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Evaluation of

**Ibtissem Smari's
dissertation titled**

“The role of language in shaping national identity in post-revolutionary Tunisia”

Ibtissem Smari's dissertation promises a highly complex, relevant, and intellectually exciting analysis of the sociolinguistics of multilingualism in Tunisia. The topic is up-to-date, looking at the new, post-revolutionary Tunisia since 2011, and relying on current approaches to multilingualism as a construct and defining identity. The speaker profiles proposed for Tunisia in this paper are notable and very promising.

The paper has been considerably expanded since the version submitted for the in-house (“mock”) defense, making it a well-argued solid piece of work, which, however, still suffers from some shortcomings, unfortunately.

Overall, the main problem of the work is still that the relationship of language and identity, its components, manifestations, and ways of analysis are not argued in detail in this paper but are mostly “taken for granted”. The new chapter of the paper, Chapter 2, Theoretical Framework, provides a much needed overview of the sociolinguistic issues that the paper rests on in 10 pages, but these 10 pages are not enough to build the theoretical framework from scratch, arguing it step by step, and critically assessing the various approaches to show their advantages and disadvantages when discussing the kind of data the author has collected. A 10 page literature review is simply not enough for a PhD dissertation!

Chapter 1: Introduction (pp. 1–10)

The Introduction has improved considerably and is now a fair start to the paper.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework (pp. 11–20)

The literature review lacks a detailed, step-by-step argumentation, a critical assessment of the sources, and a synthesis that divulges what the author is thinking about all of the surveyed sources. Such a detailed review would then supply the author the tools to demonstrate how these all intersect in her paper, and to paint the complex canvas against which the case of Tunisia can then be dissected and analyzed, and providing the tools through which it can be understood.

Chapter 3: Historical Background (pp. 21–55)

The historical background outlined in this chapter provides all the necessary details for outsiders (i.e. non-Tunisians) to understand the historical and social background.



Chapter 4: Methodology (pp. 56–91)

This chapter has also significantly improved since the first version of the dissertation. The questionnaire used by the author is now described in detail, explaining the reason for inclusion vs. omission vs. alteration of each group of questions as well as of the specific questions in the questionnaire that the author is using.

However, in section 4.4 about the participants, we are not given any indication of who (i) constitutes the people who are the 25+ group in the sample (this is 42% of the entire sample!): what age groups do they belong to? (25+ is a rather large cohort in any society), what characterizes them as far as class, educational level, and occupation? Also, (ii) do the participants living outside Tunisia students studying abroad, professionals working abroad temporarily, or immigrants somewhere? – these three possible options would mean very different people in terms of social background. All of these details (related to i and ii) would be crucial to the understanding of the role languages play in the construction of Tunisian identity. The present reviewer would have to be convinced by a meticulous argumentation supported by empirical evidence even of the highly unlikely opposite, i.e. that social variables such as age group (within the broad part of Tunisian society of 25+ people), level of education, and occupation do NOT play a role in shaping the relationship of language and identity. But surely, the linguistic identity of an uneducated, rural, elderly, male Tunisian peasant will differ from that of a university-educated, middle-aged, urban Tunisian professional female?

Chapter 5: Results (pp. 92–130)

This chapter is much improved.

Chapter 6: Discussions (pp. 131–137)

The discussion of the results is basically solid.

Chapter 7: Conclusions, Limitations and Future Implications (pp. 138–143)

It is a big improvement that the Conclusion has become a separate chapter (rather than being in the same chapter as the Discussion). The author's conclusions are solid.

Bibliography (pp. 144–163)

The bibliography is basically good although there are still some inconsistencies (missing places of publications in the case of books, missing page numbers of book chapters, missing italics in titles etc.). A new problem (compared to the first version of the dissertation) is the odd change in margins throughout.

Appendices (pp. 164–193)

The appendices have been improved.

Argumentation:

The paper has all the necessary parts and is structured clearly. The argumentation of the paper is clear most of the time.

The author should have limited her use of the first person plural pronoun in the text to instances when “author + reader” is meant (e.g. “as we can see in Table x”), and refrain from it in all other cases, including when talking about activities the author does.

Format issues:

The formatting has improved considerably.

Language:

The paper is written in good academic English, which is sophisticated and clear throughout. The text is much more readable than it was before, which is a considerable improvement.

All in all, the author has clearly done a lot of work to begin with, and made lots of improvements on the dissertation. Even though the literature review (Theoretical Framework) is not sufficient for the PhD dissertation, the present reviewer (grudgingly) recommends that the author be awarded her PhD due to the strengths of her paper.

Szeged, May 29, 2024

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