

Postcolonial policies and practices towards language in Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract

This thesis discusses language policies and practices in Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire. These two countries were both colonized by France in the 19th century, and under their rule, French was enforced as an official language across French colonies. After their respective decolonizations in the mid-20th century, Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire diverged in their language policies. Côte d'Ivoire kept French as an official language, and Algeria instead chose Arabic, pursuing a national policy of Arabization. This thesis aims to analyze the factors contributing to these differing policies, while also addressing the language practices, and how they vary from the policies. To do this, I divided my analysis into both post-independent and modern perspectives, finding contemporary newspapers and speeches to compare and contrast the attitudes in each country over time.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Algerian History.....	5
3. Ivorian History.....	7
4. Attitudes Of The Immediate Post Independence Era.....	9
4.1. Nationalism and State-building.....	10
4.1.1 Algeria.....	10
4.1.2 Côte d'Ivoire.....	11
4.2. Perspectives on France.....	12
4.2.1 Algeria.....	12
4.2.2. Côte d'Ivoire.....	13
4.3. Modernity and Education.....	15
4.3.1 Algeria.....	15
4.3.2 Côte d'Ivoire.....	16
5. Attitudes Towards Language Of The Modern Era.....	18
5.1. Nation Building.....	18
5.1.1 Algeria.....	18
5.1.2 Côte d'Ivoire.....	20
5.2. Education and Modernity.....	23
5.2.1 Algeria.....	23
5.2.2 Côte d'Ivoire.....	26
5.3. Relationships with France.....	28
5.3.1 Algeria.....	28
5.3.2 Côte d'Ivoire.....	29
6. Analysis.....	30
7. Conclusions.....	31
Works Cited.....	33

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of European colonization in the 19th and 20th centuries, newly independent countries adopted and implemented their own language policies and practices. Some chose to continue using the language of colonizers, while others adopted new official languages. Among the countries achieving independence from France in the mid-20th century were Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire. Both had become prominent parts of the French Colonial Empire, and were thus subject to the imposition of the French language across society. At the time of their respective independences, in 1960 and 1962, Côte d'Ivoire and Algeria diverged from their formerly shared language policy (Majumdar 2007; Abdulrazak 1982). Today, only Côte d'Ivoire officially recognizes French as its official language, with Algeria instead recognizing Arabic and Berber.

Post-Independence in 1960, the West African countries who were formerly part of the French Empire, including Côte d'Ivoire, tended to keep French as a national language, often citing the linguistic diversity of their countries, without a single dominant regional language for intra-regional communication (Djité 2000). In the Maghrebi countries, they tended to Arabize, using Arabic as the official language and shifting away from their histories as French colonies, towards a pre-existing lingua franca in Arabic (Bouherar and Ghafsi 2021). However, today, among Maghrebi countries, only Tunisia and Morocco are members of the International Francophonie Organisation (OIF), with Algeria remaining firmly against joining (Benrabah 2013). Despite this stance, French retains a prominent place in Algerian society, and has continued to be a status symbol.

The present language policy in these two countries also somewhat reflects their relations with France today, with Côte d'Ivoire maintaining amicable relations and Algeria having traditionally tense relations (Roger 2025). However, there are many other factors at play in these countries' language policies, including pre-colonial language practice, religion, education, and state-building. Furthermore, the actual language practices in each country do not necessarily reflect these official language policies. This is clear in the percentages of French being spoken in each country, at approximately 34% in Côte d'Ivoire and 33% in Algeria, reflecting the language policies do not necessarily dictate actual spoken language use (Marcoux et al. 2022).

In addition to Côte d'Ivoire still using French in official contexts, it has also been adopted into Ivorian culture, with Ivorian French becoming an independent dialect from standard French and other aspects of Ivorian culture and native languages being incorporated into the language (Dodo and N'ZI Yao 2024). In contrast, Algeria recognizes Modern Standard Arabic and Berber as its official languages, with Darja (Algerian Dialectal Arabic) being the most spoken language. In the 1960s, immediately post-independence, the Algerian government prioritized the "Arabization" of the country, particularly in national education. In the 1990s, there was another push for Arabization, in converting the government ministries that had not yet converted to Arabic (Bouherar and Ghafsi 2021; Benrabah 2013).

This thesis aims to analyze the individual factors leading to different language policies and practice, including the attitudes and relationship with their colonial powers, in addition to the use of lingua franca, and the interactions between pre-existing languages. The choice of language use is informative both in studying the language itself, in addition to understanding the sociolinguistic makeup of the country. This includes both language policy and practice, which may contradict one another.

I will look at attitudes towards language and language policy in Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire in the immediate post-colonial period (from independence until approximately 1985) and in the modern era (approximately 1985-present). This time frame is for countries to be analyzed and compared in both historical and modern contexts, showing the evolution of perspective on language. I plan on doing this by analyzing speeches and newspapers from the respective time periods, and seeing how language plays into their policies and practice. I did all translations myself, from French primary sources. Because these sources do not have official English language translations, I used my own knowledge and experience translating French, and having been trained on European French, there could be nuances in translation I missed.

Due to the nature of the widely available archives, many historical documents are not able to reflect the opinions of the general population, primarily reflecting the opinions of government sources. The more recent documents give wider perspectives, given the more widely available archives of recent newspapers and speeches. In addition to historical documents, they also include professors, academics, and some perspective of the general population. These newspapers, particularly the historical ones, are notably reflective of the perspectives of those in power. An aspect of the newspapers chosen was a matter of access and available resources. In historical documents, the most accessible were those from French newspaper *Le Monde*. Hence, there is a degree of bias in these documents. However, I worked to extract only the direct quotes to use in analysis. A further limitation as a result of these are the newspapers largely only showing the attitudes of government officials.

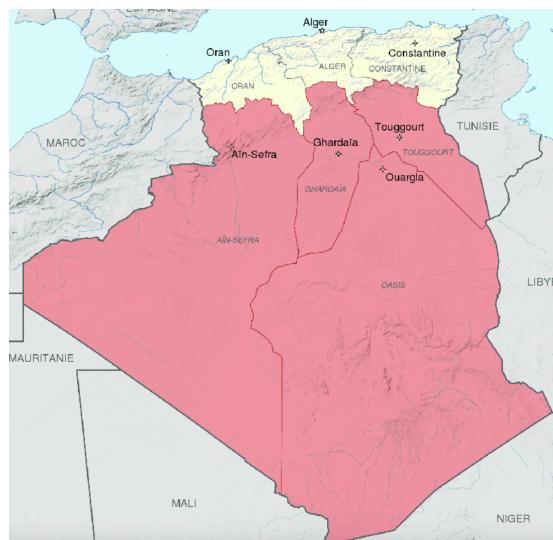
The approach to language in countries that were colonized by Europe has varied widely from adopting the language of colonisation to shunning it entirely. While the official policies towards language, particularly towards the language of colonizers, has varied greatly, the levels of language practice have been significantly less varied, with French maintaining a prominent position across both Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire. The countries' relationship with the French language is furthermore affected by their relationship with France itself, both historically and currently. This connection is influenced by the treatment of the countries under colonization, and the resulting decolonization process. In Algeria, the decolonization process involved a violent war for independence lasting 8 years, meanwhile in Côte d'Ivoire, the decolonization process was more peaceful, and did not involve a war. Further aspects seemingly contributing to national

language policies in Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire include religion, education, prior national unity, and their pre-colonial language practice.

2. Algerian History

The region known today as Algeria has had a long history of colonization, starting in the ninth century BCE with the Phoenicians. Algeria was later notably colonized by the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Ottomans, and the French. Each instance of colonization and language contact greatly affected indigenous Algerian languages. Algeria came under Arab rule in the 7th century CE, spreading both Arabic and Islam (Benrabah 2007). Algerian Arabic was continually affected by contact with both the indigenous Berber languages, along with French, Spanish, and Turkish, among other languages. Both Berber and dialectal Arabic, called Darja or Dziria in Algeria, reflect the complex linguistic history of Algeria, leading to their distinct Algerian identities (Meftouh et al. 2012). Directly preceding French colonization, the most spoken languages in Algeria were the native Berber and dialectal Arabic (Benrabah 2013).

The Second French colonial empire began in 1830 with the conquest of Algiers. It then grew to include the Maghreb region, in addition to large portions of West Africa, Central Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean (Balch 1909). Algeria became known as “French Algeria,” becoming three French departments in the North, and a territory in the South. Algeria was the first and only French colony to receive the status of department, with other regions, including neighboring Tunisia and Morocco, becoming French protectorates, or remaining colonies (Abdulrazak 1982). Being a French department meant that Algeria was considered a part of sovereign France. Throughout the period of Algerian colonization, the French considered Algeria to be the most important part of the French Colonial Empire.



Map of Algeria from 1934 to 1955 via (Sriti et al. 2023)

This map shows Algeria's divisions as a French territory, with the North constituting the three departments of Oran, Alger, and Constantine, and the South remaining a territory.

As French departments, Algeria, particularly the cities of Algiers and Oran, received many French and other European colonists. These settlers became known as “pieds-noirs,” and by 1930, there were approximately 800,000 French settlers in Algeria (Cohen 1980; Abdulrazak 1982). Furthermore, as a department, Algeria was subject to the same laws as Metropolitan France, including in language and education. With France further asserting their dominance in Algeria, French language and culture were taught in schools across the region (Benrabah 2013). With the presence of French in the schools, much schooling became inaccessible to young Algerians, particularly in rural areas, who did not speak French. An important cultural aspect of French schooling is “laïcité” or secularity, whereas the majority of Algerian residents were Muslim. This led to a lack of support among certain Muslim elders as a result, with the lack of religion, and subsequently, a lack of Arabic (Benrabah 2013). While schools were obligated to be in French, attendance was not required, leading to wide illiteracy in both French and Arabic by much of the Algerian population (Abdulrazak 1982). Therefore, the French language was not widespread, and furthermore, the French had concentrated their colonies and departments around the coasts, so the inland regions were not subject to as much attempted assimilation from the French (Benrabah 2007).

In August 1935, France announced that Arabic would be classified as a foreign language. Doing this isolated the Algerian Arab population, with their native language being labelled as foreign in their own land (Benrabah 2013). This ban not only isolated people from their own language in their native land, but from their religion, with Arabic being the language of the Quran, creating further animosity towards the French (Bouherar and Ghafsi 2021).

France believed in the assimilation of both its overseas regions and colonies to both French culture and language. In 1954, the Algerian war for independence began, with the Front de Libération National (FLN) leading the strive for decolonization (Choi 2011). The war was characterized by extreme violence, with the FLN launching a campaign of bombings and assassinations and the French side routinely practising torture to terrorise and to gather intelligence (McDougall 2017). As a French Department, Algeria was considered a part of sovereign France, and French officials were therefore unwilling to part with it (Cohen 2002). A part of the native Algerian population aided the French in the war, called “Harkis”. Many Harkis came from Berber groups, who were against the Arabization of Algeria. The French used the threat of erasure of Berber languages, claiming Berbers would be forced to assimilate into Arab culture if the French left. During the colonization era, the governing French capitalized on Berber nationalism to increase their support for the continuing French rule (Choi 2011).

In 1958, the French Fourth Republic was dissolved, and was replaced by a Fifth Republic, led by President Charles de Gaulle. Under de Gaulle, the French government was more open to negotiation, and worked to end the war. Between 600,000 and 1.5 million Algerians are estimated to have died as a result of the war (Cohen 2002). On July 5, 1962, Algeria officially became an independent nation. Post independence in July 1962, the Algerian government, led by Ahmed Ben Bella, began a process of Arabization across the state, which at the time had education, administration, and the economic sector all in French (Grandguillaume 2004). According to the new government, “Arabization” was crucial to the national identity as Algerians and as Arabs (Balta 1974).

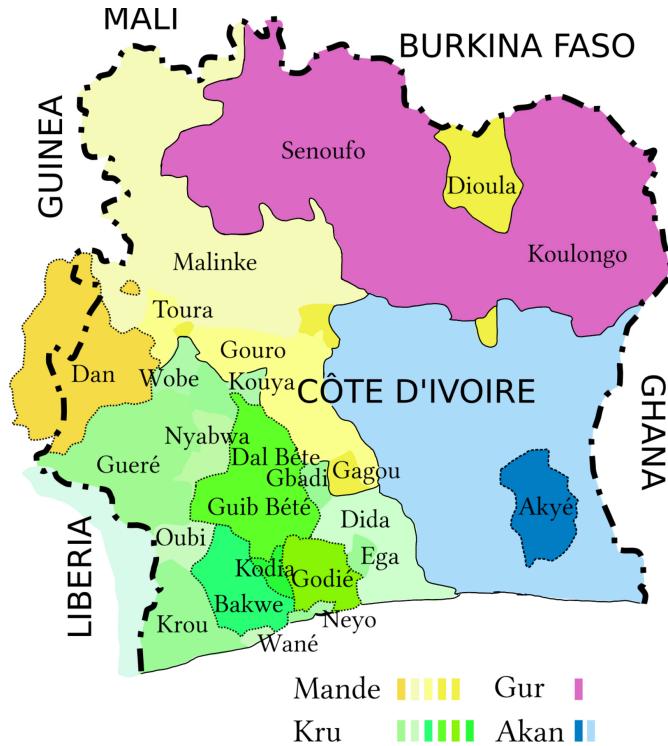
The goal of Arabization was primarily to convert aspects of Algerian life which had been in French, into Arabic, notably in administration and education (Abdulrazak 1982). Despite this, French remained an important factor for social mobility in Algerian society, including in the government. French maintained its prestige, and remained a language among elites (Rebai Maamri 2009). In Algeria, the 1990s are considered “the Black Decade” (“la décennie noire”), with the Algerian civil war lasting from 1992-2002. The war was fought between the Algerian government and Islamist rebel groups, including the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The FIS declared that the Algerian elites remained too “French” aimed to remove the French influence, in language and culture (Bucaille 2014). In the 1990s, Algeria restarted its Arabization process, with the goal of “finishing” the process, and converting all government ministries into Arabic (T 1998; Tuquoi 1996).

Under colonization, French was the dominant language of public administration and education across the Maghreb (Alalou 2009). After independence, during the initial push for Arabization, non-native Arabic-speakers rejected this process, notably the Berber speaking population (Bouherar and Ghafsi 2021). Today, the official languages of Algeria are Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Berber. The most spoken colloquial language is Darja, or Algerian Arabic (Bouherar and Ghafsi 2021). Darja and Berber are both Afroasiatic languages, and furthermore, both incorporate many loanwords from each other, and though from the same language family, are from different branches and not mutually intelligible (Haspelmath et al. 2009).

3. Ivorian History

Before French colonization, Côte d’Ivoire was not united as a single nation, and was instead a region with large ethnic diversity. It was not until the independence movement that Côte d’Ivoire became united as a state (Newell 2009). Côte d’Ivoire officially became a French colony in 1893, eventually becoming a part of French West Africa. In 1958, the French Community was created, giving the states of West Africa a degree of independence, and in 1960 the countries became fully independent (Smith 1978; Watson 1963). The area now recognized as Côte d’Ivoire had four widely spoken language groups, all part of the Niger-Congo language family: the Akan

languages in the southeast and center, the Kru in the southwest, the Gur in the northeast, and the Mande languages in the west (Moseng Knutsen 2008).



(Map via Marchese Zogbo 2019)

This map shows the language families of Côte d'Ivoire, with the northwest primarily speaking Mande languages, the northeast speaking Gur languages, the southwest primarily speaking Kru languages, and the southeast of the country primarily speaking Akan languages.

During the colonial era, French was imposed as the official language, with regional languages being used in unofficial and local contexts. As a result, French became regarded as a “prestige language,” whereas regional languages were marginalized (Dodo and N’ZI Yao 2024). French was chosen as the official language as a lingua franca, to not be perceived as favoring any Ivorian ethnic group over any other. French was also perceived as a connection to “the West” and the “modern” or “scientific” world, with its established terms for sciences and technologies (Simard 1994). Côte d’Ivoire remained part of Françafrique, or the French sphere of influence in Africa, and is today a member of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (Organisation internationale de la Francophonie 2022). Being members of these organizations has further reinforced the presence of French in Côte d’Ivoire.

Today, Côte d’Ivoire has developed its own French dialect, independent from Standard French, which is used particularly in cities such as Abidjan, the largest city in the country (Djité 1989a). The French language was adapted and used as a vernacular in the country, adapting it to Ivorian society, with grammatical changes reflecting interaction among languages (Simard 1994). Other

West African Francophone countries, notably Senegal, have prominent regional languages that are used in informal contexts. However, in Côte d'Ivoire, there is no language spoken by a majority of the country such that it naturally became the lingua franca, as Wolof did in Senegal. As a result, French has been established as the intra-regional lingua franca across Côte d'Ivoire (Dodo and N'ZI Yao 2024).

Félix Houphouët-Boigny was president of Côte d'Ivoire from independence until 1993. Under his leadership, Côte d'Ivoire focused on creating a national identity, with his focus on Ivorian unity. After the death of Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire fell into ethno-political disarray, further dividing the country into the North and South and exacerbating ethnic tensions (Moseng Knutsen 2008). In 2002, the First Ivorian Civil War began, partially resulting from debates over the “Ivorianess” of now President Alassane Ouattara, and challenges over the election results. In 2010, conflict broke out again in the Second Ivorian Civil War when Presidential election results were again challenged (Akindès 2003; El-Khawas and Anyu 2014).

Today, there are four principal varieties of French used in Côte d'Ivoire: academic standard French, common Ivorian French, Popular Ivorian French (FPI), and Nouchi (Dodo and N'ZI Yao 2024). These four languages are used in descending order of formality, with standard French being the most formal and Nouchi being the least formal. FPI includes sounds which are neither French nor a borrowed language, showing its status as an independent entity. Nouchi is particularly distinct among the varieties, with its incorporation of words and morphemes from Niger-Congo languages among others (Boutin 2021).

Dyula, a Mande language, is used as a prominent trade language, particularly in the North. However, one important aspect in the linguistic divide in Côte d'Ivoire is the religious tie to language. Côte d'Ivoire has a significant religious divide in the country between the largely Muslim northern part and the largely Christian southern part. Among Ivorians in the South of the country, Dyula is associated with Muslim immigrants in the north, creating a stigma against the language. As a result, French is largely spoken in the southern part of the country (Vogel 1991).

4. Attitudes Of The Immediate Post Independence Era

The attitudes of Algerians and Ivorians post-independence varied from a variety of factors, namely the cultural and historic attitudes towards both the former colonizers, the French, and the concept of nation. In looking at the speeches and official documents from the era, the reasoning and general attitudes towards linguistic policies is shown. Across the two instances, there is a stark juxtaposition in both the policy and general attitude towards French and France itself. The immediate post-independence era, here defined as until 1985, which signaled a shift towards the era of globalization.

4.1. Nationalism and State-building

4.1.1 Algeria

The immediate post-independence Algerian administration showed their stances and opinions in news articles and speeches from the era. They shared their perspectives on both the language policy of Algeria, in addition to its relationship with France. In 1967, then Algeria Minister for Education Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi, said:

“L’Algérie demeure toujours fidèle à l’un des objectifs essentiels de sa révolution, l’arabisation, c’est-à-dire, la récupération de l’âme algérienne par les Algériens.”
(Taleb-Ibrahimi via “L’arabisation de l’enseignement primaire se poursuit progressivement” 1967).¹

“Algeria still remains loyal to one of its essential objectives of the Revolution, Arabization, that’s to say, the reclamation of the Algerian soul by Algerians.”
(Taleb-Ibrahimi via “The Arabization of Primary School Teaching is progressively happening” 1967).

Arabic language use was central to the policy of the new government. With Taleb-Ibrahimi framing Arabic as “the Algerian soul,” the language was viewed as representative of the entirety of the Algerian people, and contributing to the identity of the new nation. However, this also created a perception of the new state as solely representing the Arab majority of the population.

“Quand on dit que l’Algérie est composée d’Arabes et de Berbères, c’est faux. Les Algériens sont des Berbères plus ou moins arabisés.” (Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi via J.-P P.-H. 1972)

“When we say that Algeria is composed of Arabs and Berbers, that’s false. Algerians are Berbers who are more or less Arabized.” (Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi via J.-P P.-H. 1972)

In this quote, Taleb-Ibrahimi describes his intent to unite the Arab population with the Berber population. In uniting the Arab and Berber contexts, this could be seen as minimizing Berber nationalism, with focus on creating an Arab state. With the Arabization policy, if he considers Berbers to be Arabs who have not been Arabized, then the Arabization policy could be considered as resulting in the erasure of Berber identities.

In 1975, Algerian President Houari Boumédiène further elaborated on the nation-building aspect of Arabic, as reported in an article by Paul Balta of the French newspaper *Le Monde*.

“[Boumédiène] a estimé que la langue arabe, « lien entre toutes les composantes de la nation »” (Balta 1975)

“[Boumédiène] declared that the Arab language was ‘a link between all the components of the nation’” (Balta 1975)

¹ All translations of news articles and speeches done by the author

This shows the Algerian administration's perception of Arabic as a factor of national unity, showing their justification for the Arabization policy. Arabic was seen as a symbol of the nation, an element uniting the entire Algerian people. This once again seems to exclude non-ethnic Arabs, most notably excluding Berbers, from language planning considerations. It prioritises those who speak Arabic, namely, the portrayal of Algeria as a nation-state. This portrayal of Arabic as a unifying symbol of national identity was furthermore depicted in the Constitution. Article 73 of the 1963 Algerian Constitution in English reads:

“The actual achievement of Arabization on the territory of the Republic must take place in the shortest possible time; however, the French language may be used provisionally with the Arab language.”

Adding to Boumediène's aforementioned statement, the Algerian administration believed that a common language would unify the country in the face of the retreat of the French, furthermore creating a unique Algerian identity. The Constitution does, nevertheless, reference the continuing use of the French language throughout Algeria, highlighting its importance. However, this also isolated the non-Arab population, who did not use Arabic as their primary language, effectively excluding them from the new state.

In Algeria, Arabic was seen as a central component to the construction of the new state. It was seen as a necessity to “complete the Revolution,” and in establishing a unique Algerian identity. Furthermore, it is important to note that the language which was used in the Algerian Arabization process is MSA, not the common Algerian dialectal Arabic, Darja. MSA is used in official contexts, including in media, administration, and education across countries with Arabic as their official language. However, the spoken language used on a daily basis in these languages is the dialect of their respective region. In Algeria, this is Darja or Dziria (Meftouh et al. 2012; Belfarhi 2019). Algerian Arabic is significantly different from MSA with its history of borrowing loanwords from languages with which it has had contact throughout Algerian history. Darja, although it is the most common first language in Algeria, was not promoted through Arabization.

4.1.2 Côte d'Ivoire

In Côte d'Ivoire, the choice of French as a national language, similarly to the choice of MSA in Algeria, was to be a unifying factor. Without an ethnic majority to establish their language as an official language or as a lingua franca, French was seen as a neutral language to unite the country and to not show any preference towards a single ethnic group by using their language as official, or to represent their country.

This desire for unity was shown by Ivorian government officials of the immediate post-independence era, who consistently praised French as an element of national identity and unity. In a 1976 speech, the President of the Ivorian National Assembly Philippe Yacé, declared:

“Le choix du français comme langue de travail, donc comme langue officielle, laisse toute latitude à chaque État concerné d'utiliser cumulativement sa langue nationale. Je

dois toutefois à la vérité de dire qu'en ce qui concerne mon pays, l'adoption du français, par l'article premier de notre Constitution, a sans doute été l'un des facteurs d'unité qui ont favorisé l'aboutissement heureux et si rapide de l'œuvre de construction nationale dont Son Excellence le Président Félix Houphouët-Boigny avait fait un des premiers thèmes de son action. Le français, librement accepté par nous, a été un facteur de cohésion... à l'intérieur de la Côte d'Ivoire où il a favorisé le regroupement de nos quelque cent ethnies.” (Yacé via Turcotte 1976)

“The choice of French as a working language, therefore as an official language, leaves each country with the freedom to use its own national language. I must say, in what concerns my country, the adoption of French, in the first article of our Constitution, is without a doubt one of the unifying factors that favored the happy and quick completion of our national construction which His Excellency the President Félix Houphouët-Boigny made one of his first actions. French, freely accepted by us, was a factor of cohesion...at the interior of Côte d'Ivoire where he favored regrouping among our hundreds of ethnicities.” (Yacé via Turcotte 1976)

In Côte d'Ivoire, they adopted a national language as a way of creating a unified state. The Ivorian relationship with France remained largely positive during and after decolonization. Yacé framed French such that it would be impossible for national unity with another language and thus according to him it is because of French that Côte d'Ivoire was able to succeed as a unified nation.

However, the choice of French also effectively worked to keep the power in the hands of the elites. At the time of independence, French levels were low outside of the elites. As such, using French allowed for privileged members of society to secure and maintain their positions (Moseng Knutsen 2008). Furthermore, the Ivorian government believed French to be an international status symbol, and that it would thus help their international standing in the world as a newly independent nation. Under colonization, France enforced this belief, leading to the general acceptance that French as an official language would be beneficial (Dascomb 2019).

4.2. Perspectives on France

4.2.1 Algeria

In 1970, l'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (the International Francophonie Organisation/OIF) was founded by Francophone countries (Organisation internationale de la Francophonie 2022). Many former French colonies joined the organization, though Algeria, notably, did not. In 1972, then Algerian Minister of information and culture, Taleb-Ibrahimi, commenting on Algeria's resistance to joining the organization, saying,

“Beaucoup de pays nous ont poussés à entrer dans la francophonie...mais, pour nous, cette francophonie est liée au néo-colonialisme” (Taleb-Ibrahimi via P-H 1972)

“Many countries pushed us to enter the International Organisation of La Francophonie…

but, for us, this Francophonie is tied to neocolonialism.” (Taleb-Ibrahimi via P-H 1972)

Taleb-Ibrahimi shared the perspective of the Algerian government on the OIF. The presence of the Francophonie and the use of the French language became tied to neocolonialism, bringing about the perspective of the importance of Arabization to the Algerian government. Thus, in Algeria, French language institutions were tied to the language and country. Through the institutions of language, France was portrayed as being able to influence Algeria through their language, creating positive depictions of both their language and the country itself.

In France, they viewed the leaders of the Algerian independence movements as part of French society, having been largely taught in French language schools and having learned French cultural teachings. Amidst the Algerian War of independence, French journalist Georges Hourdin noted,

“Il est incontestable, en tout cas, qu’Arabes ou Berbères, ceux qui sont un peu évolués, qui ont vécu en France, qui sont les chefs des mouvements politiques et militaires, sont beaucoup plus atteints par l’idéologie des droits de l’homme et du citoyen que par l’Islam religieux, auquel ils veulent à toute force échapper afin de pouvoir bâtir un État moderne, c’est-à-dire un État laïque.” (Hourdin 1956)

“It is undeniable, in any case, that Arabs or Berbers, those who have evolved a little, those who have lived in France, who are the leaders of political and military movements, are a lot more touched by the ideology of the rights of man and citizen than from religious Islam, that which they want to escape to be able to fight a modern state, that’s to say a secular state.” (Hourdin 1956)

The French viewed Algeria from a French perspective, wherein it was French secularity and philosophical teachings which led to the Algerians’ desire for revolt, and the success of their leaders. In France, the history of French colonization was portrayed as having contributed to the success of the Algerian Revolution in having contributed to the education of the leaders’ education, in addition to their French language education. The French language then maintained its status as a language of the elites into the independence era, and continued to be necessary in high status positions.

4.2.2. Côte d’Ivoire

Post-World War II, the French Empire was replaced with the French union, which turned colonies into overseas territories. In 1956, the Overseas Reform Act transferred powers from Paris to elected governments in West Africa, and in 1958, Côte d’Ivoire became an autonomous member of the French Community. As an autonomous member of the French community, Côte d’Ivoire continued relying heavily on France and French aid. At his proclamation of independence, Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny declared:

“Ce n’est pas un adieu, c’est un au revoir que nous disons à la France !”
(Houphouët-Boigny via Gauthier 1960)

“It is not an goodbye forever, it’s an until we meet again that we say to France”
(Houphouët-Boigny via Gauthier 1960)

This comment shows his amicable feelings towards France, even immediately after independence. Ivorian independence, as with countries across West Africa, largely came slowly through a largely non-violent democratic process of change, through their roles in the French Community. Houphouët-Boigny further elaborated on his perspective on France and the role of the Francophone community as independent states,

“Dans la même discours sa condamnation de l’esprit d’expansion, ses références à l’homme africain, ses appels à l’union des pays d’Afrique, les hommages rendus en particulier à la France et au général de Gaulle, libérateur des peuples d’Afrique, confirment que, sous réserve du respect absolu des indépendances nationales, M. Houphouët-Boigny, assuré de l’accord des autres États du Conseil et de l’entente et surmontant des déceptions récemment éprouvées, veut trouver avec la France et les autres pays d’expression française des formules d’association.” (Gauthier 1960)

“In the same speech condemning the spirit of expansion, his references to the African man, his calls to a union of countries in Africa, his homages to General de Gaulle in particular, liberator of the peoples of Africa, confirming that, reserving absolute respect for independent nationals, Mr. Houphouët-Boigny, assured of the agreement of other States of the Council, and of the intent and mounting deceptions recently challenged, want to find with France and other Francophone countries, formulas of association.”
(Gauthier 1960)

Côte d’Ivoire wanted to keep its ties to both France and fellow Francophone states, which can be seen in their speech and part of this is the prized position France seems to keep in society. This prized position in discourse seems inherently linked to the presence of French among societal elites, who were those who had the most education, and were also those making the laws. Yacé later reiterated the shared history between Côte d’Ivoire and France, emphasizing the continuing friendship between the two countries. This speech, being in 1960, at the beginning of independence, showed that at least through the perspective of Ivorian government officials, they wanted to maintain a positive relationship with France.

“L’amitié de nos peuples forgée au cours d’un long passé commun s’en trouve renforcée et ne sera d’aucune façon altérée par la recherche du dialogue que nous engagerons et poursuivrons avec tous les pays de bonne volonté, désireux de respecter notre souveraineté. Les sentiments qui lient le peuple de Côte d’Ivoire et le peuple de France participent, en effet, d’un même humanisme, d’une même culture à laquelle nous attachons un prix exceptionnel.” (Yacé 1960)

“The friendship of our peoples forged along a long shared history finds itself reinforced and will in no way be altered by the search of dialogue which we will engage and pursue with all countries of good will, those wanting to respect our sovereignty. The sentiments which connect the people of Côte d’Ivoire and the people of France, participate, effectively, in the same humanism, in the same culture to which we attach an exceptional price.” (Yacé 1960)

France was seen as an important aspect in forging a connection and surviving in the international world. The ministers emphasized “friendship” and respect for their fellow leaders, showing the amicable relationship between the two countries. French was furthermore seen as both a connection to France and as a way to unite the country under a neutral language.

4.3. Modernity and Education

4.3.1 Algeria

Post independence, the Algerian government pursued a policy of Arabization, enforcing Arabic as the national language across the country, switching from French in official contexts. However, amidst Arabization being a national priority in the 1960s and 1970s, French remained a prominent aspect of Algerian society. In 1972, Algerian Minister Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi commented on the continuing prominence of French, saying,

“Pendant une longue phase, nous aurons besoin de la langue française comme d’une fenêtre ouverte sur la civilisation technicienne, en attendant que l’arabe s’adapte au monde moderne... Dans nos programmes scolaires, la langue française aura le statut de langue étrangère privilégiée” (Taleb-Ibrahimi via P-H 1972)

“For a long period, we will need the French language as an open window on the technical world, while waiting for Arabic to adapt to the modern world... In our educational programs, the French language will have the status of privileged foreign language.”
(Taleb-Ibrahimi via P-H 1972)

In Algeria, despite Arabization, French was still perceived as important for international affairs, therefore allowing French to maintain a key position in the Algerian government. During the colonial period, French was the language of elites, and most prominent in the coastal regions of the country, the French Departments, and less prominent inland. However, with school attendance not being mandatory, the general population did not have high French proficiency. As a mandatory foreign language in Algerian schools from fourth grade onwards, French fluency levels rose after independence despite the Arabization policy (Benrabah 2007). French was particularly perceived as a scientific and technical language. In the midst of the Arabization policies, Taleb-Ibrahimi’s comment shows that the policy was not entirely anti-French, both in relation to the people and the language. This further showed the difficulties in entirely removing a language which had been the official language of the region for many years.

Furthermore, post-decolonization, Algeria worked to become more independent from France, with President Boumédiène (taking office in 1965), working to industrialize the Algerian economy and turn it into a prominent petroleum-exporting country (Benrabah 2007). The Arabization policy which focused on replacing English did not have a success in total, with little replacement of the language.

4.3.2 Côte d'Ivoire

In Côte d'Ivoire, French was and continues to be seen as an international language, one of modernity. After colonisation, Côte d'Ivoire remained close to France, both politically and economically.

“Comment nos jeunes, enfermés dans le cadre trop étroit d’un État isolé, pourraient-ils s’initier aux recherches scientifiques ? Si vous voulez des savants noirs il faut que nos étudiants collaborent avec leurs camarades français sur un pied d’égalité.”

(Houphouët-Boigny via Lauzanne 1959)

“How will our youth, closed off in the narrow surroundings of an isolated state, initiate scientific research? If you want knowledgeable Africans, our students must collaborate with their French comrades on equal footing.” (Houphouët-Boigny via Lauzanne 1959)

Houphouët-Boigny acknowledged the Ivorian dependence on France both economically and internationally, further mentioning the use of French as an international language, and the perception of French in the international context. With French as the official language of Côte d'Ivoire, Houphouët-Boigny believed that French resources and academics would be accessible to Ivorian students, putting them at the same level as their French peers. However, doing so also benefitted Houphouët-Boigny and other elites, as having a mastery of the official language allowed them to maintain power, while others had to learn the new language.

At the time of independence, French was established as being the language of education, along with being the official language. However, there were debates about the language policy, with then Minister of Education Lambert Amon Tanoh saying,

“L’école, au lieu d’être un facteur de développement..., est devenue une source de désintégration de la société et une source d’aliénation de l’individu. Elle est même devenue un obstacle à l’évolution harmonieuse et à l’équilibre politique parce qu’elle n’intègre pas nos enfants dans leur milieu traditionnel; au contraire, elle leur donne les moyens d’y échapper sans vraiment les préparer à intégrer le monde moderne.” (Amon Tanoh via Djité 1989b)

“School, instead of becoming a factor of development..., has become a source of disintegration of society and a source of alienation of individuals. It has even become an obstacle to the harmonious development to political equilibrium because it does not integrate to our students in their traditional place; instead, it has given them the means to

escape without really preparing them to integrate to the modern world.” (Amon Tanoh via Djité 1989b)

Many children do not speak French when they enter school, which severely impacts their ability to learn and literacy rates (Jasińska et al. 2023). Education solely in French can help those who already know some French continue to have access. With no instruction in one’s primary language, students with knowledge of French, from parents or surrounding communities, are already off to a greater advantage academically, which continues throughout primary school education (Tollefson and Tsui 2014). With schools not in their primary language, students are left behind, leading to high illiteracy rates in both their native languages and French. French is the primary language of education across Côte d’Ivoire, with little to no support for education in national languages, leaving many students behind (Moseng Knutsen 2008).

By the 1980s, the Ivorian French dialect was already unique and developed as independent from Standard French. The French are traditionally very conservative in their language, with the governing body of the Académie Française regulating official French vocabulary and grammar. This has contributed to their perspectives on the development of different French varieties across the world.

“La doctrine officielle voulait alors (et elle le veut encore pour une large part) que les différences entre le français moyen de l’Hexagone et celui des villes d’Afrique noire dite francophone ne portent guère que sur des réalités africaines pour lesquelles il n’existe pas en effet de mot français,” (Cellard 1981)

“The official doctrine wanted (and largely still wants) that the differences between the average French of the Hexagon [Metropolitan France] and that of cities in francophone Sub-Saharan Africa are only those for the realities in Africa for which there does not exist a French word,” (Cellard 1981)

The French noted the differences in the perception of standard French when compared to West African dialects. However, Ivorian French notably evolved due to necessity, as well as language contact and environments, with European French being unable to properly portray the sense of language needed in Côte d’Ivoire.

“Pour ce qui est du français d’Afrique, celui des quartiers populaires d’Abidjan (« le Français de Treichville »), de Dakar ou de Kinshasa n’est plus compréhensible au Français de passage.” (Cellard 1981)

“For the French of Africa, that of the popular neighborhoods of Abidjan (‘the French of Treichville’), of Dakar, or of Kinshasa, is no longer understandable to common French.” (Cellard 1981)

Under colonization, the French wanted to maintain the standard French language as the language across their colonial empire. However, with the diffusion of language and their uneven schooling and system of language enforcement, the spoken French quickly adapted more so to the region,

in the circumstances where it was used. The Ivorian French dialect, when developing, was not respected by Standard French speakers as “real French.” In their colonization, the goal of the French was assimilation to the French language, yet in Côte d’Ivoire, with the emergence of its own dialect, Ivorian French evolved into its own dialect, unique to Côte d’Ivoire.

5. Attitudes Towards Language Of The Modern Era

The attitudes of the modern era continue to reflect the evolution of language policy, showing the current state of policy in these states. The modern era being defined here as approximately from 1985 to present. This timeframe seems to delineate the post-colonial era from the modern era, with these attitudes more so affecting present language policy, rather than the initial post-colonial policy.

5.1. Nation Building

5.1.1 Algeria

In Algeria today, Arabic is still consistently seen as an essential aspect of the Algerian identity. Arabic is tied to both the country itself, and Islam, the state religion, as stated in the Algerian Constitution. The Algerian Minister of Communication, Mohamed Meziane, recently shared his perspective on the importance of the Arabic language to Algeria, saying,

“[L’arabe] n’est pas seulement un outil de communication, mais une structure de la conscience, une architecture du sens, un corps imprégné de pensée, de valeurs et d’histoire. La langue arabe n’est donc pas qu’un moyen de dialogue, mais le reflet même de notre existence civilisationnelle, notre outil de pensée et le pont qui relie notre culture au reste du monde.” (Meziane via Bentounes 2025)

“[Arabic] is not just a tool of communication, but a structure of conscience, an architecture of sense, a body of thought, of values and of history. The Arabic language is therefore not a way of speaking, but the reflection of our civilisational existence, our tool of thinking, and the bridge which connects our culture to the rest of the world.” (Meziane via Bentounes 2025)

In Algeria, Arabic is seen as a crucial element in the national construction of the language, as well as a connection to the rest of the Arab world, who constitute many of Algeria’s international allies. In choosing Arabic as the “reflection of our civilisational existence,” Meziane, is however, again reflecting the majority Arab population, and ignoring the presence of ethnic and linguistic minorities. The relationship between Berbers and the Algerian government has, however, recently evolved. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Berber nationalist movements were prominent throughout Algeria. They advocated for a recognition of Berber both in university and at the national level, as a distinct presence in Algerian culture and society, contributing to the Algerian identity independently from the Muslim Arab identity (“La Branche Dure Du Mouvement Berbère Menace l’Algérie d’une « guerre Totale »” 1994; “L’Algérie et le problème berbère” 1980). In 2016, Tamazight (Berber languages) was added to the Algerian Constitution

as a co-official and co-national language. While Arabic remains the “official language of the State,” the 2016 changes to the Algerian Constitution included “The State shall endeavour to promote and develop [Tamazight] in all its linguistic varieties in use throughout the national territory.” The Algerian government has thus grown to further recognize the role of Berbers in Algeria, and their unique identity separate from the Algerian Arab population. The two languages are now generally portrayed as together representing Algeria,

“Le secrétaire général du Haut-Commissariat à l’Amazighité, Si El Hachemi Assad, a affirmé que la diversité linguistique de l’Algérie, illustrée par la coexistence des langues nationales (arabe et tamazight), constitue une « force d’unité », … que la relation entre les deux langues nationales est une « relation de complémentarité et de créativité mutuelle », où « se fondent la mémoire collective et l’identité partagée du peuple algérien».” (“SILA” 2025)

“The Secretary General of the High Commission for Amazighty, Si El Hachemi Assad, affirmed that the linguistic diversity of Algeria, illustrated by the coexistence of national languages (Arab and Tamazight), constitutes a ‘force of unity,’ … that the relationship between the two national languages is a ‘relation of complementarity and of mutual creativity,’ where ‘the collective memory and the shared identity of the Algerian people is founded.’” (“SILA” 2025).

While the country was highly arabicized, Berber has recently been recognized as an Algerian language, and as a key part of the national identity and heritage. The promotion of Berber languages shows the movement away from Algeria as a nation state and instead acknowledges and recognizes the linguistic diversity of the country. This diverges from their previous policy of Arabic linguistic hegemony. They are still against the use of French in many official contexts, excluding education, where French maintains its prominent position.

In Algeria, there have been numerous developments in institutionalizing the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country, including the official recognition of Berber as an official language. In 2025, the Algerian Minister of Education stated,

« La nécessité de soutenir les bonnes visions et les initiatives visant à renforcer la place de la langue amazighe dans les médias nationaux, conformément aux dispositions de la Constitution… la nécessité stratégique, pour un média national reflétant la diversité culturelle de l’Algérie… l’approche éclairée du président de la République, M. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, qui repose sur la valorisation de la langue amazighe et l’octroi de la place qu’elle mérite pour son développement et le renforcement de sa présence dans la vie publique ». (Meziane via Yahiaoui 2025)

The necessity to support the good visions and initiatives seeking to reinforce the place of the Amazigh language in national media, conforming to the arrangement in the Constitution… the strategic necessity, for a national media to reflect the cultural diversity

of Algeria... The informed approach of the President of the Republic, Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who reiterates the value of the Amazigh language and allocation of place that it deserves for its development and reinforcement of its presence in public life. (Meziane via Yahiaoui 2025)

Thus, Algeria has evolved to further support the promotion of the Berber language, and recognize the shared history and importance of both Berber and Arabic to the Algerian identity. This also shows that although Arabization promoted Arabic as a factor in nation-building, Berbers play an important role in the linguistic policy of Algeria.

5.1.2 Côte d'Ivoire

In Côte d'Ivoire, the evolution of Ivorian French into an independent dialect has created a new uniquely Ivorian language, with new meanings and grammar from Standard French. This perception can be seen below. According to Professor Marie-Clémence Adom, the status of French in Côte d'Ivoire has changed significantly:

“Ce n’est plus une langue empruntée ni imposée. C’est devenu par l’appropriation des Ivoiriens et par les mécanismes de la population une langue purement ivoirienne au sens où les pratiques lui font porter des sens qu’ils veulent en dehors du code linguistique français. « Nous avons des phrases dont la syntaxe est française, mais le sens n’est pas française. »” (Adom via Tresore 2024)

“This is no longer a language neither borrowed nor imposed. It’s become by appropriation by Ivorians and by mechanisms of the population a purely Ivorian language in the sense that words bring new meaning outside of the French language code. ‘We have phrases where the syntax is French but the meaning is not French.’” (Adom via Tresore 2024)

According to Adom, French has been appropriated into the Ivorian context, including the introduction of vocabulary and syntax borrowed from the surrounding areas. Certain words have changed the meaning from the original French, including “connait papier” (literally “knowing paper”) meaning “educated” in Ivorian French (Tresore 2024). This has contributed to the continued use of French as an official language in Côte d'Ivoire, and the connection of French to Ivorian national identity.

While Ivorian French has become a new dialect, and become a unifying symbol of the country, French is still not the rarely a first language for Ivorians, and is almost always at least a second language. Second languages are used throughout the country for inter-ethnic communication, but the language of choice is varied throughout the country and depends on the ethnic group. For example, in the north of the country, Dyula is considered a lingua franca in the north, whereas in the city of Abidjan, French is the lingua franca (N'Guessan 2013).

Between Ivorians with knowledge of all three French varieties, common Ivorian French, FPI, and Nouchi, the usage of the various varieties in Côte d'Ivoire is subject to diglossic code-switching. "Scholarised" French is used in formal contexts, FPI is used in informal contexts, and Nouchi is used as a language of the youth or a slang language (N'Guessan 2008). FPI diverges from standard French in both pronunciation and syntax. There is a systematic consonant reduction, for example [zuka] for [zyska] for "jusqu'à" (until). There is also the omission of determiners, as in "tu va prendre bus" as opposed to "tu va prendre le bus" (you will take the bus) (N'Guessan 2008). The educated French of Côte d'Ivoire, that which is used in formal contexts, is also not altogether the same as Standard French, with its own syntactic differences. Nouchi is the most distinct from Standard French, and the most purely Ivorian language. As a casual language, Nouchi is the least standardized, with non-fixed genders of words, and loanwords from other languages, principally Dyula. Loanword verbs include "koro" for the standard French "dormir" (to sleep), or "badou" for "manger" (to eat) (N'Guessan 2008).

Across Côte d'Ivoire, the most spoken first-language is Baoulé, an Akan language, and is most spoken by the Akan people. It is also subsequently the most spoken language in the City of Abidjan (Dosso et al. 2025). The official government reasoning for the official language policy continues to be that French is used as a neutral language among the many ethnic groups of the country, to not be seen as favoring one ethnic group over another. Dyula is the most common second language of the country (Jasińska et al. 2023). However, Dyula is perceived in the South as being closely linked to the North, and thus to Islam. In the South, French is stronger, and that is where FPI is largely used.

In Côte d'Ivoire, we see French has also retained the privileged positions, though it is furthermore embraced as such by the government. Furthermore, it has been further adapted by the residents of large cities, namely Abidjan, the most populous city, creating the dialects of FPI and Nouchi. French has taken a prominent position as a lingua franca (Moseng Knutsen 2008). In Côte d'Ivoire, the choice of language seems to be chosen based on both the lack of a clear majority language, with French as a uniting language, and the lack of negative relations with France. Amid the four widely spoken languages, without a clear majority, the goal of choosing French was to not be seen as preferring one language or ethnic group over others.

"Il ne fait aucun doute que le français en Côte d'Ivoire se soit ivoirisé, à cause évidemment des formes que l'on y trouve, mais surtout au niveau de son usage. C'est-à-dire qu'il y a une norme locale, endogène, qui y régit maintenant les usages. Nous pouvons dire « le français de Côte d'Ivoire » comme nous disons aujourd'hui « le français du Québec » car les deux communautés linguistiques présentent des similitudes à bien des égards." (Simard 1994)

"There is no doubt that the French of Côte d'Ivoire has been ivorized, clearly due to the forms we see, but most of all because of its level of use. That's to say there is a local

norm, endogenous, that now regulates its uses. We can say ‘the French of Côte d’Ivoire’ like we say today ‘the French of Quebec’ because the two linguistic communities present similarly in those regards.”

However, while Ivorian French has developed into its own independent dialect, the dialect has long been perceived with a negative connotation, being associated with illiteracy and uneducated rurality (Boutin 2021).

Côte d’Ivoire has maintained close relations to France throughout their existence.

While France and Côte d’Ivoire have maintained close relationships, the relationship is not necessarily entirely positive, with the memory of colonialism still fresh with the names of French politicians still being used. However, there have been recent debates about the overt presence of colonial symbols remaining in Côte d’Ivoire.

“Les voies de Côte d’Ivoire doivent porter les noms des révolutionnaires et des politiciens ivoiriens. Là, dans l’avenir, on peut expliquer à nos enfants qui est qui.”
(Jeune Afrique 2025)

“Côte d’Ivoire’s roads must use the names of Ivorian politicians and revolutionaries.

There, in the future, we can explain to our children who is who.” (Jeune Afrique 2025) Currently, many areas of Côte d’Ivoire still prominently feature remnants of French colonization, which have begun to be renamed, prioritizing Ivorian history and figures. While Côte d’Ivoire has remained close to France economically and politically, they have distanced themselves recently, changing names of streets and buildings from French figures to those representing Ivorian history. However, this renaming is focused on the prominence and perseverance of Ivorian identity, rather than deleting the French history or connections, as France is still viewed as an important ally in Côte d’Ivoire. While Côte d’Ivoire and France have remained politically close, Côte d’Ivoire does not ignore the atrocities, and supports its own nationalism. Renaming the buildings and roads reflects the further creation of national unity.

In Côte d’Ivoire, the concept of Ivoirité or Ivorianess, has been the cause of much of the ethnic divisions and strife within the country. After the death of President Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, the country faced further ethnic divisions, dealing with the deciding factors of the national identity itself. Under Houphouët-Boigny, Ivorian unity was prioritized over ethnic conflict, focusing on national unity.

Henri Konan Bédié in 1993, who became president after Houphouët-Boigny, supported ethnic superiority for his own tribe, the Akan, a majority ethnicity in the central Abidjan area, the most populous area in the country (Akindès 2003). Thus, creating further ethnic conflict across the country, contributing to the turmoil, and leading to the civil conflicts of the 2000s. The concept of ivoirité further evolved to not just be ethnic majorities, but to focus on citizenship, exacerbating issues of ethnic divisions, nationality, language and religion (Akindès 2003).

5.2. Education and Modernity

5.2.1 Algeria

By the 1990s, only two Algerian government ministries had fully arabicized, with the Arabization policy of the 1970s having stalled (Abdulrazak 1982). Amidst the ongoing Algerian civil war, including the issue of perceived French influence in Algeria, the government re-started the Arabization of the country, aiming to “complete” the process. In 1998, Arabic was to officially become the sole language of Algeria (Tuquoi 1996). As a result, French was still prominent in the official government spaces across the country. Therefore, in continuing on their previous goals, the government chose to restart the Arabization policy.

In France, the general opinion on the Algerian language policy is rather linked to the promotion of French in Algeria. Despite no official links, with French remaining a language used in education across Algeria, the French government tends to want to promote the use of the French language internationally, including in their former territory. While the memory of the Algerian war is no longer as prominent across France, there have been historical links to the country and to the language.

“La décision d’imposer la « langue nationale » menace une partie de l’enseignement et risque de marginaliser francophones et Kabyles” (Marion 1990)

The decision to impose the “national language” threatens the teaching and risks to marginalise Francophones and Kabyles (Marion 1990)

“L’arabisation est surtout un combat contre le français et ses références culturelles.”

(Marion 1990)

“Arabization is foremost a battle against French and its cultural references.” (Marion 1990)

During the push towards Arabization in the 1990s by the Algerian government, the French viewed this as an attempt to push off both French language and cultural references. They also portrayed it as an attempt to repress ethnic minorities across Algeria, namely French and Berber. Both efforts towards Arabization were framed by the French government as attacking French and Berber-speakers. These tactics of claiming to support linguistic diversity reiterated French strategies during the Algerian war, including sowing discord between Berber and Arab groups (Bouherar and Ghafsi 2021). While the French did have a role in creating tensions among Berbers against Arabization, there were also genuine concerns from Berber groups, and Berber nationalists. Certain Berber groups supported the use of French over that of Arabic, with French being perceived less as a threat to Berber national identity (Rebai Maamri 2009).

A large part of the debate over the Berber language was included with the debate over education. The Berber languages were not permitted in schools until 1995, after which there was limited teaching allowed. The insistence against Berber language promotion, particularly in the

framework of Arabization, and prioritization of Arabic over Berber, a native language of the region, minimized the presence of Berbers across Algerian society (Le Sueur 2010). Arabization prioritized Arabic as the national language, focusing primarily on the elimination of French, however, this effectively limited the use of Berber as well.

Post-colonization, French remained the primary foreign language taught in schools and used as a technical language throughout Algeria (P-H 1972). However, with the rise of English through globalization, French has begun competing with English as the primary international language of Algeria. In 2025, the Algerian Minister for youth, Mustapha Hidaoui stated:

“Initiative vis à renforcer les compétences en langue anglaise chez les jeunes Algériens...le ministre a déclaré que maîtriser l’anglais n’est plus un choix, mais une nécessité impérieuse face aux évolutions technologiques et scientifiques dans un monde devenu un village global, où l’anglais est la langue principale,” (Mustapha Hidaoui via “La maîtrise de la langue anglaise n’est plus un choix” 2025)

“The initiative seeks to reinforce young Algerians’ competence in the English language...the minister declared that learning English is no longer a choice but a necessity facing technological and scientific evolutions in a world that’s become a global village, where English is the principal language.” (Mustapha Hidaoui via “Learning the English language is no longer a choice” 2025)

With English growing in prominence, Algeria has had the opportunity to shift from French in educational and scientific circumstances. This is used to an extent to shed the perceived hold of French. French was still important in the economic sector, and was required for the language (Benrabah 2013). The Minister of Work, Employment, and Social Security Abdelhak Saïhi reinforced this sentiment by saying,

“Cet établissement doit s’ouvrir sur d’autres disciplines et partenariats et renforcer l’usage de la langue anglaise dans la formation lorsqu’on sait que l’anglais est devenu une langue dominante à l’échelle mondiale.” (Benhameurlaïne 2025)

“This establishment must open on other disciplines and partnerships, and reinforce the usage of the English language in education, as we know English has become a dominant language at the global scale.” (Benhameurlaïne 2025)

The linguistic policy has spread to the inclusion of English on a global scale. English has become seen as the language of societal and global mobility. Furthermore, English is seen as a prestigious language on the global scale. Since the 1990s, and the second push for Arabization, the Algerian government has been pushing for English to replace French as the primary secondary language in the country. French was framed as “colonialist” and “imperialist,” and students were given a choice between English and French from the fourth grade. However, given the relevance of French in Algerian society, many students still opted into French (Benrabah 2007). A recent poll of university students showed that students preferred English as a

supplemental foreign language, in addition to French, rather than instead of French (Benrabah 2007). While English has been growing in popularity in Algeria, French has maintained its hegemony and cultural relevance. French is also still seen as crucial for higher level work, and in access to higher education, though some of this has recently changed with the introduction of English.

Throughout Algeria, recent conversations have discussed the role of which of either French or English will be the best in the use for international communication, primarily with Europe. However, there have also been discussions with the rise of the power of Arabic countries, and questions of the use of and prominence of Arabic in official contexts. Algerian Minister of Communication Mohamed Meziane recently commented on the importance of using and preserving the use of Arabic in these official contexts,

“La langue arabe a constitué, dans le sujet et le verbe, un levier civilisationnel pour la Nation, un pont de rencontre, d’entente et d’interaction, et un vecteur de l’identité et de la souveraineté. De même, s’affirme aujourd’hui, face aux enjeux de la mondialisation, de l’occidentalisation linguistique et de l’hégémonie de l’information numérique multilingue, le besoin pressant de réhabiliter la langue arabe au sein des institutions médiatiques arabes, non seulement en sa qualité d’outil de communication, mais surtout en tant que support de sens, de miroir de l’âme et de réservoir de culture et de significations des choses.” (Meziane 2025)

“The Arabic language constituted, in subject and in action, a civilisational lever for the nation, a meeting point, an understanding and an interaction, a vector of identity and of sovereignty. Similarly, affirming still today, facing the debates of globalisation, the linguistic Westernization and hegemony of digital multilingual information, the need to rehabilitate the Arabic language within digital Arabic institutions, not only in its quality as a tool of communication, but above all in its support of means, a mirror of the spirit and a reservoir of culture and meaning of things.” (Meziane 2025)

While French had been used initially, as supporting modernity, Arabic is now supported as an institutional and international language on the global stage. Arabic is further an international language with significant global influence, as a UN language and a significant global player with the Arab League and Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Issawi 1978). While French in Algeria had initially been used as a tool for international communication, English, along with Arabic have now become prominent languages on the international stage.

5.2.2 Côte d’Ivoire

In Côte d’Ivoire, the focus on French, and therefore lack of attention given to first languages, has significantly affected educational achievement levels across the country. The literacy rate in Côte d’Ivoire is relatively low, with only 49% of Ivorians over 15 being literate (Ivorian Government 2021). A significant aspect of this is, with education being in French, students who do not speak

French by the time they enter school are at a significant disadvantage compared to those who do. However, schools have also become a place for the diffusion of French Ivorian varieties, particularly Nouchi, which incorporates significant vocabulary and grammar from other Ivorian languages.

“Dr Marshal Kissi a affirmé que la langue française a été importée en Côte d’Ivoire au temps colonial puis est devenue une langue officielle parlée à l’école.” (Tresore 2024)

“Dr Marshal Kissi affirmed that the French language was imported to Côte d’Ivoire in the colonial era and that it became an official language spoken in schools.” (Tresore 2024)

“À l’en croire, l’on accède à la langue par la transmission familiale, l’apprentissage à l’école et sur le lieu du travail. Cependant, il y a une diversification d’usage. En outre, dans chaque partie du monde, le français a connu des modifications au niveau du lexique.” (Tresore 2024)

“We come to speak a language by familial transition, by learning it at school, or at work. Meanwhile, there is a diversification of the usage. Furthermore, in every part of the world, French has known modifications at the level of the lexicon.” (Tresore 2024)

French in Côte d’Ivoire is now seen as an Ivorian language, with its own development and syntax, through both schools, in addition to familial transmission. French is still not a common first language in Côte d’Ivoire, and is often learned as a second language in schools. As a result, French-Ivorian language slang, most prominently Nouchi, have emerged, and become common dialects among young people.

In recent years, the Ivorian government has encouraged the education of minority languages, instituting bilingual education. After recognizing the large gaps in education due separation from people’s native languages, and their subsequent language use.

« Nous sommes engagés et nous sommes déterminés pour l’initiative de l’introduction des langues nationales parce que l’enfant ivoirien peut et doit avoir les pieds dans la tradition et la tête dans le modernisme. La Côte d’Ivoire va poursuivre cet élan au nom de la Culture. Ce symposium vient à point nommé au moment où l’accès à une école de qualité est plus que d’actualité », (Ivorian Government 2022)

“We are engaged and we are determined for the initiative of the introduction of national languages because the Ivorian child can and should have their feet in tradition and their head in modernity. Côte d’Ivoire will follow this momentum in the name of culture. This symposium came to be named at a point when access to a quality school is more than reality.” (Ivorian Government 2022)

With the increase in the prevalence and education in their native languages, the goal is to increase the rate of literacy. However, many of the national languages across Côte d'Ivoire lack official standardization, and thus require more institutional support.

Additionally, being part of the Francophone Community is also part of how Côte d'Ivoire presents itself on the global stage, as a key part of the OIF, and as a part of the CFA Franc zone. Having once been the richest country in former French West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire has retained its prominence within the CFA West African Franc economic community (Pérez 2022). Eugène Aka Aouélé, the President of the Union of economic, social, and similar Francophone institutions, commented on the relationship between Francophonie and the economy, saying,

“La francophonie ne peut se contenter de jouer un rôle de promotion culturelle. Elle doit également devenir un espace de croissance partagée. Il est donc impératif que les nations francophones et francophiles, quelle que soit leur taille ou quelle que soit leur niveau de développement, puissent tirer bénéfice de la circulation des capitaux, des savoir-faire et des innovations au sein de notre espace linguistique” (Aouélé via Yeo 2025)

“Francophonie cannot content itself with simply cultural promotion. It must equally become a space of shared growth. It is therefore necessary that the Francophone and Francophile nations, whatever their size, or whatever their level of development, are able to benefit from the circulation of capital, of the know-how and of innovations within our linguistic space.” (Aouélé via Yeo 2025)

Francophonie, and therefore the French language, is seen as a factor tying together both Côte d'Ivoire and other Francophone countries. This diverges significantly from the Algerian position of prioritizing distance from Francophone institutions. These institutions are instead in Côte d'Ivoire, an instrument through which to present themselves on the global stage.

The issues of religion, language, and ethnicity are very prominent in Côte d'Ivoire. The choice of French as a national language was reportedly to override ethnic division, with French as an external, neutral language. If ethnic group's language were to be prioritized, it would cause conflict among the others, yet for national unity, they wanted to choose a language for intranational communication (Moseng Knutsen 2008). National languages are still used in intra-regional communication, particularly in the north of the country. Languages included Baoulé, Dyula, Senoufo, and Malinké are all prominent national languages, though none are spoken by more than 20% of the overall population (Abdul et al. 2025). The stigmas around the languages are particularly prominent in the divisions between the North and South of the country. With the concept of Ivoirité coming to prominence in the 1990s, the links between spoken language and immigration were emphasized. Dyula, in particular, is the second most common first language in the country, and is spoken across the country, but is significant in the North as a trade language. However, Ivoirité emphasized citizenship, despite Côte d'Ivoire's

large immigrant population, and created perceptions in the South against Dyula of being a language associated with immigration and with Islam (Akindès 2003).

Of the administrative regions of Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan has among the most evenly distributed first language speakers, with no majority speakers of any language, and no more than 17% for any given language. Abidjan also has the largest percentage of “no national language” speakers, at 7.2% of the population. Abidjan is also, notably, the central French speaking area of the country, with French most prominent in urban areas, with French as a first language growing, particularly in Abidjan (Abdul et al. 2025; Moseng Knutsen 2008).

5.3. Relationships with France

5.3.1 Algeria

Until 1999, France did not acknowledge the Algerian War as an official international war, as to them that would mean admitting that Algeria was not a part of France itself (Cohen 2002). In 2018, France first acknowledged the role of the French military in torturing Algerians (Chrisafis 2018). As a result, France and Algeria have maintained their own perspectives on the Algerian War and the colonization era, leading to general tensions remaining between two of the most prominent nations of the Mediterranean. The memory of the Algerian war has continued to affect the relationship between France and Algeria, including the link to French as a colonial language.

In Algeria, the relationship with France remains strained. There is a perception in Algeria of French neocolonialism still spreading through French institutions, such as French schools and the French institute.

“Le malaise grandissant entre l’Algérie et Paris dépasse désormais les différends diplomatiques traditionnels, nourri par des lobbys d’extrême droite en France. Il s’étend désormais au domaine culturel, utilisé par la partie française comme outil pour rétablir une influence en déclin. L’institut français, initialement créé pour promouvoir les échanges intellectuels et le dialogue culturel entre les deux pays, est aujourd’hui instrumentalisé par Paris pour exécuter des agendas politiques et de renseignement.”
(Bouati, 2025)

“The growing unease between Algeria and Paris surpasses beyond the traditional diplomatic differences, nourished by the extreme right lobbies in France. It spreads beyond the cultural domain, used by the French parties as a tool to re-establish a declining influence. The French institute, initially created to preserve intellectual exchanges and cultural dialogue between the two countries, is today used by Paris to execute political agendas and information.” (Bouati 2025)

France is seen as using soft power the French language to influence their political agendas. As a result of the tense relationships, anything viewed as a way for France to exert soft power is viewed with hesitancy. The example of the French Institute is here portrayed as an example of

France exerting soft power through its linguistic institutions, and supporting French agendas internationally, thus being part of neocolonialism.

This reflects back to Minister Taleb-Ibrahimi's reflection on the OIF in 1972, with Algeria considering the OIF and the French Institute as institutions through which France was able to reinforce its cultural and linguistic presence in Algeria. Thus, the Algerian perspective of France has not immensely changed from the 1970s, with institutes supporting Francophonie and the diffusion of the French language viewed as part of this, with their connections to the French government.

5.3.2 Côte d'Ivoire

The relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire today remains largely positive. Côte d'Ivoire is still highly dependent on France economically and in security. In recent years, the dependency on France in both fields has diminished significantly. The currency of much of former French West Africa is currently CFA Franc, the same currency of the colonial era, which remains tied to the Euro (or French Francs pre-2002) (Pérez 2022). Until 2019, countries using the CFA Francs were also required to maintain foreign reserves in the French treasury, thus, these countries were still highly dependent on France. However, the countries are in the process of creating a new currency, the eco, which would allow for economic independence from France (Pérez 2022).

“Ces échanges réguliers témoignent du rôle diplomatique central que joue la Côte d'Ivoire dans la région, et de l'intérêt constant de la France pour renforcer sa coopération avec ce pays stratégique. La réunion de ce jour devrait également permettre de faire un point sur les avancées des projets conjoints, comme ceux liés à l'éducation, aux infrastructures et à la transition énergétique, secteurs dans lesquels la France est un partenaire de premier plan.” (N'Guessan 2025)

“These regular exchanges show the central diplomatic role that Côte d'Ivoire plays in the region, and the constant interest of France to reinforce her cooperation with this strategic country. The meeting on this day should equally permit to make a point on the advancement of combined projects, like those tied to education, to infrastructure, and to energy transitions, sectors in which France is a foremost partner.” (N'Guessan 2025)

While there is growing economic and security independence, the relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire has remained close, with them continuing to be strong allies in their respective regions. Thus, as a tie to France, the French language is still seen as important to the success of Côte d'Ivoire today.

6. Analysis

The linguistic situations between Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire have become very different, due to a variety of factors. Among these factors is the historical presence of languages before colonization, in addition their relationships with France post-independence. The relationship with

France was tied to both their history under colonization, during decolonization, and their needs post-colonization.

In both countries, religion has additionally contributed to linguistic choices in each country. As the state religion, Sunni Islam is practiced by over 95% of the Algerian population (Benrabah 2013). Arabic is the liturgical language of Islam, hence in Algeria, the practice of speaking Arabic was highly linked to the religious practices of its citizens. Throughout the colonial era, Islam became a part of the collective Algerian identity, against the secular but traditionally Catholic French. In Côte d'Ivoire, official language policy was not affected by religion, yet practices were and continue to be. Language is tied to both religion and immigration. High Muslim immigrant populations in the North of the country, where Dyula has become a prominent language. 82% of naturalised Ivorian citizens are Muslim, and 54.3% of naturalized citizens speak Dyula as the most spoken language (Dosso et al. 2025).

While French is the official language, only approximately 36.4% of the Ivorian population speaks French (Marcoux et al. 2022). This serves to show that the administrative use of French can only go so far. With education being in French, it is hard for Ivorian students who speak other languages to learn French. For those who speak French, it is almost exclusively a second language.

From the same source, Algeria is listed as having 32.86% of its population as francophone, showing the continuing prominence of French in the country which has worked to eliminate it (Marcoux et al. 2022). In Algeria, French is spoken almost exclusively as a second, third or fourth language, after Darja, MSA, and Berber. As a result, with Darja being the most common first language across the country, students are largely in schools with similar starting positions. As a result, with a standardized education system and students starting from similar points, the language policy of Arabic is more unified, and more effective in addressing the needs of students in achieving literacy.

Despite the differences in the official language curriculum, French has a “privileged position” in both regions, being used to signify social status and education. The differences in language policy, while having differing official stances, have led to similar rates of French being spoken, largely due to the prior language distribution. In Algeria, with most students starting with a similar linguistic background, largely Darja, the educational curriculum is more universal, whereas in Côte d'Ivoire, the diversity of languages means there is a highly varied rate of language learning, affecting the standard language learning.

In looking at the official language use policies, Algeria has significantly different official policies when compared to its neighboring countries of Tunisia and Morocco, both of which had similar pre-colonial histories. However, these countries had different experiences under French

colonization, with both being protectorates, leading to a much less significant French presence, as much more autonomous entities than Algerian departments. Both also achieved independence without war, though also did Arabization policies post-independence. Nevertheless, both remain part of the OIF, with the Tunisian President being one of the founding members (Benrabah 2013). Both Tunisia and Morocco were similarly colonized by France, and had the pre-existing Arabic language. Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba and Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor were among African leaders who assisted in forming OIF in the mid 60s (Benrabah 2013). According to a Tunisian university student:

“Il a imposé l’arabe après le départ de Français, mais il s’agissait d’une ‘tunisification’ plutôt que d’une ‘arabisation.’ Ensuite, il n’a jamais rejeté le français, au contraire, son penchant culturel était de ce côté-là” (Beaugé 2000)

“[The government] imposed Arabic after the departure of the French, but it was more of a ‘Tunisification’ than an ‘Arabization.’ Furthermore, it never rejected French, on the contrary, its cultural penchant was more to that side.” (Beaugé 2000)

Moroccans at first refused to become a member of the francophone movement because nationalists rejected French as a component of historical and cultural makeup of their national identity and joined in 1981 (Benrabah 2013). In Tunisia, legal expert Hichem Moussa said:

“La caractéristique du français au Maghreb était d’être une langue de masse et de communication avec l’Europe. La stratégie actuelle consiste à le réduire à une langue d’élite.” (Moussa via Beaugé 2000)

“The characteristic of French in the Maghreb is that it is a popular language and a language of communication with Europe. The actual strategy consists of reducing it to a language of the elite.” (Moussa via Beaugé 2000)

Therefore, the presence of French as a language of the elite has remained across the Maghreb, despite all three countries of the Maghreb having Arabic as an official language, with varying levels of Arabization.

7. Conclusions

Given the accessibility of the data, it is crucial the limitations of the available data. The archives of data have limited access, particularly to the Algerian and Ivorian archives, which were limited by available data. The available data provided an excess of French historical perspectives and notes, while providing limited access to Algerian and Ivorian perspectives. In being documents largely coming from France, the range of perspectives is also limited to largely government and other public figures.

The largest contributors seem to be the historical and sociocultural elements. However, in looking at the data of percentage of Ivorian Francophones, the number itself is not very high, leading to perhaps a suggestion that the policy is not the sole factor. In both countries, the choice

of language post-independence was largely based on if the country had a previous language that was seen as unifying. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, it had never been unified before French colonization, therefore there was no clear language, which they perceived as essential in the creation of a nation-state. In Algeria, despite official Arabization and cold government relations, French still retains a privileged position as a foreign language, and still holds prestige, as it does in Côte d'Ivoire. Neither has a fully unified language policy, with neither country being a nation state, and the language practice reflecting this.

The largest factors determining language policy in Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire are the pre-colonial language practices, the economy and education, nationalism and state-building, in addition to their relationships with France and religious reasons. Though these factors have had differing effects on the countries themselves, the practice has varied, and remained similar in spite of this.

When initially considering these countries, they have different official language policies and history, with both predominantly portraying themselves as having one language internationally. However, this erases the complex linguistic histories that are present in each of Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire. For over a hundred years the two countries shared a common language policy of French, and for the past approximately 65 years they have had their own individual policies, yet have similar levels of French today, despite their diverging policies on the language.

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