

TANGIER,  
MOROCCO

APRIL 28 - 30,  
2025

# Language Frontiers

## Morocco and Beyond

THE APRIL SEMINAR AT THE

TANGIER AMERICAN LEGATION



The Storyteller, etching by James McBey, Tetouan, 1912  
From the collection of the Tangier American Legation



Language  
Frontiers  
Morocco and Beyond

**Co-Organizers**

Dale F. Eickelman (Dartmouth College and President, TALIM)

Fadma Ait Mous (Hassan II University of Casablanca and TALIM Board Member)

For Morocco, the “top-down” dictates of the state and religious institutions, including those of language, are well known for the colonial era, the early decades after independence, and the contemporary era. Since the early 20th century in Morocco, the strengths and limits of Arabic (both formal and *darija*), French, and Spanish have shifted in scope and significance. Since the mid-1990s, for example, the state increasingly promoted Tamazight and now recognizes it as a national language.

Less is known about “bottom-up” language choices—the subtle pressures by which people communicate and express themselves. Sometimes bottom-up language pressures, even if not used in schools or officially promoted, shape what can be said and done at the local or even regional, national, and transnational levels.

Topics include historical language use in Morocco. For example, from at least the 15th through the late 19th century on both sides of the Mediterranean, a *sabir*, or *lingua franca*, never officially recognized, was a prevalent mode for communication both for commerce and sometimes matters of state. In Morocco, French prevailed as an administrative language for decades after independence in 1956. How documents were translated or orally interpreted had important political and economic ramifications. Forced conscription in Algeria during the First and Second World Wars, the Spanish civil war of the 1930s, and the recruitment of Moroccan troops in Indochina in the 1950s had important effects on language use and politics. With the spread of mass education in North Africa and the Middle East from the mid-20th century, the rise of satellite television not fully controlled by the state, and the proliferation of mobile and subsequently “smart” phones, the possibilities of using language to form groups expanded. Language use among Moroccan and Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, or Moroccan first- and second-generation immigrants in Spain or Italy, signals how language choice and use both reinforces and shifts ideas of frontier and belonging.

Dr. Fadma AÏT MOUS  
(Hassan II University of Casablanca)

**ABSTRACT:**

The Amazigh Language in Morocco: Officialization, Education,  
and Sociocultural Dynamics

This presentation assesses the sociolinguistic status of the Amazigh language in Morocco, focusing on the multifaceted challenges and opportunities arising from its official recognition in 2011. Integrating policy analysis, ethnographic studies, recent statistical data, and perspectives from multilingual scholarly sources—French, Spanish, and Arabic—it argues that despite tangible progress through constitutional recognition and standardization endeavors, persistent systemic barriers impede the language's comprehensive integration into Moroccan society. These barriers include uneven implementation in education, sociocultural stigmatization, limitations in integrating Amazigh into public administration, and its academic marginalization (Idhssaine and Kirat, 2023). Highlighting the robust implementation strategies informed by decolonial approaches to language policy and emphasizing the role of civil society initiatives like the Tirra Alliance, this study underscores that symbolic recognition alone is insufficient. Substantive resource redistribution and the dismantling of entrenched linguistic hierarchies are essential (Boukous, 2012; El Borji, 2023). Moreover, the genesis and evolution of Amazigh studies within Moroccan universities, exemplified by the Department of Amazigh Language and Literature (DLLAM) at Ibn Zohr University (Agadir), are examined as crucial elements in promoting the language's revitalization and decolonizing historical narratives, thereby contributing to a more inclusive national identity. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu (1991) and Fraser (2003), the presentation examines the dynamics of linguistic capital and recognition in the Moroccan context.

Dr. Fadma AÏT MOUS  
(Hassan II University of Casablanca)



Fadma AÏT MOUS is a Professor Habilité of Sociology at the Aïn Chock Faculty of Letters and the Humanities of the Hassan II University of Casablanca and Co-director and Researcher at the Laboratoire de recherche sur les différenciations socio-anthropologiques et les identités sociales (LADSI) at the same Faculty. She is also “Chargée de mission” for developing research in the Social Sciences and Humanities at the university. Among her professional affiliations, she is General Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Arab Council for Social Sciences (Beirut) and Member of the Executive Council of the Merian Center for Advanced Study in the Maghreb (MECAM, Tunis).

She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from the Hassan II University of Casablanca in 2012 for her work on nationalist networks. Her current research interests focus on questions related to collective identities, nationalism, Amazigh culture, history and memory, gender dynamics, youth participation, and migration. Her publications include the co-edited (with Driss Ksikes) *Le Métier d'intellectuel* (2014), which won the Atlas Prize for Essays in 2015; and the co-edited (with Zakaria Kadiri) *Les jeunes du Maroc: Comprendre les dynamiques pour un nouveau contrat social* (Morocco's Youth: Understanding the dynamics for a new social contract), 2021.

She is fluent in Arabic, French, English, and Amazigh (tashelhit).

Dr. Dale F. EICKELMAN (Dartmouth College)  
and Bouzekri DRAIOUIY (Independent Scholar)

**ABSTRACT:**

Language Frontiers: Morocco and Beyond

Language shapes frontiers and boundaries as much as do states, ethnicity, religions, and sects. These boundaries and frontiers are contested, fluctuating, and permeable, even if state and religious authorities sometimes assert that they are fixed and unchanging. Carefully read, 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) anticipates Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" by more than half a millennium, Ibn Khaldun wrote that "blood ties" make for the strongest form of 'asabiya, or "group feeling." For him, blood ties and group feeling are metaphors—sustained through sentiment, common action, and shared experience. Of the various vectors of identity, language is less understood, perhaps because it is taken for granted. The Arab League, inspired by the British in 1942 and founded in 1945, initially had seven members. Today it has 22. Its members adhere formally to recognizing a classical, or literary Arabic as a state language. Some states, including Morocco, officially recognize other languages. Spoken and written languages often imperceptibly change over time due to local and external factors. Facility in them becomes a subtle marker of status and class. Prior to the advent of mass education, local spoken languages were often only fully understood in narrowly circumscribed communities. In England, Spain, France, Morocco, North America, China, and elsewhere, the rise of state-sponsored mass education eroded the base of local language variations. Changing patterns of emigration also have unintended consequences. In Germany, for example, the children of immigrants have the right to be taught in their language of origin. Thus Turkish Kurds can be taught in Kurdish, not possible in their country of origin. From at least the 15th through the late 19th century on both sides of the Mediterranean, a *sabir*, or *lingua franca*, never officially recognized, was a major mode of communication both for commerce and sometimes for matters of state. In Morocco and Algeria, French prevailed as an administrative language for decades after independence. How documents were translated or orally interpreted had important political and economic ramifications. Forced conscription in Algeria during the First and Second World Wars, the Spanish civil war of the 1930s, and the recruitment of Moroccan troops for Indochina in the 1950s had important effects on language use. With the spread of mass education in North Africa and the Middle East from the mid-20th century, the rise of satellite television not fully controlled by the state, and the proliferation of mobile and subsequently "smart" phones, the possibilities of using language to form groups expanded, and not always in anticipated ways.

## Dr. Dale F. EICKELMAN (Dartmouth College) and Bouzekri DRAIOUIY (Independent Scholar)



**Dale F. Eickelman** is Ralph and Richard Lazarus Professor of Anthropology and Human Relations Emeritus at Dartmouth College, USA, and President of the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies ([www.legation.org](http://www.legation.org)). His publications include *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (1976), *Muslim Politics* (co-authored new ed., 2003), *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach*, 4th ed. (2002), *Knowledge and Power in Morocco* (1985), *Higher Education Investment in the Arab States of the Gulf* (co-edited, 2017) and, most recently, his co-edited *Islam, Christianity, and Secularism in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe: The Last Half Century* (2022).

A former President of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), and of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Professor Eickelman currently serves as a trustee and senior advisor to Kuwait's first private liberal arts university, the American University of Kuwait. He was named a Carnegie Scholar (2009-2011). In 2011 he received the Distinguished Scholar Award from the Middle East Section of the American Anthropological Association, and in 2022 received an honorary Ph.D. from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria.

**Bouzekri M. Draiouiy** is a graduate in applied linguistics from the École Normale Supérieure of the Université Mohamed V, Rabat. He taught English at public secondary schools in Casablanca and Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, until his retirement from the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale in 2013. On his return from Oman in 2000, he joined a general and business/professional language center as a part-time trainer for both young and adult learners alongside his full-time public sector teaching duties. He is also a freelance translator. From his early secondary student life up to now he has worked with Dale F. Eickelman both in Morocco and elsewhere as a research assistant. They have published together articles on oral religious texts in *Hespèris-Tamuda* and *Anthropos*. Recently Draiouiy translated into Arabic several chapters in *The Anthropology of Islamic Societies* (انثروبولوجيا المجتمعات الإسلامية), edited and presented by Youness Loukili (2022).



Dr. Mohammed DAHBI  
(Al Akhawayn University)

**ABSTRACT:**

Language and Literacy at School: the Difficult Connection

This paper examines the complex relationship between language and literacy in Morocco, where conceptual confusion between these domains contributes to persistent educational challenges. Drawing on international assessment data (PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA) and national evaluations, I propose that the lack of clear distinction between language teaching and literacy development affects educational outcomes in Morocco's multilingual context. Drawing on published research and documented classroom practices, I illustrate how this conceptual blur manifests in teaching practices across subjects and levels. History of language policies since independence helps explain current attitudes and practices regarding literacy. The paper argues that distinguishing between language proficiency and literacy development is crucial for educational improvement. The terminological gap in Arabic (and French) educational discourse - where 'literacy' lacks a widely understood equivalent - reflects and reinforces conceptual confusion among educators and policymakers. Finally, I propose practical recommendations for teacher education, curriculum development, and policy reform to address these challenges. I suggest that clearer conceptual frameworks for literacy development, distinct from but connected to language teaching, could significantly improve educational outcomes in Morocco's public schools.

## Dr. Mohammed DAHBI (Al Akhawayn University)



Mohammed Dahbi is Professor Emeritus at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane. He is a linguist with special interest in language and literacy education, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. He taught high school and subsequently spent a large part of his career teaching at Mohammed V University where he was also involved in teacher training and in many educational policy reform efforts. He participated as a consultant in the design of Al Akhawayn University and was appointed as the first dean of Humanities and Social Sciences. He also directed the Center for Academic Development and the Social Science Research Institute and served as the Chief Academic Officer (VPAA) of Al Akhawayn University.

He directed several research projects in the areas of classroom discourse, conversation analysis, courtroom and doctor-patient discourse, literacy acquisition, and language variation. He served as President and long-time member of the Moroccan-American (Fulbright) Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange, the TOEFL Board, and member and chair of the TOEFL Grants and Awards committee, and member of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Humanities and Islamic Studies in Casablanca. He continues to serve on the board of the American Cultural Association in Morocco. This long career has helped him develop expertise in research design, project management, and human resource management, and gave him access to an extensive professional network in Morocco and internationally. He holds an MA from the University of Southern California (1974), and a PhD from Georgetown University (1984).

Abdelbaar Mounadi IDRISSE  
(Independent scholar)

**ABSTRACT:**

Translation for Museum Interpretation and Accessibility:  
the Tanger American Legation Museum

This presentation examines literature on translation for museums in Morocco. I draw on my experience of interpreting the displays of Tanger American Legation Museum from English into Arabic. The presentation builds on previous descriptive and theoretical experiences of similar projects in other countries. I explore the challenges of museum translation, indicate solutions that have been adopted elsewhere and adapted to our project. The presentation has three parts: (a) an overview of museum interpretation and established writing styles and guidelines, (b) assessing the importance of museum translation as an interpretive tool and its implications for audience outreach, and (c) describing the experience of interpreting and translating the Tanger American Legation museum in Tanger, Morocco.

## Abdelbaar Mounadi IDRISSI (Independent scholar)



Abdelbaar Mounadi IDRISSI is an independent researcher interested in translation and translation/interpretation studies and linguistics. He is Outreach Director at the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies (TALIM) and an intern pre-sworn translator at the Cabinet Raissouli for Technical, Legal, and General Translation in Tangier. Idrissi is also a volunteer translator/proofreader at Respond Crisis Translation, providing pro bono translation/interpretation services for asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and displaced victims of conflicts, wars, and natural crises. A certified virtual exchange facilitator by Soliya, Abdelbaar is an alumnus of the Spring-2018 Soliya Connect program.

He participated in the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program, spending a year (2019-2020) as a primary instructor of Arabic at Jackson State University in Mississippi. He also participated in Erasmus+ Global Mobility, which awarded him a one-year exchange grant to study English Language and Translation Studies at the University of Eastern Finland. He also actively volunteered with the local branch of the Erasmus Student Network, and was later elected as vice-president of its Spring 2017 board. IDRISSI holds a Translator's Diploma (M.A. equivalent) from the King Fahd School of Translation in Tangier (2018), and a B.A. in English Language and Literature from Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fez (2015). His first published translation into Arabic is Eric Calderwood's *Colonial al-Andalus: Spain and the Making of Modern Moroccan Culture* (2018; Arabic, 2023).

Dr. Daniel WAGNER  
(University of Pennsylvania)

**ABSTRACT:**

Language and Learning in Morocco and Beyond

This paper examines the intersection of language, learning, and education in Morocco from 1956 to the present with particular attention to the major social and policy changes of the 1970s and 1990s. For example, in 1970 less than half of all seven and eight year old children had spent at least some time in primary school. A decade later, the figure was nearly 75%. Today, the figure is 99%. This development parallels the research for the first year of attendance in secondary schooling. However, urban-rural differences persist. Nearly 90% of urban children began secondary school, but only 60% from rural areas. Some think that this urban-rural difference is due to the fact that rural children are more likely to be tamazight speakers, female, and poor. More recently, as formal education and Arabic literacy skills reach more of the population through schools and the digital media, it is important to consider what curricula, teaching skills, school characteristics, and parental input make a difference in improving literacy acquisition. We also review how other countries with similar socio-economic and ethno-linguistic characteristics have faced comparable obstacles. We conclude with further steps for education leaders to consider for strengthening the education system in Morocco.

## Dr. Daniel WAGNER (University of Pennsylvania)



Dan Wagner is the UNESCO Chair in Learning and Literacy and Professor of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. He is Founding Director of the International Literacy Institute, co-established by UNESCO and the University of Pennsylvania, Founding Director of the federally-funded National Center on Adult Literacy, and PennGSE's International Educational Development Program. After an undergraduate degree in Engineering at Cornell University, and voluntary service in the Peace Corps (Morocco), he received his Ph.D. in Psychology at the University of Michigan, was a two-year postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University, a Visiting Fellow at the International Institute of Education Planning in Paris, a Visiting Professor at

the University of Geneva (Switzerland), and a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Paris. Wagner has extensive experience in national and international educational issues, and has served as an advisor to UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, USAID, DFID, and others on international development issues. In addition to professional publications, Dr. Wagner has written/edited more than 25 books (in English, with translations into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and Japanese), including most recently: *Learning as Development: Rethinking International Education in a Changing World* (2018); *Learning at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Science, measurement, and policy in low-income countries* (2018); *Apprentissage et Developpement: Repenser l'éducation internationale dans un monde qui change*(2019); *Learning, Marginalization, and Improving the Quality of Education in Low-income Countries*, (2022).

Dr. Nabila LOURIZ  
(Hassan II University of Casablanca)

**ABSTRACT:**

Language Contact and Variation in Moroccan Arabic

Abstract : Variation in Moroccan Arabic (MA) is manifested at all grammatical levels. In particular, the choice of lexical use among speakers is driven by various social variables, including social status, age, gender, audience, and social network. This paper principally discusses variation as the outcome of language contact and the challenges it raises vis-à-vis standardization. Diversity, complexity, and possible conflict mark the Moroccan sociolinguistic situation (Announi, 2021). MA is also influenced by contact with varieties of Amazigh, French, Spanish, and recently English. The result is, lexical borrowing and phonological coloring, partly explaining cross-speaker as well as intra-speaker variation. Ennaji (2005) subdivides MA into different regional varieties: a) Northern dialects b) the Fassi variety, c) the Moroccan dialect of Rabat and Casablanca, d) dialects influenced by Tashalheit Amazigh (e.g. Marrakshi), and e) Hassani. This paper analyses data from Casablanca, Marrakesh, and Tangier, and suggests how contact with French, Amazighi, and Spanish affects speakers' linguistic choice. Our focus is on morpho-phonological diversity and its impact on lexical structure. Finally, we discuss the sociolinguistic considerations related to attempts to standardize MA.

Dr. Nabila LOURIZ  
(Hassan II University of Casablanca)



Nabila LOURIZ is professor of linguistics at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities–Aïn Chock at Hassan II University of Casablanca. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Essex (UK), with a thesis on L3 phonology, a field that was in its infancy at the time [2004]. She then expanded her research to other language contact scenarios, namely, the adaptation of loanwords from French, Spanish, and Tashilhit into Moroccan Arabic. She earned several research grants and awards, including the British Academy Award and (twice) Fulbright Research Fellowships. She held visiting positions at international universities, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA), the University of Graz (Austria), and the University of Essex (UK). She is on the scientific boards of several international journals and conferences.

Dr. Mohamed OUBENAL  
(Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe, Rabat)

**ABSTRACT:**

Business texts written in Amazigh: commercial correspondence in tachelhit from the first half of the 19th century

We focus on sixteen letters written in tachelhit by tradesmen in contact with the small coastal town of Taşşurt (Essaouira/Mogador). We first present the political-economic context of the Souss region in the first half of the 19th century. Then we analyze the form and content of these letters, collected at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris). These letters show that the know-how learned in the madrasas of the Souss area were used to write letters giving instructions on trade matters, while also informing recipients of significant events which might affect their business. All letters follow a highly standardized format, with the sender beginning with a salutation in Arabic. This is followed immediately by a lengthy text in tachelhit, as if the sender were seeking a certain intimacy with his correspondent in order to convey practical information.

Dr. Mohamed OUBENAL  
(Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe, Rabat)



**Mohamed Oubenal** is a sociologist at the InstitutRoyal de la Culture Amazighe, Rabat [[www.ircam.ma](http://www.ircam.ma)]. He has a Ph.D. in sociology from Paris-Dauphine University, and his research interests include economic sociology, the sociology of culture, and social network analysis. Currently he is studying the transformations of Amazigh society as well as economic elites. He is member of the editorial team of the academic journal *Asinag*, published by IRCAM and dedicated to Amazigh studies (<https://journals.openedition.org/asinag/>) and the *Revue Marocaine de Sciences Politiques et Sociales* (RMSPS), published by the Mohammed V University (Rabat). Personal website : <https://sites.google.com/view/oubenal/>

Dr. Oussama CHERRIBI (Emory University)  
and Leila CHERRIBI (University of Amsterdam)

**ABSTRACT:**

**Educating in One's Own Language: Moroccan and Turkish Migrants  
in the Netherlands**

The migration of Moroccans to the Netherlands, initiated through the recruitment of labor migrants in 1969, sparked a complex interplay of cultural preservation, linguistic identity, and policy evolution. For Moroccan migrant communities, language emerged as both a symbol of heritage and a crucial means of connecting to their cultural roots. Grassroots efforts by parents and community leaders to provide language education for their children arose as a response to the challenges of maintaining maternal languages within the Dutch socio-cultural environment. These initiatives from "below," deeply rooted in the aspirations of migrant families, aimed to sustain a sense of identity and continuity amidst the dislocation of migration. Mosques and migrant organizations became pivotal actors in these efforts, creating informal networks of language instruction and cultural transmission.

In parallel, Dutch policymakers recognized the importance of addressing the linguistic and cultural needs of migrant communities. The Dutch government began financially supporting these initiatives in 1974, and in 1983, this support evolved into a formal policy known as *Onderwijs in Eigen Taal en Cultuur* (Education in Own Language and Culture). This policy emerged as a state-driven, top-down initiative aimed at helping migrants preserve their heritage languages. Motivated by the perception that migrant communities in the Netherlands were temporary, the policy sought to equip migrant children with linguistic skills that would facilitate their reintegration into their countries of origin. At the same time, it aimed to support Dutch language acquisition and improve school performance. In its initial version, one key requirement was that the chosen language be the official language of the migrants' country of origin. When the agreement between the Netherlands and Morocco was established, only Arabic was recognized as Morocco's official language. However, Morocco's 2011 constitutional reforms granted Tamazight co-official status alongside Arabic. The Dutch minority language policy was revisited in 1998 and renamed *Allochtone Levende Talen* (Instruction in Non-Indigenous Living Languages). This revision expanded the policy to include migrant languages that had been excluded from the original framework. For Moroccan migrants, this meant the inclusion of Tamazight. Ultimately, when the Dutch minority language policy ended in 2004, Arabic secured a permanent position in secondary education as a Modern Foreign Language. Additionally, both Arabic and Tamazight are now used, when necessary, to translate Dutch communication directed at Moroccan migrants.

Now, twenty years after the termination of the Dutch minority language policy, Moroccan migrants have become an integral part of Dutch society. Both Arabic and Tamazight remain strongly present in the country's social and cultural spheres, as different generations of parents actively pass down their mother tongues to their children. More than ever, Moroccan-Dutch families are dedicated to teaching their children their heritage languages, thus ensuring the continuity of both linguistic and cultural traditions. Additionally, Moroccan-Dutch literature increasingly blends Dutch, Arabic, and Tamazight, reflecting the vibrant linguistic diversity within the Moroccan migrant community.

Dr. Oussama CHERRIBI (Emory University)  
and Leila CHERRIBI (University of Amsterdam)



Oussama Cherribi is Teaching Professor in the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies and a Visiting Faculty and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Economics at Emory University. He serves as the Director of the Emory Development Initiative and Associate Director of the Center for African Mediterranean Studies (CAMS), a partnership with Arizona State University. A former Dutch MP, he represented the Netherlands in De TaalUnie, the Council of Europe, the Western European Union (WEU), and the North-South Center in Lisbon. He played a key role in advocating for the expansion of De TaalUnie to include Suriname and South Africa. He is the author of *Fridays of Rage: Al Jazeera, the Arab Spring, and Political Islam* (2024) and *In the House of War: Dutch Islam Observed* (2012).

Leila Cherribi is a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam and is currently finishing a doctoral dissertation, "*A Tradition in the Making: Evolving Changes in the Contemporary Dutch Literary Scene*." She holds a bachelor's degree from Mohammed V University in Rabat and two Master's Degrees from the University of Amsterdam.

