

**ESCWA**

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

for REGIONAL  
INTEGRATION

***UNESCO WSIS Thematic Meeting on  
Multilingualism for cultural diversity and participation of all in  
Cyberspace***

***Bamako, 6-7 May 2005***

**Language policies and strategies in the  
Arab region**

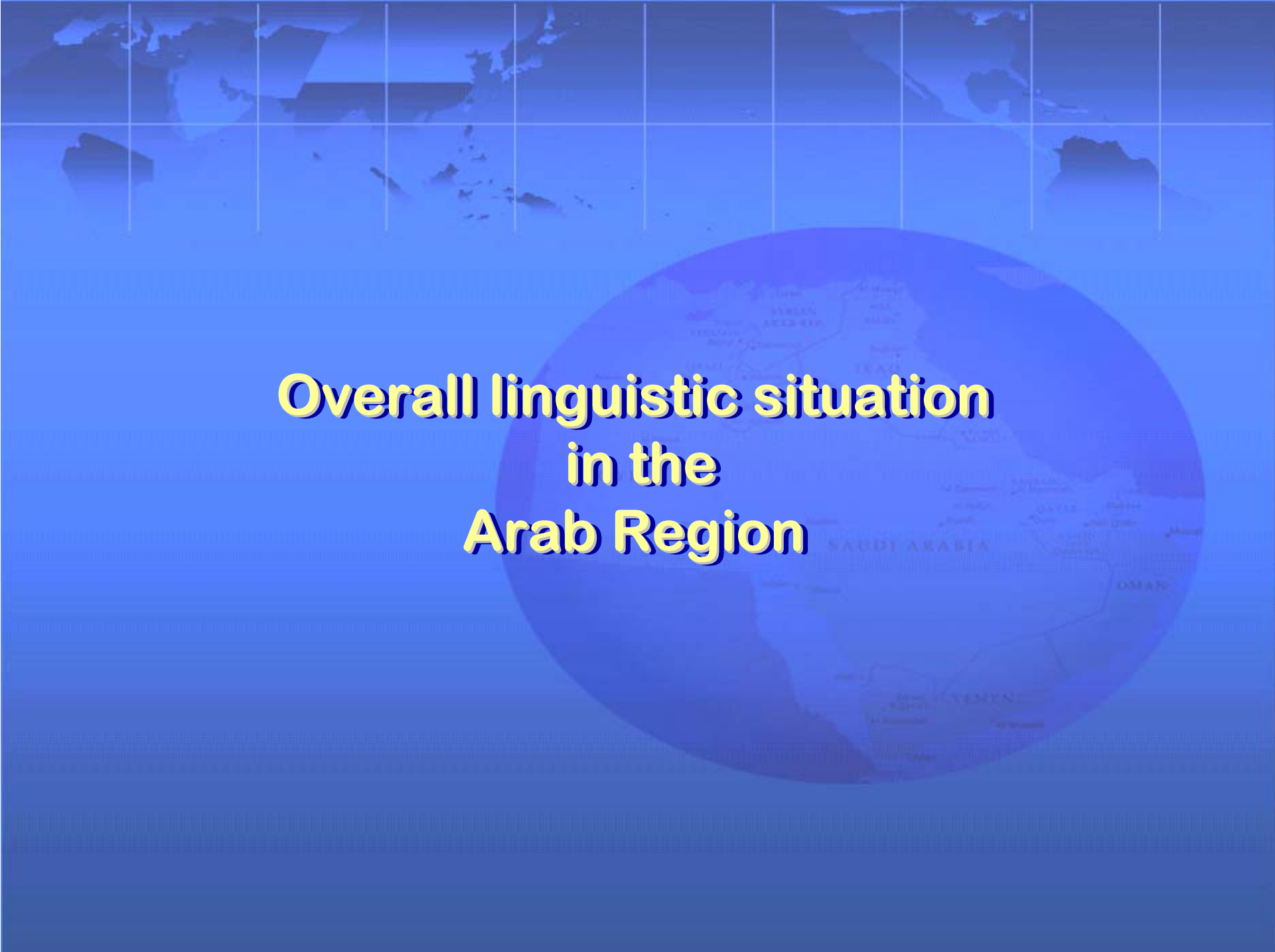
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# Content

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 7<sup>th</sup> 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

## **Overall linguistic situation in the Arab Region (2)**

- **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

# Lebanon

- 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

## **Iraq (1)**

- **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**

## **Iraq (2)**

- **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

## Promotion of digital Arabic content (2)

- 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 Arab 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

# Arabic Domain Names System

- 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)

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***Thank you***

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