (1999) criticism of the perceived move to displace French in 1993, Benrabah (2013) himself predicted that English would overcome current obstacles and displace French in Algeria's complex linguistic landscape. Based on the criteria of economic strength, political strength, numerical strength, and cultural strength, Benrabah (2014) compares four 'world' (quotation marks in original) languages in Algeria: Arabic (Benrabah did not specify which variety), English, French, and newcomer Chinese. He maintained that cultural strength is a weakness for Arabic due to weak knowledge output and intellectual production illustrated by a lack of translations into MSA. Furthermore, through a survey of 1,051 Algerian high school students, he argued that competition between English and French is fiction because 76.4% of respondents agreed that their choice of English should not mean a rejection of French. Benrabah (2014) also reported that, out of 204 Algerian university students, 92% viewed English as a world language rather than nine other languages presented to them. The author attributed the discrepancy between these attitudes and the continued dominance of language functions by French to the Algerian government's reticence to move the country from a centralized socialist economy to a globalized one at a faster pace. Predicting that English is likely to replace French in Algeria, Benrabah (2013, 2014) reported that English departments across the country have seen a dramatic rise in enrolments, leaving French departments behind. In fact, in the Department of English at M'hamed Bougara University of Boumerdes where I myself studied in Algeria, enrollment has exponentially gone up from less than a 100 to approximately, 2000 students majoring in English Language and Literature in a decade (2006–2016). The author (Benrabah, 2014) also argued that the arrival of the Chinese language in the Algerian linguistic landscape is testament to the relevance of economic strength as a metric for what constitutes a world language. With an economic metric in mind, Chinese could also present some form of competition for English in Algeria. In fact, China has surpassed France and has become Algeria's prime import partner with \$8.3 billion worth of imported Chinese goods in, 2015 (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2015). Analyzing the linguistic landscape of Chinese companies operating in Algeria's construction industry, Benrabah (2014) observes that Chinese was symbolically placed higher than French and written in bright colors (symbolically interpreted to be echoing China's higher and brighter economic power over France), while French was written in faulty form and was not as clearly visible. While learning Chinese is not common in Algeria, Morocco already has two Confucius Institutes. Algerian bureaucrats, however, refused the establishment of a Confucius Institute in Algeria. Unsurprisingly, Morocco is where the rate of learning Chinese is increasing faster rather than Algeria, possibly in conjunction with rising Chinese investment in Morocco (Benrabah, 2014). Algerian government socialist and anti-globalist policies, the rise of China as an economic power, and the strong legacy of French are, thus, powerful forces standing in the way of English dominance. Believed to be the most tenacious obstacle, the strong legacy of French as a barrier in the way of English is further exemplified by the Francophonie organization's ideology.

While Algeria is not a member state of the Francophonie, the organization's ideology is powerful and still maintains a stronghold in Algeria. Algeria is a francophone country in the sense that it is a former colony of France and French is still used to various degrees. Algeria, however, does not adhere to the Francophonie organization due to political reasons. According to Vigouroux (2013), the term francophonie was first used by Reclus in 1880 to refer to non-French people who are likely to become users of French. Decades later, in, 1962, Senegalese president Senghor reinvented the term francophonie, calling for unity among nations that use French. The Francophonie, with capital F, however, refers to an institutional and geopolitical entity. There are various sociopolitical agendas behind the existence of the Francophonie. For some, it is a political tool for France and Quebec to counter the hegemony of Anglo-American globalization. The universality of French is often cited to support the Francophonie's agenda. Part of the Francophonie's discourse is also to present French as a victim of linguistic genocide caused by the expansion of English. The Francophonie, thus, engages in language partnership, advocating for and funding bilingual programs in Africa, not necessarily for the love of minority languages but the maintenance of the influence of French itself. Finally, Vigouroux (2013) maintained that there is a discrepancy between the Francophonie's discourse and that of Francophones. For example, the Francophonie

rejects French users who are not French due to anti-immigration policies and by labeling immigrants as Francophiles and smugglers of the language when they spread French in non-French speaking regions. At the same time, the Francophonie appreciates the fact that the non-native French users spread French in English-speaking regions. Francophone Attali's keynote speech (2001) is a case in point. In a keynote speech to the American Association of Teachers of French, Attali (2001: 465), a French economist and writer, put forth a series of ideas to help secure the future of French and its 'unique genius'. He stated that, unlike economic goods, language is a commodity whose value increases when more people have it. More people should, thus, be encouraged to learn and use French. He added that it is important to associate French with freedom by refusing to support Francophone dictators. An idea that might support this claim is that the wider global spread of English compared to French might be partially explained by the notion that, while the US and the UK are believed to have fought against and helped topple undemocratic regimes in the name of freedom, France has been accused of supporting them. According to Attali (2000), French's future then hinges on whether France supports freedom and democracy and quits supporting authoritative regimes. Additionally, France should cooperate with the Maghreb to ensure security and development. The Francophonie and France have a role to play, such as investing in defending the French language as opposed to only making laws and defending France's cultural exceptionalism (Attali, 2000). The speaker's talk (Attali, 2000) partly illustrates the Francophonie discourse mentioned above, but also includes some surprisingly positive statements. For example, he maintains that French needs to be taught as a language of a large community of users and not as that of only one country, that is France, which can be done by valuing the teaching of literatures, film, and music that are 'written in the other Frenches' (Attali, 2000: 475). The plural form of French is actually used, reflecting some awareness of what might need to happen for French to achieve the same international status as English. The speaker also supports borrowing from other languages. Translating from and to French is another essential step to promoting the French language itself. Developing virtual libraries and universities is also seen as a way to compete with English. In light of massive open online courses in America, offered in English, France should invest in this trend as well, according to Attali (2000). Despite the global dominance of English over French internationally, however, French in Algeria still fulfills a large functional range. Despite this lingering presence and the Francophonie's attempts to resist English and survive as a powerful lingua franca in the 21st century, English is fast-growing in Algeria and its growth does not have to be mutually exclusive with that of French.

## 9 | CONCLUSION

This descriptive study has created a sociolinguistic profile of English in Algeria. Research findings include identifying English-using segments of the Algerian population, and discussing their characteristics and English proficiency. In addition, I have also described the historical background as well as the contemporary functional uses of English in Algeria, including the extent to which English fulfills interpersonal, creative, and instrumental functions. Ultimately, the profile is intended to describe who uses English in Algeria and for what purposes. With reference to users, interesting findings included the identification of a growing community of Algerian users of English in the United States thanks to the Diversity Lottery Visa program, and Algerian music artists were also identified as a thriving category of English users. Regarding the uses of English, this article described how English is used internally among Algerians to communicate online, bolstering the interpersonal function of the language. Increased use in the business world outside of the oil and gas industry, among youth interested in start-ups and entrepreneurship, is also interesting in contemporary Algerian society. It is hoped that these findings will serve to address a gap in research on world Englishes, and provide insight into the nature of the spread of English in Algeria's multilingual context.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Embassy of the United States of America, Algeria., 2013. US Embassy and Berlitz Center launch new English language classes. [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/algeria/401501/PDFS/EI%20Amel\\_ENG%20PR.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/algeria/401501/PDFS/EI%20Amel_ENG%20PR.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> For recent examples using a relatively similar heuristic for sociolinguistic profiles, see Nielsen (2003), Velez-Rendon (2003), Michieka (2005) and Kasztalska (2014).

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