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Language policies and strategies in the Arab region

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1. Overall linguistic situation in the Arab Region
2. Arabic language policies in selected countries (Morocco, Algeria, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq)
3. Linguistic strategies for building the information society in the Arab region
Overall linguistic situation in the Arab Region
Overall linguistic situation in the Arab Region (1)

- Arab region: 22 Arabic-speaking countries in the League of Arab States
- Arabic is the dominant language
- Minorities exist with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- The Arab-Islamic empire starting in the 7th century spread Arabic and strongly rooted it
- Loss of linguistic diversity continues and was accelerated by the pan-Arabism wave of the 50’s and 60’s
Arabic is the sole official language in almost all Arab countries.

All governmental/administrative procedures are in Arabic.

School education is essentially provided in Arabic.

Higher education is largely in Arabic with technical disciplines often taught in a foreign language (English or French).
Overall linguistic situation in the Arab Region (3)

- Difficulties in modernizing Arabic and making it more functional
- Six Arabic Language Academies with little coordination
- Arabic language research is very limited, preventing the development of modern tools for building an inclusive information society
Arabic language policies in selected Arab Countries
Morocco (1)

- 1994: 28 million, 90% Arabic speaking, 30% Amazigh speaking (3 varieties)
- Morocco’s language policy remains utterly monolingual
- Arabic-Amazigh political disputes are serious
- Amazigh is mainly a spoken language
- Government tolerates magazines in Amazigh
- Moroccan Arabic dialect and Amazigh are commonly used by the people
- Arabic and French are used in the institutional sphere
Morocco (2)

- Arabisation started immediately after independence (1965)
- School education became totally Arabised in 1990
- Bilingualism (Arabic + French) prevails in University education
- Education in Amazigh is scarce in spite of several royal decrees (latest in 2001) – implementation is slow
Morocco (3)

- In 2001 multilingualism was explicitly acknowledged by the Government
- Amazigh is officially recognized in Berber areas
- A Royal Institute of Amezigh Culture was established
- A more open approach towards Amazigh was adopted
- More concrete achievements are expected in the near future
Algeria

- Similarities with Morocco, but more rigid attitudes
- Over 95% are Arabic speaking; 20% Berber (Amazigh speaking)
- Language dispute is moderate to serious
- Amazigh is not an official language
- Arabisation started immediately after independence (1962) with the help of other Arab countries
- School education is completely Arabised
- University education is Arabised to a large extent
- Amazigh is limited in higher education
Syria

- Arabic is the sole official language
- Vigorous Arabisation policy since independence in 1946
- Strong Arab nationalistic policies aimed at assimilation
- School and university education are totally Arabised
- No special linguistic rights for minorities (Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, ...)
- Teaching of minority languages, in a very limited way, is tolerated
Arabic is the official language
Arabic teaching is compulsory in school with very few exceptions
Minorities are free to teach their languages in addition to Arabic
Mostly private schools, marked by strong confessional and cultural differences
Universities are dominantly private/foreign using mostly English and French
Prior to 2003 Arabic was the sole official language. Assyrian language and culture was practically wiped out due to strong Arab nationalism policies by Government. Arabic-Kurdish dispute is very serious. Arabic teaching is compulsory in all school outside the Kurdish area. University education is mostly in Arabic with the use of English limited to few technical subjects.
The new (temporary) constitution recognises two official languages: Arabic and Kurdish.

It also recognises the right of minorities to teach their children their mother tongue (i.e. Turkish, Syriac, and Armenian).

No instruments have been developed to implement these linguistic principles entrenched in the constitution.
Linguistic strategies for building the information society
In the Arab region
Promotion of digital Arabic content (1)

- Very limited Arabic content on the Internet
- Low penetration of ICT in the Arab region
- Internet usage much less than World average, and stagnant
- Use of mother tongue by ordinary citizens essential for widespread Internet usage
- Multilingualism on the Internet key for increasing usage
Market for Arabic language on the Internet exists and needs promotion

Arab Content Initiative launched by ESCWA aimed at:
- building a knowledge-based economy in the Arag region
- developing an Arab industry of content
- promoting applications in government, education, commerce, entertainment, culture and health
- promoting multiculturalism, ancient civilizations
- networking of communities of practice
To allow Internet addressing using Arabic

Arabic Domain Names Task Force (ADN-TF) established by ESCWA in 2003, including MINC and experts from Arab countries

First Guidelines for ADN published as Internet Draft in July 2004 focusing on linguistic issues

The League of Arab States formed a working group for ADN; collaborating with the ADN-TF

Current focus on implementation (operational, technological and legal aspects)
Thank you

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