

Opponent's review of the doctoral dissertation

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„Language attitudes and motivation of the Tunisian youth: English language learning after the 2011 revolution”

The topic of the dissertation is highly relevant, as the author of the thesis has conducted research in an area that lacks sufficient exploration. The results obtained from this research are valuable for foreign language teachers and university students studying foreign languages, not only in Tunisia, but also in the broader context of foreign language teaching. One of the key contributions of this research is the examination of two psychological factors in foreign language teaching: attitudinal and motivational factors. These findings can be utilized to develop strategies and instructional approaches that enhance students' motivation to learn and improve their performance in English language acquisition. Additionally, the author provides a comprehensive description of the social and linguistic context of contemporary Tunisia, which is a topic with limited general knowledge in this region of Europe. This aspect of the thesis adds significant value to the overall research.

In this dissertation, the author's specific objective is to explore the role of instrumental or integrative motivation in language learning among Tunisian learners and university students.

The structure of the thesis is logical and clear. The dissertation includes 26 figures and 30 tables, which serve to effectively present the data.

The dissertation comprises six main chapters. The first chapter titled “Introduction” provides a description of the research aim, the problem statement, and the primary lines of the research. In this chapter, the author formulates the main research questions excellently. The author clearly states the intention to investigate the different types of motivation exhibited by English language learners. Furthermore, the research aims to examine whether there has been a shift in the social role of English in Tunisia following the Jasmine Revolution in 2011, and whether there has been a corresponding change in attitudes towards the importance of learning English.

In the second chapter titled “Literature review”, which is divided into four main sections, the author of the dissertation describes the linguistic situation in Tunisia based on existing literature. Specifically, the author discusses the status of Berber, English, Classical Arabic, Tunisian Arabic and French in Tunisia.

In this chapter, the author presents a highly intriguing situation that is relatively unfamiliar to me. As I delved into the findings, several questions arose. Regarding the discussion on Berber, the author provides various figures on the number of language speakers, which appear somewhat contradictory.

For instance, on page 7, it is stated that "'while the Berber language is considered as a dying language and it is estimated to be spoken by less than 10% of the Tunisian population'." However, on page 9, the figure is mentioned to be over 500,000, while other estimates reduce it to 200,000, representing approximately 2% of Tunisia's 11.5 million inhabitants. The presentation of figures in this manner is perplexing, and it would have been beneficial to include an explanation as to why accurately determining the number of Berber speakers in Tunisia is challenging. The author acknowledges that the Berber language is endangered, stating on page 9, "The Berber language is facing a crucial fate that is leading to its extinction (Aloui, 2021)." However, on page 8, it is mentioned that in Morocco and Algeria, the Berber language is heard daily through television and radio broadcasts, and Berber songs and published materials in Berber are available.

This leads me to wonder: in your opinion, are Berber language resources in Morocco and Algeria not accessible to Berbers residing in Tunisia?

The chapter presents significant regional varieties in the Tunisian dialect, encompassing both phonological and lexical aspects. These variations contribute to the sociolinguistic richness of the region without posing a threat to mutual understanding (10.o). Furthermore, the author introduces the theoretical framework employed in the dissertation's theoretical section within this chapter. It is stated (p. 8) that "the language situation in Tunisia may be characterized as diglossic, bilingual, and even more multilingual." The diglossic arrangement involves the coexistence of spoken and written Arabic, while the bilingual scenario involves the functional division between Arabic and French languages. In relation to this, I have a question regarding the author's perspective. Does the concept of diglossia, as described in the author's opinion, solely pertain to the usage of language varieties in different contexts? Can the theory of diglossia, as exemplified by Fishman's influential study published as early as 1967, be applied to the usage of Arabic and French in Tunisia? Additionally, to what extent does this language situation primarily apply to written language use in Tunisia?

Of particular interest is the author's statement on page 10, which highlights that „The Tunisian dialect presents important regional varieties, both phonological and lexical, which constitute a sociolinguistic richness without any threat to mutual understanding” (p. 10). At the same time, it raises the question of whether there exists, or in your opinion, a standardising version of Tunisian Arabic? Two statements by the author seem to support this notion: On page 10, it is mentioned that "Over the years, a fundamental record of written TA has been accumulated from popular tales, poetry, songs, and publications such as newspapers, books, and novels." Additionally, on page 13 it is noted that ". the

radio speaker is sometimes shifting from TA to English but not very often and especially in social media such as Facebook".

Furthermore, I am curious about the meaning behind the statement:: "the Arabic language still has a major role in the Tunisian language." Does this imply that the Tunisian language is distinct from Arabic? The author introduces the concept of "Tunisification" as the foundation of Tunisian identity; however, the specific meaning of the concept is not clearly defined. It remains unclear whether it pertains solely to a linguistic context or encompasses a broader social context. Could you please provide a brief explanation of this concept? I am particularly interested in understanding the statement on page 10 "The roots of Tunisification came from the number of civilizations that Tunisia has encountered in the past, each one of them has marked the country in such ways and due to each one of them Tunisification has been created and today it represents the language of Tunisia (TA)".

In this chapter, the author presents an explanation of the concept of attitude. However, one aspect that seems to be missing is an emphasis on the significance of social determinants in shaping attitude. While introducing the concept of attitude, the author provides a concise definition, but it may be beneficial to further explore the role of social factors. My question in this context is how the behaviourist conception of attitude, according to which attitude is a response to certain social situations, would be applicable to the results of this research (Agheyisi, Rebecca-Fishman, Joshua 1970. Language attitude studies: A brief survey of methodological approaches. *Anthropological Linguistics* 12: 131-157.)

Regarding the place of French in Tunisian society, the author states on page 31: „Education in Tunisia means being a French speaker since it is considered as the language of literature and culture, as well as the language of domination and influence (Hammadi, 2020).” Subsequently, on page 32, the author mentions that : “Similar phenomena are reported in Norwich, by Trudgill (1972, 1974), in Detroit by Wolfram & Riley (1967), Wolfram (1969), Fasold (1968) while Labov (1966, 1986) and Levine & Crockett (1966) have investigated the same phenomenon in other varieties of American English." It should be noted that most of the cited case studies describe linguistic and social situations from 50 years ago. Consequently, it is essential to consider the changes that have occurred since then when drawing generalizable conclusions. Apart from the historical context of colonialism, what practical reasons still support the linguistic and social situation where French retains greater prestige than Arabic?

The third chapter of the thesis provides a comprehensive description of the research methodology. It covers the process of designing the research, the questionnaire design process, the interviewing process, the selection of respondents, and the way qualitative and quantitative data were processed. The author used the statistical program SPSS to process the data.

The processing of the research results is well organised, the statistical methods used are appropriate, and the interviews have been processed and coded correctly.

The research intends to investigate the relationship between three variables: attitude, motivation, and different grades of education. - a cross-sectional mixed method which would dictate a methodology to collect data and a way to process and analyse at one point in time

In the fourth chapter of the thesis, the author presents the demographic data of the respondents. The participation of primary and secondary school pupils, as well as university students, is balanced in the survey. However, it is unfortunate that no data regarding the respondents' mother tongues, French and Arabic, are available. This limits the ability to contextualize attitudes towards English within a broader framework. Additionally, the number of respondents is relatively small, which restricts the scope of drawing broader conclusions.

Nevertheless, the statistical analysis of the data validity of the measures employed were of a high standard. The utilization of tables and graphs enhances the professional, textual analysis, making it more illustrative and easily understandable.

In this chapter, the author provides well-elaborated answers to the research questions formulated in the dissertation.

Chapter five summarises the conclusions derived from the empirical data, following a structured approach to address the research questions. The conclusions drawn are appropriate, and the combination of the questionnaire and interviews conducted complement each other effectively, offering a comprehensive perspective on the research topic. Notably, an important finding on page 104 is that: "The mixed method findings of the present study demonstrated that motivation may be influenced by a variety of factors, such as the classroom settings (learning materials, teaching methods, learning environment, etc.), the student's individual characteristics, along with the language education policy."

The recommendations presented in this chapter are relevant to educational policy and are based on the resulting data. In the sixth and final chapter, the author summarises her findings based on the obtained data. This chapter appropriately acknowledges the limitations that impact the validity of the findings.. These include the small number of respondents and the future profession of university students in the field of tourism, which may, and probably has, to some extent distorted the results obtained. These facts make it possible to generalise the results only with some reservation.

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In summary

The six chapters of the dissertation are logically structured, each chapter including an introduction to the topic, the data, and a summary of the chapter.

Despite the shortcomings noted above, this research is, in my opinion, an excellent basis for designing a broader study that examines the topic from multiple perspectives.

The number of references in the dissertation is adequate and the dissertation meets the requirements of a PhD. degree in terms of content and form.

Therefore, based on the above, I consider the thesis to be acceptable for public debate.

In addition to the previous questions, I have the following question for the candidate: How could the research be designed to ensure the validity of the obtained data on a general basis?



Nitra, 20th June 2023.

prof. Ildikó Vančo, PhD.

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