

Ideology at Work: Language as Performative Discourse

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Abstract *Language policy and practice in Algeria is subject to an extreme ideological dispute that has accompanied political, cultural and social life since independence. In a rich linguistic arena, where four languages (standard Arabic, Algerian spoken language, Berber and French) interact as much as they compete, political and religious ideologies, by instrumentalizing standard Arabic, have had their share in directing policies and developing representations that serve political interests, often at the expense of a peaceful and fruitful coexistence within a diverse linguistic market. The question raised here is the following: how does standard Arabic serve political interests, despite the fact that its political status totally contradicts its real sociolinguistic one? With a colinguism being set as a rule for language policy, standard Arabic, religion and politics have come to form a triad whose purpose is to maintain conditions for a performative ideological discourse whose permanence needs the people's consent and rallying belief in a community of believers. The main goal of such a state is to exclude the vast majority of the population from the field of political debate and reflexion, and discard oppositional intellectuals who do not use standard Arabic.*

Keywords: *language, ideological discourse, colinguism,*

1. Ideology at Work: Language as Performative Discourse

Apprehending language as discourse reveals the social forces that have a vitally important foothold on the individual's mind when using and interpreting language, and when forming opinion and taking actions accordingly. Among these forces is ideology which reaches the individual psyche through the manipulation of language. Ideology is therefore part and parcel of the context of production and interpretation of language, i.e. it is organically linked to discourse. As Bakhtin put it: "Language is not a neutral medium... it is populated – overpopulated with the intentions of others." (Quoted in Cazden, 1989: 122) These intentions, which are an ideology transformed into a discursive form through a particular type of language (a speech genre), make the dialogic process that links the speaking subjects (the ideologues: politicians and preachers) to their listeners (the people).

Ideologies always need to be integrated into the process of maturation of societies in order to be effective. When founding myths are formed, their adoption by the people takes time through their intrusion in mainstream national culture by means of such social institutions as the school, religion, politics, or language. Most particularly, attributing to a given language the status of an official language, thus making thereof the language of school education and political communication, is vital to the integration of the dominant ideology, conveyed through that language, into the process of socialisation of young individuals such as school kids and university students. This is what Bourdieu (2001: 75) described as the making, beside the speech or discourse community, of a "conscience community which is the cement of the nation", where linguistic homogenisation or unification means intellectual and cultural purification or cleansing. The school teacher of the official language is transformed from a language teacher into a *mentor* (Davy, 1950: 233), propagator of, not only an official language, but also an official ideology, who teaches pupils or students not only what to *say* but also what to *think*.

2. Felicity conditions

Standard Arabic plays this utilitarian role in Algeria, and its maintenance in this highest political position is the safeguard for the position of official ideology, which, because of the long association between the two, has come to be inseparable from it. The social structure and power relations which the dominant ideology has established in Algeria, for instance, can well be visible in standard Arabic that definitely keeps both the ideologues and the people in their respective positions. Here lies the ideologues' fear of the exposition of students to foreign languages as cultural products, which can, through acculturation, *rust* the official ideological machine. Foreign culture is a *clear and present danger* to the unity of the conscience community, as ideas are very much contagious viruses that never immigrate without damage. Language and the other institutions function then as *legitimators* of the ideologues' discourse, to which they confer a performative

dimension, i.e. social efficiency. As Said (1995: 321) put it, discourse is systematic and cannot be made at will; it always belongs "to the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence".

Yet, there is not a natural environment favourable to the transformation of any speech into a performative discourse. This environment has to be created. Discourse gets performative within fabricated social conditions (cultural, religious and political) described by Bourdieu as *felicity conditions*, which include the speaking subject's social position as well as their position within the field of their intervention, the context of production and reception of discourse, the form of discourse (speech genre) and the relation between the speaking subject and the listener.

Felicity conditions are all the more determinant of the success of ideological discourse as this discourse is more in need of the listener's acknowledgement of the message and of the speaking subject than of their comprehension of the message. This is illustrated by the Algerian political or religious leaders' speeches made in standard Arabic, and which are incomprehensible for most of those to whom they are addressed, yet accepted by these same people. Without favourable felicity conditions, an utterance (as a unit of discourse) is but a speech act, and not a *performative* act that possesses a *perlocutionary* effect with "a clear pretension of possessing a given power" (Ducrot, 1977).

3. The mandated spokesperson

Part, then, of these felicity conditions, and first of all, is the statutory condition of the speaking subject (Bourdieu, 2001: 270), be they the politician or the preacher. This status is that of the mandated spokesperson for the people that confers the right to speak to, and in the name of, the people. Once this status is attributed to a person, they become the listen-to-person, worthy of attention, of trust, and most importantly, worthy of being followed. They are what they seem to be, or what the majority of the group believes them to be. The epithet 'mandated' is of a great importance here as they are the spokesperson as long as they are mandated by the group who believe in them by virtue of their reference to religion. The mandated spokesperson's discourse succeeds as long as they *preach to the converted*.

It is to be observed that, despite the fact that the personal qualities of an orator play a role in constructing their charisma, it is their status of a mandated spokesperson that gives them the authority to speak and be listened to. By virtue of their status of a mandated spokesperson, they hold the *skeptron*, the authority to speak. The case, for instance, of Amr Khaled, the very successful preacher on the Arab-speaking satellite channel *Iqraa* is an interesting illustration. This charismatic preacher, though he masters the speech genre (sermon) and the medium (standard Arabic), his success is mostly due to the social conditions that have attributed to the religious discourse a privileged position, as compared to that produced by intellectuals, mainly when the latter express themselves in a language which bears the epithet, not to say the anathema, of foreign like French or English, as compared to the preacher who addresses people in a highly-valued language, standard Arabic. Politicians, by making reference to religion, as inscribed in the Algerian Constitution ("Islam is the religion of the state"), with the support of the religious institutions, also acquire the status of the mandated spokespeople. The case of the current Algerian president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, is a vivid illustration of this particular point. In a written discourse, published in some Algerian newspapers like *El-Watan* (April 16th, 2006), prior to the president's visit to the city of Constantine (east of the country), the authors of this discourse introduced their text, meant to welcome the president, by addressing him as the *faithful* and *saviour*, thanking God for having sent him to save the country after a bloody decade of terrorism and civil war. This implicit analogy to the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed, was aimed to establish the status of president Bouteflika as a *God-mandated* spokesperson, i.e. confer to him the credit of truth, relying on the Muslims' religious representations based on the Koran. From the civil status of a politician in charge of public affairs, the president is sublimated, through an excessive personality cult, to a *messiah* without whom his people will fall into darkness, as illustrated by this extract from another newspaper in which the journalist recounts the popular gathering to welcome Bouteflika on his return from his stay in hospital in Paris in December 2005: "The Algerians, I think, fear that something terrible happen to the president. They fear that his withdrawal from the management of the country's business might induce the total end of his programme which they consider as the only thing capable of saving them from their unrest" (*L'Echo d'Oran*, January 2nd, 2006).

The mandated spokesperson's power, the *skeptron*, is not to be understood as that of physical, economic strength. It is the *symbolic capital* or *credit* (Bourdieu, 1980) that people invest in a category which is supposed to *know* more than any other member of society, including real intellectuals or professionals. It is the trust based on the representative image of the spokesperson by virtue of his sources, in this case, religion. The mandated spokesperson is right because he invokes the word of God. Obviously, the danger here does not really lie in the status of the mandated spokesperson per se. It is rather that transformation of this status from one of representative power into one of dictatorial power, in which the suggestive act becomes a performative act. As observed by Bourdieu (2001: 270), once a person acquires the status of the mandated spokesperson, whether by usurpation or consent, his discourse changes from the indicative to the

imperative form. By means of what Bourdieu calls the *oracle effect*, the mandated spokesperson exercises a constraint on the people to mutate from a representative of the group into the group itself. The group ceases to have an opinion, as they are told what to think through suggestive ideological discourse and driven to act accordingly as this discourse is performative. People cease to be speaking subjects, voicing their own constructed opinions to turn into mere voices of the mandated spokespeople's discourse. The mandated spokesperson is the being, even when they are absent, and the people are nothingness, even when they are present.

It is noteworthy to observe that while some mandated spokespeople are aware of the illegitimacy of their status, at least in moral terms, many others tend to cope without any remorse and sense of wrongdoing with their status, because of the act of institution and of the people's positive response due to the cultural brainwashing they undergo. This is what Bourdieu (2001: 273) labels the *legitimate imposture* which describes a situation whereby the mandated spokesperson "is not a cynical calculating person who consciously deceives people, but someone who sincerely thinks he is what he is not."

This is particularly true for many religious leaders who think it is their religious and moral duty, as knowledgeable people, to speak for those who do not know their own good. It is also true for some nationalist leaders and intellectuals for whom people are not aware enough to distinguish between what is good to them and what is bad. Moreover, it would be erroneous and misleading to believe that the mandated spokesperson's interests are always material. In many cases, these interests are not quantifiable and are part of the proselytising of ideas believed to be the sole and only truth, especially in symbolic systems like religion, which the mandated spokesperson believes it their duty to convey to his fellow countrymen and countrywomen. In such situations, the mandated spokespeople insist on the necessity to attribute the most positive value to the three main components of social organisation: tradition, authority and hierarchy. With the *positivisation* of these three sources of power, the regime enshrines a conservative system which automatically attributes to anything which expresses a revolutionary idea a negative connotation, subversion. This contributes to the creation of the most favourable felicity conditions for the acceptance of the ideological discourse and, in parallel, the worst *infelicity* ones that lead to the rejection of the intellectual's discourse.

The mandated spokesperson certainly needs qualities to be entitled to this status. Their symbolic capital that confers to them credit relies on the act of institution, but also on their own cultural capital. The act of institution is an act of communication (Bourdieu, 2001: 180), by which an individual is publicly attributed an identity by the social institutions. This identity is then acknowledged by the whole society which institutes that individual officially as its representative. The title of *sheikh*, for instance, granted by the religious institution and confirmed by the political one (such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs), positions its carrier as the only one who has the authority to speak about religious matters, and by extension, about many earthly matters, to become the authority itself. The cultural capital is the sum of technical qualifications including types of knowledge (religious or political for instance) and many other cultural acquisitions that allow them to hold an official position like a civil servant, a minister or deputy (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1975). Precisely, standard Arabic is for the mandated spokesperson part of the cultural capital that offers them a substantial advantage over any intellectual who does not master this language, and paradoxically over their listeners who do not master it, yet are supposed to understand it.

Sanctifying standard Arabic in Algeria has also meant stigmatising the other languages, and as a consequence stigmatising the cultures they represent. Just as the upheld linguistic correctness in standard English once led to the moral correctness of its users and the denigration of the cultures and lifestyles of those who used other social dialects, the cultures conveyed through languages other than standard Arabic are also viewed by some in Algeria as not worthy of respect and consideration, not to say of existence at all.

The status of standard Arabic is central to the whole ideological enterprise of the political regime. In Algeria, it has been given a political position which does not reflect the linguistic reality of the country, by means of political documents and most importantly of education. This virtual position serves the whole system of power relations necessary for the maintenance of the political status quo, since it deprives an important category of society, the oppositional intellectuals who do not master this language and find in French the most suitable vehicle of their 'disturbing' ideas. For this, the political regime makes use of a trilogy of elements:

- this language is the language of the sacred book, the Koran;
- it is a language of national identity;
- a pseudo-scientific conception of the Algerian linguistic reality in which standard Arabic is in a diglossic relation with the other languages present in the Algerian linguistic repertoire.

The symbolic capital of standard Arabic, as the language of the Koran and an identity marker, is then turned to the mandated spokesperson's advantage in the construction of their symbolic capital or credit. To equip their discourse with the necessary illocutionary force and reach the perlocutionary effect, the mandated spokesperson needs to transform

their discourse into what Maingueneau (1993: 87) labels *inscribed utterances* (*énoncés inscrits*), i.e. utterances which are stabilised through use by people who enjoy “a strong symbolic position for the group” (Charaudeau & Maingueneau, 2002: 204). This explains quite clearly the recourse to religion and to the people who incarnate religious rectitude, such as the Prophet of Islam and his companions, and to the type of speech genre commonly used to speak about them or for them, i.e. the religious sermon. The inscribed utterances found in the words of these symbolic figures are integrated in the mandated spokesperson’s discourse in order to supplement it with the same symbolic capital. This transfer of credit can only be achieved thanks to standard Arabic, and this justifies the religion-politics alliance where the work tool of the former serves the latter’s interests.

4. Colinguism

With standard Arabic, and with the religious sermon as a speech genre of the political-religious discourse, the mandated spokesperson reinforces their power by an abuse of power, through what Bourdieu (2001: 327) calls *fallacy*, which he defines “not as the fact of saying the false, the mere lie, but rather the fact of saying the false with all the apparent logic of the true.” As the language of the Koran, a book of truth according to Muslims, the language itself becomes truth. By the mere fact of saying something in this language, it exists, without any need for the speaking subject to prove its existence. Words and expressions such as *الأمة الإسلامية* (the Islamic Ummah) and *القومية العربية* (Arabic nationalism) are, for instance, formulations that are taken as realities but which are actually fantasies.

Contrary to the linguistic rule which states that there can be no meaning without referents, the fallacy of standard Arabic, as used by ideologists, is precisely the production of formulas without referents in reality, a case of words which fabricate things. By extracting this language from its natural linguistic environment to transpose it, thanks to *colinguism*, into the political and sacred spheres, it became a language of fallacy par excellence. In this colinguism, standard Arabic, religion and politics form a ‘united front’ whose purpose is to maintain a solidarity which can guarantee to the ideological-political discourse its illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect through the people’s consent and rallying belief in a community, not of citizens, but rather of believers composed of the people and their political leader turned into a religious leader at the same time.

Coined by Balibar (1993: 7), colinguism is defined as “the association, through education and politics, of certain written languages in communication between legitimate partners.” This concept raises a very important aspect in language planning, that of the *act of institution of languages* (Charaudeau & Maingueneau, 2002: 101). Colinguism is the outcome of the institutionalisation of one language by attributing to it a privileged status, and thus, all the means to attain this status, at the expense of the other languages present in the same society. The high variety of language is imposed in this position in order to exclude categories of society from power struggle, categories which use the other varieties or languages that consequently get the low position and, thus, have no means for their promotion. This shows again the vital role of the political, juridical or educational institutions which have the decision making and enforcing powers.

As opposed to diglossia, where the positions and roles of languages are determined almost naturally according to what these languages can offer to society practically and objectively, colinguism is a situation where languages are assigned positions and roles according to what they can *serve* ideologically and politically, i.e. according to their relations to the political regime. Colinguism in Algeria designates then the fact that classical Arabic, a non-native language, is given the status of national and official language, while Berber, the Algerian spoken language and French, a second language in Algeria, are refused the positions which their sociological reality entitles them to have. The institution of a language as an official and national language establishes its organic link to the state and the political regime, “whether in its genesis or its social use.” The corollary of this statement is advanced by Bourdieu (2001: 71): “It is in the process of the constitution of the state that the conditions of constituting a unified linguistic market dominated by an official language are created: being obligatory in official occasions and official settings (School, public administrations, political institutions, etc.), this state language becomes the theoretical norm according to which all linguistic practices are objectively measured.

By instituting a colinguism favourable to standard Arabic, politics protects its *sword of Damocles*, which is paradoxically viewed by the people, not as an instrument of domination, or at least a mere language that belongs to their cultural heritage, but rather as a sacred language they *ought* to protect and defend as the moral/religious duty of any Muslim.

As matter of fact, colinguism in Algeria fulfils three main political objectives:

- control the shortest route to the hearts of the people through Islam whose sacred book is written in standard Arabic;
- exclude the people from the field of politics;

- exclude all oppositional intellectuals who do not use this language, either because they do not have enough competence in it, or because, within the field of their scientific competence, they have to use another language such as French.

The exclusion of the people operates in a very precise manner. By using standard Arabic in addressing them, a language which is obviously not mastered by a great proportion of them, politicians dissuade them from developing any interest in politics which seems to them beyond their sphere of competence, and mostly quite far from their daily preoccupations. The politicians' arbitrariness and lack of competence are thus disguised by a pseudo-esoteric language imposed as the means of 'communication' between the governor and the governed. Yet, without being understood (as observed above), the spokesperson's discourse in standard Arabic, the language of faith, is accepted as part of the pact of solidarity in the community of believers. The dramatic paradox lies here in the fact that the people acquiesce to the alienation of their native languages which are the only ones in which they can really express their frustrations and aspirations. By taking part in the destruction of their most suitable means of expression, they give up one of the most cherished human rights, the right to speak for themselves and participate in the determination of their future.

5. The speech genre

Ideological discourse is always made in a way to call upon the listener's *habitus* and *hexis*. This is also what explains the ideologues' recourse to religion. The type of speech genre, for example, chosen to deliver the discourse is very much related to the way Algerians are used to consider what a true utterance is. Their discursive *habitus* determines the acceptability of the mandated spokesperson's utterances or discourse. In practical terms, and as far as the Algerian society is concerned, the mandated spokespersons (the politician and the preacher) have made an option for a particular type of speech genre, the religious sermon, in order to reach discursive acceptability. The religious sermon is not handled here as a mere communicative event part of the non-linguistic or experiential context in language use (Nunan, 1993: 7-8), something which would not reveal its ideological substratum in the way it is instrumentalized, consciously or not, by political and religious ideologues. It is rather understood as a speech genre in the Bakhtinian sense of the term, i.e. as a socially-determined form of combination of language (Bakhtin 2002).

According to the Bakhtinian definition of primary and secondary speech genres, the religious sermon is a secondary rhetorical speech genre, and the normal process of speech genre evolution is that in which primary speech genres are handled by professional language users to transform them into secondary and sophisticated speech genres. Yet, it is admitted here that the religious sermon, in Algeria, has taken the reverse direction and mutated from an originally secondary speech genre into a primary one. This phenomenon occurred with its extraction from the religious field and the generalisation of its use to other social realms, including politics, the media, and most importantly education. What motivated this transfer is the symbolic capital and apparent credit that the religious sermon confers to its user within an environment overwhelmed by religious culture, that is, an environment that forms the suitable felicity conditions for a discourse that bears the hallmark of religion.

As an originally secondary speech genre, the religious sermon is characterised by all the sophistication these types have in terms of refined style, attractive imagery and individuality. As a converted primary speech genre, it enjoys wide diffusion and free access to general culture. The point made here is that the religious sermon has become in Algeria *the* genre most discourses destined to the people are framed in. The stylistic playing on emotions in the religious sermon is reinforced with what Bakhtin (2002: 84) calls the *expressive aspect*, which he defines as "the speaker's subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content of his utterance." As such, the mandated spokesperson's discourse, made in the religious sermon form, states ideas that are emotionally evaluated by the speaker himself, by having recourse to religious referents and justifications, emotional tone and stylistic aura. Linguistic and paralinguistic features characterise this genre. The linguistic ones vary from lexical markers such as the use of the same recurrent words with unique meanings to morphological markers "involving more deferential forms" (Saville-Troike, 2003: 64), such as the use of the first person plural or the third person singular when the speaker refers to themselves. The paralinguistic features range from the intonation, pitch, stress, yelling to kinesic, including formatted and particular body language such as knocking on the pulpit. The ideas are then evaluated by the listeners as definitely true, thus discarding any criticism or questioning. Emotional involvement invites adherence and commitment and rejects discussion and doubt.

With the use of the religious sermon as the speech genre to address the people in standard Arabic, this language, made sacred and thus transformed into an exclusively religious language, is also turned, by distortion of use, into an expressive language, not allowing rational and objective use. While words and languages "belong to nobody, and in themselves they evaluate nothing," as observed by Bakhtin (2002: 85), standard Arabic has paradoxically become the propriety of the mandated spokesperson (the politician and the preacher).

It is not intended here to uphold a Manichean view of languages, that there are rational languages and irrational ones. It is definitely admitted that languages are what their users make of them. Standard Arabic is by no means a language that is inherently unfit for science and rational discourse. This language was, and still is, the vehicle of a great literature, whether scientific or fiction, and was the instrument of a momentous civilisation that left indelible traces in human patrimony. Yet, the ideological instrumentalization of standard Arabic, added to the fact that it does not possess a native speaking community, have made of it an instrument which is cut off people's reality, devoid of its human dimension, and mainly used for political domination.

Mastery of standard Arabic is, however, not sufficient, as stated earlier, as the mastery of the speech genre is also essential to giving the impression of the mandated spokesperson's individuality in terms of discourse content and consequently to the completion of their charisma. Mastery of speech genres, and in this particular case of the religious sermon, equips the mandated spokesperson with the means to have control over their audience. This explains the impressive success of such preachers on Arab satellite channels like Amr Khaled on *Iqraa*, or Mohammed Amara on *ESC*. This parallels, to some extent, American Evangelist preachers, like Dr. C.A. Dollar on *TBN* or Bishop T.D. Jakes on *Church Channel*, who attract large audiences on American evangelist TV channels, and who attempt to resolve the failure of the Christian discourse. This failure has long been attributed to the sole demise of the people's belief in the Church's interpretation of the world, in rugged competition with science. Actually, as Bourdieu noted, it is also the collapse of the special social relationship between the clergy and the people, between the Christian believer and their mandated spokesperson or mediator, the priest, in their relation to God. This relationship faded at the very moment it ceased to be magical, i.e. based on the belief and trust in the mediator themselves. This clarifies perfectly the success of the Islamist religious discourse, through such TV channels as *Iqraa*, as it is first based on the charisma of orators like Amr Khaled, Abdallah Muslih, Wajdi Ghunaim and Ali al-Djafri, who have become household names, competing with movie and music stars in the majority Arab-Islamic world.

Other illustrations can be drawn from politicians' speeches to show how they instrumentalize religion to achieve the status of the mandated spokesperson, by the use of standard Arabic as the language of communication and the religious sermon as the speech genre of this communication. Probably the best examples can be found in presidential speeches, first because the speaker holds the highest political and symbolic position in the country, and second because no other period in Algerian modern history has witnessed such overuse or abuse of religious references in politics for ideological considerations. A quite vivid instance is provided by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in his address to the state executives about the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, on which the Algerian people were invited to pronounce in the national referendum of September 29th, 2005. In the pure tradition of the religious sermon, reference to God was systematic and reached twelve times, whether to ask for his blessing or to justify an action or idea, as this extract shows it: "Along years, we have done our best to extinguish the inferno of the *Fitna* ... till God's mercy helps us."

This is a perfect example of self-proclamation as a God-mandated spokesperson by joining the pronoun 'we' (which refers to the speaker) in the first clause to the word 'God' in the second. The direct induction is that the action of those referred to with 'we' is in itself God's mercy, and which can only expect from the listener, as a believer, to welcome. Equally important, the use of the word *fitna* (which means 'turmoil' or 'sedition') in Arabic in the French version of the address, instead of a French equivalent, is also a deliberate intention to refer the listeners back to religion, this word standing for the worst state a community could experience according to the Koran, as this verse, very well known by most Muslims, states it: "For Persecution [*Fitna*] is worse than slaughter" (Al-Baqarah S.2, A.191). As such, anyone who contradicts this discourse is supporting the *Fitna*, and thus standing against God.

The monopolisation of the religious sermon as a speech genre is accordingly the first step towards the monopolisation of power over the people. Politicians have understood this all too well as illustrated by the Islamist political parties' continual strive to control the mosques, by any means necessary (including physical threats against imams), in a country where official records show that an average of more than 14 million people attends the Friday Prayer in mosques every week (*El Watan*, February 20th, 2006). Thanks to the religious sermon and standard Arabic, political discourse, a secondary speech genre in essence, has also become a primary speech genre. To diffuse its ideology, political discourse, as a primary genre, gets full access to the largest portion of the population that does not possess the intellectual means to understand and respond to specialised discourse used in "complex cultural communication" (Bakhtin, 2002: 98).

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