

Rabeh Sebaa, *L'Arabisation dans les Sciences Sociales: le Cas Algérien (Arabization in the Social Sciences: the Algerian case)* – L'Harmattan: Collection: Histoire et Perspectives Méditerranéennes, 1996.

In Algeria, the publication of a book has become a rather unusual event. Instead of being a somehow normal activity, publishing seems like attempting the impossible. 'That's one published and saved', we always say after each birth. Saved from oblivion. Another book which will help re-establish our memory in the face of the overall amnesia. We have become oblivious of what we were: a people full of contradictions, of hope and history, but also a people unable, at the threshold of the third millennium, to extricate itself from the ascendancy of orality. But which vernacular are we talking about, when one knows that the country is still struggling against real/false linguistic problems it wants to solve with profuse government decisions, decrees and laws, away from the socio-cultural, linguistic and psycholinguistic realities of the country?

Rabeh Sebaa's book freezes in words, scalpel-words, a fraction of this memory which is lacking, not because of a certain inadequacy, but because we have been violated. Is there a more extreme violence than to go counter nature? That is what Sebaa has tried to describe in his book by tackling, in a very convincing way, the problem of arabization at university level from a general view point to a narrower case study: i.e. arabization of social sciences. He paints with vitriolic words past and present policies of arabization seen as a crusade towards the "*recovery of the lost Linguistic Paradigm*". Such is the problematic identified by Sebaa: the relationship between a society and its *parole* through a study of the linguistic mediation in the context of social sciences. Besides, the scenery is established outside the usual binary opposition between the institution and the academic. Sebaa tackles the academic in order to avoid the trap of the good mannered justifications of certain academics fond of compromises instead of truths, or, at least, denunciations of the corruptions (political, linguistic and social) undertaken towards and guided by objectives which are not always clear, to say the least.

The generalisation of the national language which means for many the acquisition of an appropriate Arabic terminology, has been on the agenda of political and educational authorities since independence. The slogan about this supposed generalisation is misleading because it is built on a double lie: on the one hand there is no generalisation because this presupposes a daily use of the language, on the other hand, the term 'national' implies a certain unity of the process of arabization, which is far from being the case. In this endeavour, several contradictions have appeared: the focal dichotomy which is proposed, is that

between language and knowledge. This is all the more true that in the learning context considered (that of social sciences), it is about a "situation of a double learning of language and knowledge" (p.112). In such a framework, Sebaa proceeds methodically and sets the stakes of 'Comment-dire', 'Comment-se-dire', 'Comment-nous-dire' to go beyond the 'politico-ideological layout' (which is intrinsically speaking desirable, but a shade idealist):

"It is then in the complexity of the simultaneity of this double learning: learning of a language and acquisition of a knowledge, that we set out to read in that thrust of anxiety, some aspects of what is conventionally referred to by crisis of social sciences, and hence of the university in Algeria in relation with a policy of a new language planning, badly secured because badly accepted" (p.28).

The book is divided into three chapters. The first one studies the types, contents and conditions of the learning of a so-called conventional language (a label which does not suit us because all languages are sets of conventions), i.e. the standard one. In relation with the situations where Arabic is learned, the epistemological aspects (problems of terminology and lexis) are studied in the second chapter. As for the last chapter, it expounds the anthropological aspects in relation with to situation of learning.

Thus, chapter One entitled '*Formes d'Apprentissage et Contraintes d'Usage Linguistiques*', undertakes to lay down the linguistic, pedagogical and scientific conditions of arabization. Launched in September 1980, the process of arabization at university level took a false start since generalisation of Arabic meant only acquisition of an appropriate and specialised language. The other underlined aberration was the systematic shunning of the francophones who were amongst the most qualified cadres of the country, and who had then to find refuge-places (e.g. institutes of foreign languages or centres of research) far from the torment of arabization. However, the various means of training in learning Arabic will reveal their limits: the centres for intensive learning of languages, CEIL (which showed a pathetic inefficiency, on the pedagogical and scientific planes); the linguistic stays in the Arab countries (confronted themselves with the problem of using Arabic in scientific and technical domains, but rather less psychologically 'blocked' by the use of dialects), finally, the ridiculous is reached when a special type of teaching called 'individual teaching by dubbing' is offered as an alternative.

Sebaa offers then a very interesting dichotomy between 'arabophones of filiation' and 'arabophones of affiliation' to distinguish between the professionals of the language who master Arabic from the amateurs who gibber the language. This phenomenon, he posits, ends up in a triple 'exteriority' of the language: in relation to the teacher-apprentice, in relation to the university community (research being made mostly in French), and finally in relation to society (by a phenomenon which we would call language schizophrenia).

The tone of the book becomes more caustic when the author takes up in the second chapter entitled *'Arabisation entre Modernisation de la Langue et Instrumentalisation de la Terminologie: Aux Origines du Terminologisme Total'*, the study of the epistemological aspects concerning the 'how-to-say' and the capacity of the 'know-how-to-say' ('How to express in a language the contents of another', p. 176). If we share the idea of a 'slumber of Arabic linguistics', we diverge on the so-called 'laziness of the mind' of the Arabs, to explain the former point. On the other hand, what is worth our interest is the description made of the ambivalent rapport of arabophone teachers with a scientific milieu they search eagerly (in France), and a language they hate (French).

As to the contribution of Middle-East teachers, Sebaa considers it insignificant, because not responding to the objectives set to the latter. They are also accused, justly, to be doubly incompetent, because of their incapacity to respond first to a 'pedagogical expectation' and then to a 'linguistic demand'. School has thus been transformed from a 'giver of knowledge into a place of Arabic learning'. As for the universities, they have become 'centres of linguistic literacy' where scientific matters have but the meanest share. If one feels here a certain bitterness in the author's analysis, it is because he has been able to measure the extent of the damages done at the pedagogical and scientific levels, in the face of an arabization made extremely instrumental. The best illustration of this narrow vision of things is brought by a thought-provoking study on the problem of borrowing in the semantic field. The author distinguishes between three types of borrowing: *'Eddakhil'* (or 'intruding' words of occasional use), *'El moua'reb'* (or arabized foreign words), and *'El mouwallad'* (or words of Arabic origin with a modified meaning). One desideratum would be that the explanations be accompanied with illustrations for a better understanding. This part is likely to appear too theoretical to those who do not know Arabic, and the illustrations would have been most welcomed.

In addition, Sebaa posits rightly that arabization for the educational authorities has become a problem of *'moustallah'* (terminology), hence the reduction of the chances for the success of the process. Arabization has thus become an atomisation of the language, not the mastery of its discourse in specialised domains. The result is that *"the learning of the terminology takes precedence over the learning of the language which itself prevails over the learning of knowledge"* (p.90). This 'total terminologism' has become the keystone of the policy of arabization hence the mushrooming of glossaries in the book market, products of apprentice-linguists. The same statement can apply to the Arab world where a concern for standardisation and internationalisation of glossaries remain wishful thinking. Sebaa then shows through a revealing study the level of terminological spreading in the Maghreb (though the peoples are supposed to be close historically

and linguistically), justifying the popular saying which states that: 'the Arabs are agreed not to get on'. Besides, the author puts forward the idea that the development of the glossaries without arabization of knowledge was such that the "*effort of translating is substituted for the effort of reflection*" (p.120). The budding linguists are content with the development of a terminological culture in relation with modernity to which they want to adhere while expressing it piecemeal.

The third chapter entitled '*Arabisation et Parole Sociale: Perspectives Anthropologiques*', studies the procedure of the learning of Arabic by the teachers by considering the anthropological aspects. Sebaa underlines in a very pertinent way the idea that the debate about arabization is first and foremost dependent on the solving of the opposition between language of instruction and language of knowledge. Besides, arabization is not one but many, because it reflects the existence of different communities (university, judicial...). The university teachers being always obsessed by the Absolute Norm (the language of the Koran), this has led to the fact that "*science has become secondary with regard to the forms of its expression*". Thus, in sociology, as for the other university subjects in a situation of double learning, the problematic between "*thinking and naming*" might last as long as the university teacher does not venture boldly and in a definite way into creation. If not, sociology as a discipline will remain in a "*permanent state of incompleteness*". The process of imitation has to be reduced to a minimum to allow research to leave the ghetto (scientific as well as linguistic) in which administration has confined it. The obstacles being many-sided, it is difficult for the social sciences to solve in a satisfactory manner the real dilemma (language of teaching and language of knowledge). If the different methods of arabization have showed their limits, it seems to us that this is more due to this "*arabization through negation*" advocated by the nihilists and the defenders of the Norm. The adoption of a systemic approach to the process of arabization is as much for us as for the author, the less partisan means to materialise it:

"To accept the project of a type of arabization which does not associate the Algerian vernacular, French, Tamazight (Berber), and the large spectrum of the medial and intermediary languages, it is to accept, in the long term, the idea of its non-attainability" (p. 174)

As for the future of sociology as a science, it seems to be caught in a stranglehold between the Linguistic (lying fallow) and the Institutional (in constant disequilibrium). Only an objective and realistic arabization could put an end to the formalist and prescriptive approach advocated to solve the debated process. In addition, it would consider the usual vernaculars not as linguistic aberrations, but as authentic manifestations of a people in harmony with itself.

This approach will move away this linguistic schizophrenia the learners are imposed today through a de-structured school, and a popular media (TV), in constant break-up, at the linguistic level, with the average Algerian.

One can find the tone of this study a bit critical (even severe), but the book never shifts to counter-productive polemic. If there is absence of complacency towards those who have led the enterprise of arabization to run aground on the reefs of their political and personal interests, this is due to the starts of a conscience which refuses to keep silent in the face of the mess it is witnessing.

However, if John Milton has had his *Paradise Recovered*, Sebaa announces that we cannot regain the 'Lost Linguistic Paradigm'. This observation is made not because the author is not optimistic – all teachers are – but because the problem is to be found elsewhere than in the characteristics of the language of teaching the individuals endure more than they master. Thus, it is through a language naturally internalised that the teacher can become Prometheus in the scientific domains. The book by Sebaa has succeeded in lighting up a small fire of hope. Let us burn in it our hesitations, our erring ways, the extremely prescriptive attitudes, and 'the duty-to-say', for a natural language found again, and if need be, for our own rectitude.

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- *All the quotations are translated by the reviewer.*