'Chameleonic' English in Tunisia: A Third-Space Language

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This paper examines present trends in the diffusion of English in Tunisia and discusses critical aspects of the incorporation of this language as part of the local linguistic ecology. The growing influence of English in Tunisia is first assessed against the historical, cultural, and political backdrop of the omnipresence of French and its colonial legacy. Subsequently, the popularity of English is examined through two indexes of linguistic growth, namely its representation on street signs and its legitimation in people's attitudes. Samples of images representing the visual and linguistic landscape (Gorter & Shohamy, 2009; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Shohamy et al., 2010) were collected in the streets of selected urban centers of Tunisia, and language attitudes where elicited from Tunisian participants via written questionnaires and oral interview sessions. The results of this investigation reveal that the use of English in Tunisia is 'chameleonic' appearing rarely but still adapting well to the linguistic ecology of the country. In addition, while it does not evocate similar colonial undertones as the French language, English is nonetheless 'camouflaging' an embedded strong economic value as it is instrumentally (Wee, 2003) manipulated by advertisers for purposes of commodification (Tan & Rubdy, 2008).

Keywords: Sociolinguistics; Code-Switching; Semiotics; Linguistic Landscape; Linguistic Ecology

Introduction

When compared to French, a language with a more established history, English has a relatively recent presence in Tunisia. Although tacitly emerging in the linguistic environment of the country, English is currently gaining more visibility and growing in representation in key domains such as education (Boukadi, 2013; Boukadi & Troudi, 2017; Boussabah 2007; Canagarajah & Ben Said, 2010; Maherzi, 2001), science and technology (Daoud, 2001), international trade (Miled, 2007), electronic communication (Daoud, 2001), and within academic circles (Hawkins, 2008; Troudi, 2009). As a byproduct of the effects of globalization (Barrett & Dovchin, 2019; Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael, 2015; Vandenbroucke, 2016) and the ubiquity of American popular and corporate culture (Ritzer, 2004), Tunisia is symptomatic of former North African protectorates and colonies, which are now slowly distancing themselves from dependence on the French language and turning to English as a tool for development and growth (Ennaji, 1991). While French is a language still loaded with colonial undertones due to the historical circumstances, English on the other hand is starting to establish itself as a serious competitor in the linguistic marketplace. Owing to the linguistic dynamics

which are already in place with Arabic as the national language and French as the *de facto* second language, English is carving out a linguistic and semiotic space. Specifically, English is setting itself between two already established languages. Arabic, which embodies national identity and French, a language which some would describe as a 'relic' of former colonial occupation (Calvet, 1994; K. Salhi, 2002). This paper explores the interplay between Arabic, French, and English in the linguistic landscape of Tunisia and both highlights and investigates the growing visibility of English, in the linguistically-diverse space of the country.

Language Dynamics in Tunisia
        To date, the only official language of Tunisia, as stipulated by the national constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia, Chapter I, Article 1, p. 4), is Arabic: "*Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state. Its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic and its type of government is the Republic*". Arabic is in this respect the uncontested 'language of the state' and has been extensively promoted through a policy of Arabization[1] which followed Tunisia's independence from France in 1956. In its initial conception, this policy was aimed at preserving Tunisia's traditional Islamic culture, heritage, and identity and was framed as "the only politically acceptable solution" (Battenburg, 1997, p. 281). The influence of French as a status and prestige marker among the educated elite and its connection with modernity and sophistication has constantly represented a threat to this policy of Arabization. This is mainly due to the hegemonic discourses which derided Arabic as a language relegating Tunisians to traditional values and backwardness. Form a historical perspective, French has always been a widely-used language in Tunisia notwithstanding the fact that it has never been explicitly recognized by state legislature. In this respect, it is Tunisia's implicit or *de facto* second language inherited following the colonial occupation by France from 1881 to 1956. Ironically, one of the inconsistencies which can be readily observed when strolling the streets of Tunisia is that despite the non-endorsement of French by the government, this language is still visibly salient and has a large representation in the Linguistic Landscape (LL). In fact, Arabic-French bilingualism can be encountered on government-regulated street signs particularly in the form of translations and transliterations of locations, geographical areas, and place names (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Official Bilingual Arabic-French Sign

Bilingual translations and transliterations have been referred to in the context of francophone Africa as 'imperial relics' (Calvet, 1994) and were designed during the French political administration, remaining unaltered until today. In Figure 1 for instance, name locations are Transliterated/Romanized from Arabic (e.g. Ariana, Soukra, Essalama, Taieb Mhiri) with French semantically expressed through the use of articles (La Soukra) and nouns (Nord – *North*; Cité – *City*). These Arabic-to-French translations and transliterations which follow a French morpho-phonology rather than an English one are therefore 'crystallized' forms which attest to the rigidity of colonial bilingual translations and transliterations as well as to their obsolescence. The tripartite hierarchical layering between Arabic, French, and English is also substantiated in the LL. Indeed, when looking at frequency counts of languages appearing on street signs collected from the cities of *Tunis* and *La Marsa*, Arabic, French, and English are revealed to be the most frequently occurring languages (see Table 1).

[1] Arabization is a language planning initiative whereby the government actively endorses the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in several domains and promotes it to the level of a fully functional language.

Table 1. Frequency Count of Languages Collected from Street Signs in *Tunis* and *La Marsa²*

Language	Arabic	French	English
%	41.9	36.6	14.5
Occurrences	766	668	264

*Other languages were omitted from the table

In historical perspective, Arabic-French bilingualism has thus far defined the linguistic identity of Tunisia. However, the last decade has witnessed a more widespread use of English in the country. While English is gaining ground and currency and becoming an incentive for upward social mobility, it is also unsettling the established diglossia and specifically engaging in a 'tug of war' with the French language both in terms of visual display and in people's attitudes[3].

Methodology

This study examined the linguistic landscape of Tunisia by specifically focusing on the urban areas of *Tunis* and *La Marsa* (Map 1). This deliberate geographical delimitation and exclusive attention on urban zones is explained by the scope of the project which only investigated multilingualism in urban centers. All pictures were collected by the author, using a digital camera and then saved on a mass storage device (i.e. USB or flash drive).

With respect to the city of *Tunis*, pictures of street signs were taken mostly from large avenues, which constitute the important transit areas within the city. The modern city, or *Ville Nouvelle*, has been built during the French protectorate and starts from *Bab El Bhar* and stretches towards the large *Avenue Bourguiba*, a straight two-way heavily trafficked thoroughfare which forms the backbone of the modern city and stretches from the onset of *Tunis Marine* into the entrance of the Old City or Medina. Designed by the French to be on a par with the Parisian Champs-Elysees, this avenue is replete with restaurants, local and international chain hotels, cafés, cultural sites, and shops. The collection of data in *La Marsa* was performed on sections of large avenues such as *Avenue Habib Bourguiba*, *Avenue de la République*, *Avenue Taieb M'Hiri*, *Avenue du 07 Novembre*, and *Avenue Ali Belhaouane*, as well as on the following streets: *Rue Hedi Saidi*, *Rue Abdelahfidh El Mekki*, *Rue Abou El Qacem Al Chebbi*, *Rue Cheikh Tayeb Siala*, *Rue de la Mosquée*, *Rue du Sapin*, *Rue du 09 Avril 1938*, *Rue du Stade*, *Rue Imam Chfai*, *Rue Kabadou*, *Rue Mohamed Abda*, *Rue Mohamed Ali*, *Rue Omar Ibn Sheikh*, and *Rue Tazarka*. Some other data collection sites comprised the touristy Place *Saf-Saf*, the public park of *La Marsa - Sidi Bou Said*, the *La Marsa* TGM train station, the *Zephyr* mall.

Map 1. *Tunis* (Capital City) and *La Marsa* (Suburb).

As mentioned by Backhaus (2007, p. 65), if one needs to guarantee a sound data collection procedure, two fundamental points need to be taken into consideration, namely the determination of the survey items, and the geographic limits of the survey area. The survey items were confined to the definition of LL as provided by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and consisted in "public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings" (p. 25). With respect to the second point, the collection of data was conducted while taking into consideration both the major busy axes of the cities as well as the more residential areas. This was performed in order to guarantee a more representative coverage of the investigation

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[2] *Tunis* is the capital city of Tunisia; *La Marsa* is a seaside suburban area.
[3] This study will only explore dynamics of language display. Attitudes from Tunisian respondents were not part of the scope of the current project.

sites. However, even though data was collected at different points, it does not claim to be a holistic and exhaustive representation of the two cities because other sections of the cities of *Tunis* and *La Marsa* have not been included in the data collection. In addition, this study does not aim to perform an across-the-board survey of the linguistic landscape of *Tunis* and *La Marsa*, such as is the case in geographically-comprehensive LL studies (Barni & Bagna, 2009), but to select a cross-section of streets in these cities in order to describe the observed trends of these two LL contexts.

Some LL studies have offered to dovetail the central circular railway or bus line of a city, as in Backhaus (2007). This methodology while appealing is problematic as it does not account for all areas of the cities but only the ones accessed by transportation facilities. On the other hand, collecting data from only one street as performed in several LL studies (Edelman, 2006) is again not devoid of methodological hurdles as limiting the data collection to an exclusive street, not only excludes other areas of the cities, but also makes the study weak in terms of the city's holistic representation. Based on these parameters, it is necessary to find a middle ground between these two data collection procedures and perform the data collection in a structured manner. Snapshots of street sign were collected from each street within an area delimited by two consecutive traffic lights. Despite having the limitations of not being statistically accurate, the advantage of this selection principle is that it combines the methodologies of Backhaus (2007) on the one hand who used traffic lights as points of geographical reference, and other researchers (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006) who collected signs over long stretches of streets. In this respect, this collection procedure provided a disciplined and non-biased way to determine the survey area.

The data collection was not limited to any particular type of sign but included the range of signs which are characterized in terms of the definition of LL offered by Landry and Bourhis (1997) quoted above. Choosing to select a bigger range of sign types rather than to focus on only one type is motivated by the desire to capture the diversity of the linguistic landscape of the investigated cities. In addition, having a more inclusive and balanced representation of sign types enhanced the validity of this study by providing a more representative and holistic account of the linguistic landscape of Tunisian urban centers. In fact, including different types of signs may positively contribute to the investigation of the LL; Backhaus (2007) supports this idea by stating that:

> Many aspects of a city's linguistic landscape are not captured when focusing on one type of sign only. In this respect, qualitatively oriented studies such as Calvet (1990, 1994), Scollon and Scollon (2003), or Spolsky and Cooper (1991) have a much wider scope, including both official and non-official, and both commercial and non-commercial signs. (p. 61)

Rivalries within the linguistic marketplace
Although Tunisia does not endorse an official second or foreign language in its linguistic legislature, French has traditionally and historically been accepted as the *de facto* second language of the country. In addition to historical ties, strong diplomatic relations and the presence of a significant Tunisian diaspora in France have created a climate of harmony between the two countries. Inauspiciously, France's cultural presence can also be explained due to the linguistic and cultural imperialism which 'francophonie' (Cutler, 2018; Denault & Mclaughlin, 2015; Philip, 2015; Premat, 2018) and French cultural models exert on Tunisian local culture (Ballais et al., 2018; Dhaouadi, 1996). In spite of the fact that Tunisia is an EFL context where English is in its foundational stages[4] (see Schneider, 2007) this language nonetheless represents a linguistic 'juggernaut' which is slowly jeopardizing the historical *status-quo* of French and currently ranking as the third language of the

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[4] English in Tunisia is in phase 1 (foundation) in Schneider's model pertaining to the lifecycle of English.

country. English is now becoming more visible when compared to the past. It is commonly encountered in advertising (see Figure 3 and 4) and is also one of the growing languages of education, tourism, science, and technology. The promotion of English from nearly invisible to fully functional can be witnessed in several state-issued informative billboards which form part of the Tunisian LL (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Hierarchical Ranking of Arabic, French, and English

As can be seen in this image, while Arabic is superior to both French and English in terms of positioning and font size, French and English are negotiating their respective rankings. In fact, while French has a historically-granted second place, English is written using a larger font size and thus represents a challenging contender aiming for a higher status. This linguistic rivalry is even more noticeable on public signs, as show in Figure 3, where English takes the dominant role of the 'commoditizing' language vis-à-vis both French and Arabic.

Figure 3. English-dominant business sign for 'ready to wear' women's clothes

This new linguistic situation which creates push-pull dynamics between French and English has been described as also taking place in other African contexts (Aitsiselmi & Marley, 2008; Omoniyi, 2003) and is currently creating an atmosphere of linguistic rivalry where French is not only contending with English, but also revealing early symptoms of desuetude.

As the inability of French to make inroads into Anglophone territories becomes more discernible (Ballais et al., 2018; Battenburg, 1997; K. Salhi 2002), English starts to be used in a larger array of domains and with more visibility than in the past. Crucial milestones of the history of English in Tunisia can be found in governmental measures which took place with the advent of the 1980's; Tunisian politicians, government officials, and journalists started to advocate that the policy of Arabization should be accompanied with an emphasis on the teaching and use of the English language in more domains and with more commitment than the interest manifested in French. This plain desire to bolster English was sometimes the subject of polemical statements such as the one

delivered by the past Minister of Finance, Mansour Moalla who stated: "The day will come when Tunisians will have no interest in learning French. They will resort to English or another 'useful' language" (Bessis, 1982-3, p. 81). In addition to these vocal statements, current challenges in the teaching of French are becoming more exacerbated by the increasing negative attitudes towards this language (Boukhari, 2006; Diallo, 2018). As explained by Hawkins (2003), language activists who champion the cause of Arabization and lament the elongated presence of French are using English as a lever to dethrone the dominion of the French language. As a consequence, the Arabization policy has actually contributed to shifting the status of French from a second to a foreign language in secondary schools (Noureddine, 1997; R. Salhi, 2000). This has considerable implications for the status of English in Tunisia, where both French and English are placed on equal footing and where the two languages are now competing in the foreign language marketplace.

The fact that French in Tunisia is starting to show signs of decline has prompted French authorities to work collaboratively with the Tunisian Education Ministry in order to retroactively promote this language through pedagogical innovations (Hammami & Dutrey, 2006), cultural programs and partnerships (International Organization of the Francophonie) and therefore commit to give French a 'makeover' which will uplift its current status. French 'political' resistance to British and American-led initiatives in Africa and the Middle-East and specifically in Tunisia, is another manifestation of the fears about the diminishing cultural influence of France in these areas of the world and its covetousness in maintaining a stranglehold over the linguistic marketplace in Tunisia (Battenburg, 1997). While the francophonie movement has been criticized as an imperialistic and neocolonialist ideology which is originally based on the French ideals of '*mission civilisatrice*' (civilizing mission) (Kasuya, 2001), efforts by French stakeholders at countering the growth of English in Tunisia can be described as futile – the reason being a comparatively marked imbalance in terms of the provision of monetary resources for the promotion English and French in Tunisia:

> In 1996 the American government contributed an estimated 600,000 dollars and the British government allocated about 400,000 dollars for language, cultural, and educational activities. The French government, in contrast, spent approximately 20 million dollars for such programs within Tunisia. One British official, in describing this disparity, exclaimed only somewhat jokingly: 'The French spend more in a morning than we do in a year' (Battenburg, 1997, p. 287).

The struggle between French and English in Tunisia has been captured as a case of 'linguistic rivalry' where English is slowly promoted and French gradually demoted (Daoud 2011; Veltcheff, 2006). Recent agreements between the Tunisian government and the British Council have sought to boost the use of English in professional domains while making sure not to 'undermine' the French language (Tunisia turns to a new language partner). These push-pull relations between the two languages still seems to be serving English to the detriment of French particularly in key domains such as science and technology (Daoud, 2001), international trade (Miled, 2007), and electronic communication (Daoud, 2001; Hawkins, 2008), where English appears to constitute more linguistic capital.

As a matter of fact, several street signs in the Tunisian LL are exhibiting innovative patterns of Arabic-English language mixes which deviate from the traditional pattern of Arabic-French bilingualism commonly encountered in the urban centers of the country (see Figure 1). It is also more common to see English displayed in more colorful, dynamic and multimodal street signs (Kress & Bezemer, 2015; Pütz & Mundt, 2019) (see Figure 4). English in signs of a promotional nature have more appeal to the younger readership and often consists of trendy and easy to remember catchwords like 'fun', 'super', 'live', 'best', 'new', 'happy', 'go', etc. (Inagawa, 2015; Laitinen, 2015; Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014).

Figure 4. Multilingual sign advertising a local
cell phone company

These decorative and sometimes creative uses of English convey a "cosmopolitan flair" (Huebner, 2006, p. 41), where English is used as a trendy language indexing "visual charm" (MacGregor, 2003, p. 21). In addition, as shown in Figure 4 the uniqueness of display which contravenes the monomodal state-sponsored signs (see Figure 1) constitute a more dynamic appeal to sign readers due to the fact that English is written using large font when compared to French and Arabic. The sign is also more colorful, transient (i.e. non-static) and hybrid as it features not only English and French (la nouvelle ligne Tunisiana – *The new Tunisiana phone line*) but also Tunisian dialect both written in Arabic (عيش بفنّ – *live artistically*) and roman script (Carta – *SIM Card*). As it will be shown later with more details, English is also a 'chameleonic' language because in this particular sign it combines with Arabic to create a double meaning. The word فنّ [transliterated as 'fann'] means 'art' in Arabic and is phonetically similar to the English word 'fun' thus creating a pun where a two-layered semantic interpretation is possible. One reading being 'Live Artistically' the other 'Live a Life of Fun'. This propensity for English to have a dual lexical form and semantic meaning emphasizes its chameleonic and creative (Deshors, Götz, & Laporte, 2018; Järlehed & Jaworski, 2015; Swann & Deumert, 2018) uses in Tunisia and how although limited in appearance has more potential for hybridity and layering amidst other languages than French. In addition, when compared to uses of French, English on street signs was more frequently represented on transient interfaces (buses, trains, digital signs, cars, etc.) suggesting a more dynamic and mobile relation to sign readers.

Chameleonic appearances and the desired visibility of English

The proportion of languages in monolingual representations (Table 2) indicate that although English is less prevalent than French on street signs, it still has more frequency and saliency than the Tunisian dialect. English is therefore preferred to the local vernacular on visual interfaces.

Table 2. Proportion of Monolingual Street Signs

Language	Arabic	French	English	Tunisian Dialect
%	49.4	33.5	10.8	2.3
Occurrences	117	111	34	6

In terms of language mixes, English is a considerably recurring language on bilingual and multilingual signs. As the illustration in Figure 4 has shown, English is easily incorporated amidst other languages and several language combinations included (see Table 3).

Table 3. English Combinations on Street Signs

Language	Frequency (%)
Arabic + *English*	8.7
Arabic + French + *English*	6
French + *English*	4.9
Tunisian Dialect + French + *English*	2
Italian + *English*	1.4

The presence of English on advertising signs, store front names, and billboards is characterized by numerous instances of language mixes and *clichéd* words and expressions. The use of English is usually characterized by brevity. English in the LL of *Tunis* and *La Marsa* can be deemed as 'chameleonic' by analogy to the animal, whose furtive appearances are distinguished by colorful blends to its adjoining ecology. Hence, English in the streets of Tunisia is sometimes unnoticed, not because of its paucity but due to its camouflaged uses and unexpected appearances. The term 'chameleonic' has not been theorized in the sociolinguistic literature or used in the same context as it is used in this paper. In addition, a review of this word in the broader field of language research reveals that it has been adopted in the areas of didactical discourse (Domunco, 2009), EFL pronunciation (Taqi, Algharabali, & Almubayei, 2018), epistemology (Smullyan, 1984). However, in all the surveyed studies, the investigation of 'chameleonic' or 'chameleon-like' aspects of language differ from the one discussed and expanded upon in this study. The modern aspect of English was captured in expressions referring to fashion, lifestyle, globalization, and technology (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Store-front trilingual sign (English, Arabic, and French)

While traditionally Arabic and French would have been used, the appearance of English as a decorative language and its desired visibility (Takashi, 1992) on this sign (Figure 5) gives it a modern tenor and provides it with a technological edge which neither Arabic nor French could have epitomized or fulfilled. In fact, the Arabic translation although provided above its English counterpart is nonetheless made less visibly salient for the reader. Being considered a trendy and modern language in Tunisia, English is oftentimes deliberately manipulated to serve as a commodity (Rubdy & Tan, 2008). In fact, several LL studies have shown that the instrumental use of English on street signs conveyed a "cosmopolitan flair" (Huebner, 2006, p. 41), where English is "the international language of trendiness" (Schlick, 2003, p. 6), having "visual charm" (MacGregor, 2003, p. 21), or as elevating the status of shops (ibid, p. 21). The indexation of modernity is one way whereby English is commodified and used as a language that 'sells'. Other aspects which play upon the selling properties of English are captured in the association of this language with quality, know-how/expertise, and reliability. While this connection is dimly established in Figure 5, where 'electronic systems' is used as an implicit assertion of the technical expertise of the advertised business, the French expressions

'encore plus près de chez vous' (even closer to home) and 'le contrat de confiance' (the contract/bond of trust) accentuates this notion of quality of service, expertise, and trustworthiness between the customers and the business owners.

Creating a space for English

This particular use of English as a chameleonic language, easing and mediating some of the historical tensions which the French language is associated with, can be seen as an indicator of the linguistic adjustments which are taking place in Tunisia. It is important to place the situation in a broader political context. The Tunisian government still has strong political, economic, and cultural ties with France. Therefore, although the government may be fostering more visibility of English in Tunisia, this initiative is impinged by the active role played by France in promoting its language in the national territory. This tendency is reflected in the use of English on public and private signs where it was shown that 24% of private (i.e. non-governmental) signs had English when compared to public (state-sponsored) signs where only 5% of signage used this language. In terms of the typology of signs, the LL literature has broadly distinguished between two different categories, termed respectively as 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' (Hassa, 2012). The first category termed either 'bottom-up', 'unofficial', or 'private', refers to signs designed by companies or small business owners. They differ from a second category of signs, labelled as 'top-down', 'official', 'public', or 'state-sponsored', which are produced by the government or by an institutional entity. Top-down signs commonly abide by and reflect the language policy situation of a country and are more in accordance with the promotion of the official language(s). Bottom-up signs, on the other hand, contain a greater deal of diversity and may include languages which are not officially promoted or adopted by the country in question

Images collected from the LL clearly indicate that while the government (i.e. an official entity) is less enthusiastic in outwardly displaying English in the LL – and hence carefully avoiding to vex French language advocates (Helal, 2018) – people (i.e. a bottom-up entity) are actually showing more willingness to exhibit this language on street signs. From this vantage point, although there are early indicators that this trend is making headway, English in Tunisia is still not fully in-place to play a hybrid role but is a language which assimilates harmoniously and adapts without dissonance to the local linguistic ecology. For this reason, the term 'chameleonic' is more suitable in accounting for the presence, display, and use of English in the Tunisian context because although it is still sporadic, when it incorporated into the existing languages, English still fits in harmoniously.

English therefore occupies a 'third-space' and acts as a mediating language or a proxy for French in certain domains. The concept of third-space although initially coined by Bhabha (1990, 1994) to account for the situatedness of post-colonial communities in a liminal position between colonizer and colonized, is understood in this study as a semiotic and a symbolic space which allows users to move beyond the dependency on the French language and to juggle between a language of identification (i.e. Arabic) and a language of hegemony (i.e. French). As such, the third space which English occupies in the Tunisian LL is a fluid and shifting space of hybridity and negotiation. The dynamics introduced by the English language in Tunisia are an index of the linguistic adjustments which are taking place in the country where a turning point seems to be happening. These linguistic adjustments which are also symptomatic of inconsistencies in language policy and planning (Ben Said, forthcoming) signal a crucial move towards the adoption of English as an effective tool for communication and represents a milestone in moving beyond the historical dependence on French. Thus, the term 'third-space' is quintessential in capturing the transitional phase that Tunisia is currently going through. English therefore plays an instrumental role in subverting past and current linguistic practices and as Bhatt (2008, p. 178) accurately comments on the notion of 'third-space': 'shifting linguistic identities that appear in local practices of language use represent struggles across

difference – between past and present, between then and now'. This statement seems to be particularly germane to the current situation in Tunisia where English is used to mediate between Arabic and French. In addition, this third space function of English has been instrumentally used by advocates for the cause of Arabization who have been calling for more active implementations of English in different domains because they see it as not representing a threat to local identity. Accordingly, the use of English by Tunisians does not compromise local culture and identity. Even though it is a fast-growing language, English in Tunisia is not subtractive in the sense that it will not encourage the language loss of Arabic due to the dominant Arab/Islamic heritage of the country. However, it could be argued that given its steadily growing popularity, English may become substitutive and replace French in certain domains. While Tunisia has traditionally been classified as being part of French speaking or francophone Africa, this study shows that this descriptive label may no longer be valid to characterize the linguistic and geopolitical status of the country.

The following diagram explains this hypothesis about the shift from French to English in Tunisia. Though the diagram has been constructed to present the role of English in postcolonial communities, it is adapted here to explain the role of the French language in Tunisia. This diagram shows the different steps in the 'life cycle' of English from its initial transportation and transplantation as a foreign language (i.e. EFL), to its developments and institutionalization where it then shifts into a second language (i.e. ESL). The final phases describe how English then becomes more restricted in use and is disinstitutionalized, shifting thereby back into a foreign language (i.e. EFL).
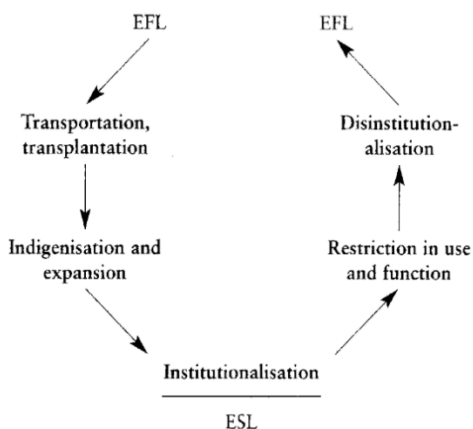

Figure 6. The Life Cycle of English. (Adapted
From Moag, 1982 and Schmied, 1991)

In Tunisia, while French seems to be at the end of the cycle (i.e. disinstitutionalization) - - especially because it has been replaced via a strong policy of Arabization - - English may be at the beginning of the cycle where it is being transported, adapted and becoming less invisible (Boukadi & Troudi, 2017). In other words, while French is in the fifth stage of the process, English is in the ascendant third stage. This study hypothesizes that English is now slowly and surreptitiously getting transplanted into the linguistic practices - - hence the adoption of the term 'chameleonic' - - and particularly in the Tunisian LL. Contrary to French, English has no colonial connotations in the Maghreb and offers a less 'political' alternative (Battenburg, 1996). Thus, the proposition that English is becoming more popular than French seems to be valid across the 'francophone' Maghreb (Battenburg, 1996, 1997; Ennaji, 1991). Sociolinguistic studies have also pointed out in Algeria (Belmihoub, 2018), Morocco (Hassa, 2012; Sadiqi, 1991), and Tunisia (Latiri, 2004), that English is

starting to be preferred over French as a foreign language. As Ennaji (1991, p. 15) explains, English is starting to compete in serious ways with French, particularly in the domains of education, science, and technology:

> Not only is English favored by students, educationalists, and decision makers, but it is also gradually becoming a serious rival of French in higher education. A good number of university students and researchers must learn English to be able to read the English references relevant to their specialty. Additionally, more and more scientific research carried out by native Maghrebin academics is nowadays published in English.

In this regard, the 'chameleonic' appearances of English in the Tunisian context is contributing to a growing awareness for the need to adopt this global language into the current local linguistic practices. Furthermore, while French is perceived as a threat to local identity, English on the other hand is not historically-controversial, blends in well and does not convey hegemonic implications but is actually perceived as a symbol of cosmopolitanism and globalization (Graddol, 2006).

Conclusion

It is now becoming clear that the dynamic interaction between language representation and linguistic perceptions in Tunisia is progressively uncovering a complex situation which is symptomatic of the linguistic adjustments concomitant with the emergence and steady growth of English. Linguistic trends represented in the LL are clearly showing the need to accommodate more 'space' for English in Tunisia. Findings from this study can thus be used to inform policy makers about the discourses of linguistic plurality which are available at the bottom-up level in order to make provisions for a more representative, realistic, and factual linguistic policy for the country (Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018). Undoubtedly, the implementation of a policy which will involve more representation and implementation of the English language will still constitute some challenges and dilemmas (Canagarajah, 2005), particularly since English is a relatively new language in Tunisia. Yet, this situation would be more in-line with the reality of the situation on the ground where French is used in the LL but not officially recognized as the second language of the country. Tunisia is in need of a policy which takes into consideration the needs of the population and which would be more 'ecologically situated' (Hornberger, 2003). Contrary to French, which is still tainted with the vestiges of colonialism, English endorses the role of a chameleonic language with sporadic appearances yet adjusting within the linguistic landscape of the country.

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