The Didactics of Vocabulary for Amazigh-Speaking Learners (Tamasheq)

Dr. Ailoum Moussa

Laboratory of Linguistic and Literary Practices in the Algerian Desert Regions and their Extensions on the African Coast, University of Tamanghasset (Algeria),University of Tamanghasset. Email: **ailoum.moussa@univ-tam.dz**

Abstract

Vocabulary constitutes the cornerstone of the communication process in general and represents a central pillar in the educational process among its three main components (the teacher, the learner, and knowledge). It is the linguistic repertoire acquired throughout this process, thus functioning as the link that facilitates comprehension, discussion, and the exchange of opinions and issues related to education and other matters, both inside and outside the classroom. This study aims to highlight the value and role of vocabulary in the teaching–learning process among Amazigh-speaking learners (Targui/Tamasheq), the local spoken language in the far south of Algeria, specifically in the Hoggar region. In order to investigate how Arabic vocabulary is acquired by this linguistic group, a questionnaire was administered within the classroom environment, where the processes of teaching and learning are actively practiced and manifested. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following question: What are the main reasons, methods, and mechanisms through which non-Arabic-speaking Amazigh (Tuareg) learners acquire Arabic vocabulary?

Keywords: Vocabulary; classroom; teacher; learner; Amazigh language.

Introduction

Language is composed of fundamental linguistic elements, namely sounds, grammar, and vocabulary. These elements form the basis for learning the linguistic system of any language. Sounds represent the audible manifestation of language, with the tongue serving as its instrument; grammar constitutes the core mechanism for controlling the linguistic system; and vocabulary embodies the scientific concepts upon which knowledge is built. It is well established that language is a product of social interaction; in reality, words belong to the listener rather than the speaker, and language learning itself is the result of practice. Indeed, language only dies when it is abandoned by its speakers. This illustrates that language is far more profound than merely a collection of vocabulary items, grammatical rules, morphological patterns, and evaluative measures used to assess linguistic output in poetry and prose.

Scholars and researchers in historical linguistics have agreed that the world's languages and dialects can be traced back to three major linguistic families:[1]

1. **Afro-Asiatic (Semitic)**, which includes Arabic, Hebrew, and Amazigh (with Tamasheq being one of its varieties).
2. **Indo-European (Aryan)**, which includes English, French, and Sanskrit.
3. **Sino-Tibetan (Trans-Himalayan)**, which includes Chinese.

Amazigh is one of the languages of communication within Algerian society and constitutes an integral part of Algerian identity. It represents a form of cultural, intellectual, and civilizational diversity through its various spoken dialects, including Kabyle, Chaoui, Mozabite, and Tamasheq. These are primarily spoken languages written in the Tifinagh script and serve as the primary means of communication among their speakers. The history of Amazigh dates back to prehistoric times, belonging to the Amazigh Muslim people, the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa, extending from the Nile Valley in western Egypt to Morocco and the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean, and from the Mediterranean coast to the Sahel region of West-Central Africa south of the Sahara.

Researchers in linguistic history and academic centers indicate that the Amazigh language is the seventh oldest language in the world, alongside Egyptian, Arabic, Sumerian, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. It is also considered the third richest language in the world in terms of lexical breadth and synonymy, after Arabic and Greek, according to the researcher Abubakr Haroun.

Concept of Language

a. Definition by Ibn Jinni

Ibn Jinni defines language as: "Sounds by which each community expresses its purposes.".[2]

b. The Amazigh Language

"The Amazigh language consists of words, expressions, and vocabulary drawn from nouns, verbs, particles, sentences, and discourse styles spoken by Amazigh people across their various dialects and accents in all regions of their presence since their existence on earth until the present moment. Its sources today include all oral and written Amazigh heritage, such as inscriptions, poetry, folktales, myths, riddles, proverbs, wisdom sayings, songs, and oral narratives recounting the history of their lands and the realities of their societies throughout the ages. The Amazigh language has an alphabet known as Tifinagh, consisting of 28 letters written from right to left. The term *Tifinagh* in Amazigh means 'our letters' or 'our words,' derived from *tafirt* (letter or word) combined with *ennanagh* (ours), thus meaning 'our letters/words.' Others argue that it originates from the verb *yufo*, meaning 'to discover,' as Amazigh people believe they invented these letters themselves, calling them 'our discovery' (*Atifi ennanagh*) ".[3]

The Nature of Tamasheq (Tuareg Amazigh)

The *Tamasheq Tuareg–Arabic Dictionary* states that: "Tamasheq—as viewed by this dictionary—is a language of *Tumast*, meaning a nation, representing a unified identity for its speakers. It is not a dialect of so-called 'Saharan dialects'—a vague term— nor a dialect of Arabic, nor of neighboring languages similar to it, even if some are closer to it, as though they all stemmed from a single source. It is far from being a composite language formed from other African languages such as Songhai, Fulani, and others."[4]

The Importance of Teaching Vocabulary

The ultimate goal of learning any language is to achieve linguistic and communicative competence. This goal cannot be attained without fulfilling its prerequisites, foremost among them focusing on the core elements of language, particularly vocabulary, which represents the central axis of the linguistic system. Language cannot function without vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary does not merely involve learning pronunciation, understanding isolated meanings, mastering derivation, or placing words in grammatically correct structures. Rather, "the true criterion of vocabulary competence is the learner's ability to do all of this, in addition to something equally important: the ability to use the appropriate word in the appropriate context. What benefit is there in memorizing a number of words without knowing how to use them?" [5] Hence, vocabulary plays a fundamental role in shaping the linguistic system.

Criteria for Selecting Vocabulary

1. **Frequency:** Preference is given to widely used words.
2. **Relevance to learners' needs.**
3. **Relevance to learners' world.**
4. **Compatibility with learners' cognitive level.**
5. **Communicative importance.**
6. **Linguistic accuracy and eloquence.** [6]
7. **Distribution or range:** Preference for words used across the Arab world rather than those limited to specific regions.
8. **Familiarity:** Preference for commonly used words over archaic ones.
9. **Generality:** Preference for words covering multiple domains rather than those restricted to a single field.
10. **Importance:** Preference for words most needed by learners.
11. **Arabicity:** Preference for Arabic-origin words over borrowed ones (e.g., *hātif* instead of *telefon*). [7]

Enriching Vocabulary Repertoire

Vocabulary instruction is a crucial component for primary school learners. Recognizing vocabulary automatically within texts and understanding their meanings significantly contribute to developing lexical repertoire and accelerating reading comprehension. Vocabulary lists introduced at early stages facilitate automatic word recognition during reading. These include names of people and days of the week, familiar words (school tools, classroom equipment, school facilities, family- and home-related vocabulary), and functional words such as connectors, demonstratives, independent pronouns, and relative pronouns. Over the years of schooling, this vocabulary gradually expands to encompass various domains related to the learner's local, regional, national, and international environment. [8]

Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary to Non-Native Speakers

Among the most prominent strategies for teaching vocabulary to non-native speakers are:

a. The direct strategy for vocabulary recognition.

b. The spelling strategy (decoding words)

he Applied Aspect of the Research: (Questionnaire Analysis)

The questionnaire directed to teachers of **primary school pupils** in the Wilaya of **Tamanrasset**, Algeria, consists of **29 questions** divided into **five sections**: (demographic data, cognitive data, textbook content, oral and written expression, and assessment). These questions include both **closed-ended** and **open-ended** items.

First: Personal Data

1–2. Institution, gender

Gender	Saïd Ben Toubal Primary School	Mohamed Boudiaf Primary School	New Autoul Primary School	Ali Tiba Primary School	Sheikh Bouamama Primary School	Total	Percentage
Male	2	2	1	3	3	11	26.83%
Female	7	8	6	5	4	30	73.17%
Total	9	10	7	8	7	41	100%

Analysis

The table shows that **female teachers account for 73%**, whereas **male teachers represent 26%** of the sample. This indicates a clear predominance of female teachers, which may be attributed to females' greater inclination toward the fields of teaching and education. In contrast, there appears to be a noticeable reluctance among males to engage in the teaching profession

3. Distribution of Teaching Experience (Years)

Teaching Experience (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
From 1 to 5 years	13	31.71%
From 6 to 10 years	14	34.15%
From 11 to 15 years	4	9.76%
From 15 to 20 years	3	7.32%
21 years and above	7	17.07%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

Based on the table illustrating teachers' years of teaching experience, the highest percentage corresponds to those with **6 to 10 years of experience (34%)**, followed by teachers with **1 to 5 years (31%)**. This is followed by those with **21 years or more (17%)**, then **11 to 15 years (9%)**, and finally **15 to 20 years (7%)**.

Overall, the data indicate that the majority of teachers in the sample are relatively **newly recruited**.

4. Which educational system did you study under?

Educational System	Frequency	Percentage
Old system	19	46.3%
New system	17	41.5%
Both systems	5	12.2%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The percentages presented in the table addressing the question *"Which educational system did you study under?"* indicate that **46% of the teachers were educated under the old system**, while **41% were educated under the new system**. Additionally, **12% of the teachers reported having studied under both systems**. This distribution reflects the diversity of educational backgrounds among teachers, which may influence their instructional practices and professional perspectives.

5. Are you aware of the nature of the region in which you teach?

Awareness of the Region's Nature	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	41	100%
No	0	0%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The results presented in the table indicate that responses to this question reached **100%**, meaning that **all teachers possess a clear understanding of the nature of the region in which they teach**.

Second: Cognitive Data

(The Process of Teaching Tamasheq Amazigh-Speaking Pupils)

6. What is the percentage of Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils in your class?

Percentage of Tamasheq-Speaking Pupils	Frequency	Percentage
All pupils	12	29.3%
Half of the pupils	11	26.8%
Some of the pupils	13	31.7%
A small number of pupils	5	12.2%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The distribution of responses regarding the number of Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils shows that classes in which **all pupils speak Tamasheq account for 29%**, while those in which **half of the pupils are Tamasheq speakers represent 26%**. Classes that include **some Tamasheq-speaking pupils account for 12%**. Overall, these results indicate that Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils are present in the majority of educational institutions, which reflects a growing engagement of this group in formal education.

7. How do you communicate with Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils?

Means of Communication	Frequency	Percentage
Tamasheq Amazigh	0	0%
Colloquial Arabic	8	19.5%
Modern Standard Arabic	28	68.3%
Colloquial & Standard Arabic	4	9.76%
Standard Arabic & Tamasheq Amazigh	1	2.44%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The analysis of the table shows that 0% of teachers communicate with pupils in Tamasheq Amazigh, 19% use colloquial Arabic, and 68% rely on Modern Standard Arabic. Meanwhile, 9% of teachers use a combination of colloquial and Standard Arabic, and 2% use both Standard Arabic and Tamasheq Amazigh.

These findings indicate that the majority of teachers do not have sufficient command of Tamasheq Amazigh, which results in difficulties in comprehension for pupils whose first language is Tamasheq.

Some teachers also referred to alternative strategies, including:

- Explaining and clarifying words and terms through the learner's peers.

- Using hints, gestures, and non-verbal cues.
- Reading aloud.
- Clarifying sentences and drawing analogies with familiar objects.

8. When explaining to a Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupil, do you make use of colloquial Arabic?

Use of Colloquial Arabic	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	26	63.4%
No	15	36.6%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The table shows that **63% of teachers make use of colloquial Arabic** when explaining lessons to Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils, while **36% do not rely on it**. This suggests that Tamasheq-speaking pupils receive particular attention from teachers, who resort to colloquial Arabic as a facilitative strategy, especially given that many teachers do not speak Tamasheq and therefore use colloquial Arabic to clarify certain aspects of the lesson.

9. Do you resort to translation during the lesson?

Use of Translation	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently	12	29.3%
Sometimes	19	46.3%
Rarely	10	24.4%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The table shows that **29% of teachers frequently resort to translation** when explaining lessons, **46% do so sometimes**, while **24% rarely use translation**. These findings indicate that the majority of teachers rely on translation, to varying degrees, when teaching Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils.

10. In which language domains do you resort to translation

Language Domain	Frequency	Percentage
Explaining vocabulary	20	48.8%

Linguistic structures	5	12.2%
Grammar rules	3	7.32%
Explaining phrases / expressions	13	31.7%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The results of the table show that **48% of teachers resort to translation when explaining vocabulary**, **12% when dealing with linguistic structures**, **7% when teaching grammar rules**, and **31% when explaining phrases and expressions**. These findings indicate that teachers make use of translation across most language domains in order to facilitate comprehension for Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils.

In addition, teachers reported using other supportive strategies, such as reading aloud, clarifying sentences, and drawing analogies with familiar objects whenever possible.

11. Do you think that the socio-linguistic environment constitutes an obstacle to learning the Arabic language?

Impact of the Socio-Linguistic Environment	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	43.9%
No	23	56.1%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The table shows that **43% of teachers believe that the social environment constitutes an obstacle to learning Arabic**, whereas **56% hold the opposite view**. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the social environment is **not the main obstacle** to learning Arabic for Tamasheq-speaking pupils.

12. Do Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils experience linguistic duality (diglossia/bilingualism)?

Experience of Linguistic Duality	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	34	82.9%
No	7	17.1%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The table shows that **82% of teachers answered "Yes"**, while **17% answered "No"**. This clearly confirms that **Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils experience linguistic duality to a significant extent**.

13. What problems may result from this linguistic duality?

Based on teachers' responses regarding the problems arising from linguistic duality, most answers focused on the following points:

- Difficulty in understanding the Arabic language, which consequently leads to difficulties in learning and conveying information.
- Inability to express thoughts, whether in written or oral expression.
- Difficulty in pronouncing Modern Standard Arabic correctly.
- Difficulty in dealing with textbooks, especially in the preparatory and first-grade levels.
- Difficulty in mastering reading skills.
- Difficulty in communication between the pupil and the teacher, as well as among peers.

Accordingly, it can be stated that linguistic duality generates several problems that negatively affect the academic achievement of Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils, making them lag behind their peers, particularly in reading.

14. Do you think that learning Arabic at school is sufficient for the Tamasheq-speaking child to speak and understand Arabic proficiently?

Learning Arabic at School Is Sufficient for Proficiency

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	21	51.2%
No	20	48.8%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The table indicates that **51% of teachers answered "Yes"**, while **48% answered "No"**. This suggests that **Tamasheq-speaking pupils need to learn Arabic beyond the school environment** in order to achieve a high level of proficiency in understanding and speaking the language.

Third: The Textbook

(Educational Content of the Textbook)

15. Does the textbook encourage Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils to use Arabic vocabulary?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	23	56.1%
No	18	43.9%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The table shows that **56% of teachers responded positively**, while **43% responded negatively**. However, the results suggest that **the textbook does not sufficiently encourage Tamasheq-speaking pupils to actively use Arabic**.

16. Do you think that vowelization (diacritics) in the textbook helps in learning Arabic?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	37	90.2%
No	4	9.76%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The findings show that **90% of teachers support the use of diacritics**, while **9% oppose it**, confirming that **vowelization in textbooks is essential for helping pupils learn Arabic effectively**.

17. Are the textbook themes appropriate for Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	21	51.2%
No	20	48.8%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The data indicate that **51% of teachers consider the themes appropriate**, while **48% do not**. This suggests that **the textbook attempts to design themes suitable for all pupils**, including Tamasheq Amazigh speakers.

18. If not appropriate, what are the reasons?

According to primary school teachers, the shortcomings of textbook themes are due to:

- Failure to consider the learner's environment and the cultural specificity of the community.
- Themes exceeding the cognitive abilities of primary school pupils.
- Excessive content and accumulation of activities, hindering comprehension.
- Lack of consideration for geographical diversity, with themes often being distant from the intellectual level of Tamasheq-speaking pupils.
- Inappropriate writing style and printing quality.

19. Are there lessons and themes related to the environment of Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	24	59%
No	17	41%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The table shows that **59% of teachers believe that some themes relate to the pupils' environment**, while **41% believe otherwise**. This is due to the presence of **a limited number of themes that reflect the environment of Tamasheq-speaking pupils**.

20. If yes, to what extent?

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Half of the themes	6	14.6%
One-third of the themes	0	0%
One-quarter of the themes	7	17.1%
Less than one-quarter	28	68.3%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

Most teachers (**68%**) indicated that **less than a quarter of the themes relate to the pupils' environment**, confirming the **scarcity of contextually relevant content**, which negatively affects learning outcomes.

21. Which lessons do Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils understand best?

Type of Lessons	Frequency	Percentage
Related to their environment	27	65.85%
Unrelated to their environment	0	0%
Rarely understand	1	2.44%

All topics	4	9.76%
Do not easily understand all lessons	8	19.51%
Other	1	2.44%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The results indicate that **65% of pupils better understand lessons related to their environment**, confirming that **contextual relevance facilitates comprehension**.

22. Do Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils understand the vocabulary used in the reading textbook?

Level of Understanding	Frequency	Percentage
Easily	8	19.5%
With difficulty	19	46.3%
Do not understand despite explanation	4	9.76%
Understand but forget	10	24.4%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The findings show that **46% of pupils understand vocabulary with difficulty**, which confirms that **vocabulary remains a major obstacle** to effective learning.

23. Do Tamasheq Amazigh-speaking pupils complete language exercises?

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Easily	7	17.1%
With difficulty	5	12.2%
With errors	29	70.7%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

Most teachers (**70%**) report that pupils complete exercises **with errors**, indicating persistent linguistic difficulties.

Fourth: Expression

24. In written expression, in which aspects do pupils show difficulty?

Aspect	Frequency	Percentage
Sentence construction	17	41.5%
Use of grammar rules	13	31.7%
Mixing Arabic and Tamasheq	11	26.8%
Total	41	100%

Analysis

The main difficulties lie in **sentence construction and grammar usage**, which hinders the acquisition of writing skills.

25. What types of errors occur most frequently?

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Spelling	22	23.2%
Grammatical	15	15.8%
Phonological	12	12.6%
Syntactic	17	17.9%
Lexical	15	15.8%
Morphological	14	14.7%
Total	95	100%

Analysis

Spelling and syntactic errors are the most frequent, largely due to **differences between the Amazigh and Arabic linguistic systems**.

26. Other errors

Some teachers reported additional errors, such as:

- Using colloquial and Tamasheq words due to limited vocabulary.
- Difficulty in organizing sentences in both oral and written expression.

27. How are these errors corrected?

Teachers highlighted the following strategies:

- Repetition for reinforcement.
- Dedicated correction sessions.
- Homework assignments.
- Collective correction on the board.
- Use of images, gestures, and occasionally colloquial Arabic.
- Immediate correction.
- Sentence reformulation.

- Exclusive use of Modern Standard Arabic.
- Use of real-life examples and storytelling.

Fifth: Assessment

28. In which activities do pupils show weakness?

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Reading	15	19%
Grammar	7	8.86%
Oral expression	26	32.9%
Written expression	31	39.2%
Total	79	100%

Analysis

Written and oral expression are the weakest areas, followed by reading.

29. What solutions do you propose to address these difficulties?

Teachers proposed:

- Extensive reading practice.
- Activating Quranic schools for literacy.
- Using Modern Standard Arabic consistently.
- Correct pronunciation modeling.
- Continuous training in reading and writing.
- Using educational technology.
- Parental involvement.
- Establishing support centers.
- Positive reinforcement.
- Considering the pupil's regional background.
- Increasing oral expression activities.
- Creating a supportive learning environment.

These proposals highlight the **shared responsibility of family, school, society, and educational authorities**.

Conclusion

- Vocabulary constitutes the cornerstone of the linguistic system.
- Linguistic repertoire develops through mastery and contextual use of vocabulary.
- Tamasheq-speaking learners are similar to other L2 learners in language acquisition processes.
- Modern teaching methods and intermediary language use are essential.
- The questionnaire shows positive integration of Tamasheq-speaking pupils.
- Weaknesses in expression activities are due to lack of practice and environmental factors.

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