Written Dārija: “māšī mə‘qūl təktəb-ha bi-ḥurūf al-luğa al-‘arabiyya!” It is not Logical to Write It with the Arabic Letters! Media Reception of the Zakoura Dictionary Project

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Abstract This study investigates written linguistic practices emerging from public debate in Morocco. Although Darija is increasingly used in writing, especially in online platforms, most of its users still stigmatize it. In 2017 the Zakoura Foundation edited the first monolingual dictionary of Darija, a fervently debated initiative. So, this analysis aims to show the limits of such codification initiative, and factors which affect language ideology in Morocco. Therefore, a corpus of articles and readers’ comments on the Zakoura Dictionary of two Moroccan digital newspapers, Goud and Hespress, has been analyzed, quantitively and qualitatively, in order to compare the opinions about language and the language varieties in which they were expressed.

Keywords Standardization. Written Darija. Conventionalization. Orthographic Norms. Language Ideologies. Moroccan Digital Newspapers.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Framework and Contextualization. – 2.1 (Informal) Standardization. Darija as a Written Language. – 2.2 The Centre for the Promotion of Darija and the Zakoura Dictionary. – 3 Corpus and Methodology. – 4 Analysis and Interpretations. – 4.1 Articles and Comments. ‘For’ and ‘Against’ Opinions. – 4.2 Articles and Comments. Linguistic Choices. – 5 Conclusions.
1 Introduction

Briouate, baghrir and ghriba, three Moroccan Arabic names for traditional sweets, generated a fierce debate at the start of the Moroccan school year in 2018. The three terms in Moroccan Arabic (henceforth Darija), were written in Arabic script and published in school textbooks. This incident fuelled a long-standing controversy as the public opinion still rejects the use of Darija as a formalized and legitimized didactic and pedagogical tool in the school system.

Despite recent studies, such as the Fafo Report 2016 (Kebede, Kindt 2016), which proves that the written production in Darija occupies increasingly more public space (advertising, social networks, online newspapers), standardization and conventionalization of written Darija orthography remains a sensitive topic. So much so that the publication of the Qāmūs ad-dārīğa al-maġrebiyya (Dictionary of Moroccan Darija, henceforth Zakoura Dictionary, the first monolingual dictionary of Darija in Arabic script published by the Zakoura Foundation in 2017, has reopened the traditional and lengthy diatribe between promoters of Darija and defenders of Fuṣḥā (Standard Arabic).

Within the wider context of the sociocultural and economic changes caused by the digital revolution, this study aims to investigate the language ideologies that Moroccans (both journalists and common users) express in their written practices.

More precisely, this analysis focuses on comments and articles published online and aims, on the one hand, to observe the limits of the Zakoura Foundation initiative concerning the question of the orthographic codification of the Darija variety; on the other hand, to show how linguistic practices reflect contrasting uses and ideologies with respect to the standardization process proposed by the Zakoura Dictionary. This comparative analysis makes it possible to observe discrepancies between actual written practice and ideological behaviour on language attitudes.

Drawing material from the two Moroccan online newspapers, Goud and Hespress, a linguistic and ideological analysis of the media debate announcing the publication of the Zakoura Dictionary will be carried out. From a methodological point of view, a corpus of 10 articles and 301 readers’ comments will be analyzed. The quantitative analysis will outline ‘for’ and ‘against’ opinions on the matter, and the most frequent linguistic (see syntactic and morphological) traits used by journalists and readers when writing (also) in Darija.

The present study represents a more comprehensive and detailed version of the contribution presented during the last conference of the Association Internationale de Dialectologie Arabe (Kutaisi, Georgia, 10-13 June 2019). The topics discussed in this paper are also part of the ongoing PhD research by the Author, which began in 2016, on the syntactic and stylistic variation of the Arabic language in Moroccan digital newspapers.
in Arabic script; while the qualitative analysis will focus on investigating the gap between attitudes (ideologies) and practices (written languages used) that rises from the public debate regarding the standardization and the conventionalization of Darija.

Therefore, the first part of this study concerns the theoretical framework concerning the formal versus informal standardization process of languages focusing on Arabic and on the conventionalization of written Darija, in particular. Greater attention will be paid to the presentation of Zakoura Dictionary and to the codification initiatives of the Zakoura Foundation. The second part of this study will be dedicated to the linguistic and ideological analysis of the selected corpus. Finally, the third part will focus on results and conclusions.

2 Theoretical Framework and Contextualization

2.1 (Informal) Standardization. Darija as a Written Language

Standardization, i.e. “the imposition of uniformity upon a class of object [...] such as language” (Milroy 2001, 531), is a phenomenon closely linked not only to the field of linguistics (with respect to the internal structure of language systems), but also to sociolinguistics (with respect to extralinguistic factors, such as the relationship between norm(s) and prestige). The standardization process as shown by Haugen (1966) involves at least four stages: “selection, codification, acceptance, and elaboration of a linguistic norm” (Haugen 1966, 922). Therefore, whereas “codification” and “elaboration of a linguistic norm” are strictly related to linguistic mechanisms, “selection” and “acceptance” are purely ideological and political choices. In other words, a (formal/official) standard variety ‘rises up’ from the status of dialect to the rank of language as a result of a language planning process promoted by actors who “select” a language variety and whose ‘authority’ is “accepted” by the language community. Hence, this claim inevitably implies that the standardization process is not ideologically neutral and is strictly related to political issues as, for instance, the development of nationalism, as also argued by Haugen (1966).

In this perspective, Haugen’s standardization outline represents the formal standardization process – ‘standardization from above’ – a

2 In the Arab-speaking countries and in other linguistic realities, the Arabic language (in both its standard and colloquial varieties) plays a symbolic role in the diffusion of nationalist ideologies, whether pan-Arab, regional or national-state nationalism(s) (Kalas 2011). This was also highlighted by Suleiman ([1996] 2013) concerning the Egyptianized form of Standard Arabic as a key tool for national identity formation among Egyptian nationalists in the perspective of nation-state construction.
linguistic codification process promoted by authoritative actors, in
opposition to the ‘standardization from below’ – informal standardi-
zation or “conventionalization” of common shared language practic-
es informally accepted by the members of a language community as
outlined by Caubet (2017a) for the informal standardization of Darija.

Related issues associated to the formal standardization and con-
ventionalization processes concern the differentiation between oral
and written languages. In fact, as stated in Haugen “[whether written
languages] establish models across time and space, [spoken languag-
es] are subject to […] linguistic change” (1966, 929). This statement
confirms that the concept of ‘uniformity’, in opposition to ‘variation’,
is central to the process of standardization, as confirmed by Auer on
European languages, when he defines a standard variety as:

a common language, i.e. one which (ideally) shows no geographical
variation in the territory in which it is used; […] an H variety, i.e.
it has overt prestige and is used in situations which require a for-
mal way of speaking (if a spoken standard exists at all), as well as
in writing; and […] codified [variety], i.e. “right” or “wrong” plays
an important role in the way in which speakers orient towards it.
(Auer 2011, 486)

In addition, in a typological perspective, Auer (2011) also describes
five emergence models of European national standard languages
from the evolution of their dialectal varieties. In particular, the mod-
el he calls “Type A” (endoglossic), or “medial diglossia”, reflects the
model of diglossia existing in Arabic-speaking contexts, such as the
Moroccan one. More precisely, he states:

the standard variety is perceived to be related to the vernaculars
for which it provides a roof, and which we can now call dialects.
[…] [A]lthough the relationship between standard and dialect re-
mains diglossic, this diglossia assigns the varieties to different me-
dia: the endoglossic standard is used in the written medium, the
dialects in the spoken medium. (Auer 2011, 489)

Auer’s definition effectively reflects Ferguson’s concept of diglossia
(Ferguson 1959), and the functional and strictly dichotomous distinc-
tion between the varieties H (‘high’, written, official, and prestigious
languages) and L (‘low’, spoken, unofficial, and less prestigious lan-
guages). Therefore, in the diglossic context of the Arabic language.3

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3 It must be borne in mind that linguistic practices, both through oral and written
medium, reflect a more flexible and stratified situation between the two H and L poles
of the diglossic continuum, rather than this strictly dichotomous schematization. For a
the Arabic *Fushā*, considered in this study the formal standard variety of Arabic language, represents the ‘standard norm’ – the product of an institutionally and socially accepted process of selection and codification (Mejdell 2017) – for written production.

As a matter of fact, in Morocco, as well as in other Arab countries, colloquial and/or informal varieties are becoming commoner in the written production, and as a consequence of this phenomenon a development has been shown to occur in these linguistic communities. From this perspective, Mejdell (2017) refers to “destandardisation” as a development [...] where the validity of the standard is significantly challenged, in practice, as the sole variety for (public) written purposes. (Mejdell 2017, 70).

Nowadays, such development is becoming more and more current in the Moroccan language community, where middle\(^4\) and spoken varieties migrate from being purely oral to serving several written purposes.

Therefore, as briefly mentioned above, the process of informal standardization, or ‘standardization from below’, clearly emerges in the passage of Darija from a strictly colloquial variety to a written language. Precisely, Caubet (2017a) refers to this passage as conventionalization from a sociological perspective, claiming that collective behavior and repeated usage [let] youth read and copy from each other, so that separate actions have an impact on the community. (Caubet 2017a, 137)

Analyzing the contemporary written practices of Moroccan artists (bloggers, journalists and slam poets), she pointed out that writing Darija in Arabic script\(^5\) implies two correlated dynamics: the promo-

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\(^4\) The narrow definition of Middle Arabic consists of “the language of numerous Arabic texts, distinguished by its linguistically (and therefore stylistically) mixed nature, as it combines standard and colloquial features with others of a third type, neither standard nor colloquial” (Lentin 2011). On Middle/Mixed Arabic see Lentin 1997, 2008; Larcher 2001; Mejdell 2006; Doss 2008. As for Moroccan dialectology, Youssi (1992) described the common features of a middle spoken variety of Darija he called “Arabe Moderne Marocain” (AMM), that is “Modern Moroccan Arabic”, namely, the educated variety of spoken Darija.

\(^5\) Moroccans first used Darija in written digital communication in 1999 in SMS, chats and online forums using a mix of Latin letters and numbers in order to reproduce a written form of spoken Arabic varieties. This written realization was called *3aransiya*, from the term used by Zaidane (1980) indicating the Darija-French code switching, or...
tion of *Darija* as a language ideologically belonging to a common cultural identity in all domains, and the diffusion of common writing practices (Caubet 2018). So, if ideologically the use of written *Darija* in cultural production is relevant for belonging to “Moroccanness” (Caubet 2017b), this common practice – more frequently visible and shared among digital platforms and social media –, lead to the development of an informal ‘codification’ of *Darija* norms (orthographically, lexically and syntactically). In other words, the spreading of common practices among users facilitated the process of conventionalization of a non-institutionalized *Darija* norm for writing, as well as a mutual acceptance of these norms among their users, i.e. standardization from below.

However, it is important to bear in mind that *Darija*, even if it is spreading in written productions, is far from becoming an ‘official standard language’, and most of its users still consider it a stigmatized variety. Nevertheless, several studies already investigated the processes involved in the passage from oral to written *Darija* both in formal and informal productions (Caubet 2004; Benítez-Fernández 2006; Hoogland 2013), as well as in literature and in the press (Miller 2012, 2015, 2017; Caubet 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Brigui 2016; Hoogland 2018). Indeed, most written *Darija* productions show that *Darija* is increasingly used in combination with *Fuṣḥā*, the standard variety traditionally used in the domain of written productions.

So, if on the one hand *Darija* spread across the public space (advertising, social networks and digital platforms) through its written form and evolved from being the oral variety expressing traditional and popular culture to the language of modernity (Miller 2017), on the other hand its users show contrasting views with respect to its legitimation in all domains and media.

In particular, the following analysis will outline the reactions and the criticisms of public opinion to the *Zakoura Dictionary* (Mgharf-aoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017), representing a semi-institutionalized attempt of codification of written *Darija*. As it will emerge from the analyzed data, the *Zakoura Dictionary* project represents an attempt of ‘standardization from above’ whose authority does not seem to have been recognized by the Moroccan language community.

more recently e-*darija*, since 2006, according to Caubet (2018, 389). Whereas until 2008-10 new technologies did not allow people to use Arabic script, after the digital revolution (2010) technological devices were implemented to use Arabic alphabet, so people started to switch to Arabic script and use *Darija* as a modern living language in writing and creative productions. For more details see Caubet 2004, 2017a, 2017b, 2018.
2.2 The Centre for the Promotion of Darija and the Zakoura Dictionary

The Zakoura Dictionary was published by the Centre for the Promotion of Darija of the Zakoura Foundation, a Moroccan association created in 1997 by Noureddine Ayouch, well-known publicist and member of the Higher Council for Education in Morocco. The main aim of the Foundation is to promote the human development and the education of children, youth, and women in the marginalized areas of Morocco. The Foundation’s activities mainly concern the opening of educational centers in rural areas of the country where the teaching staff develops informal pre-schooling educational programs through the valorization of the mother tongues Amazigh and Darija. The annual reports published by the Foundation highlight their long-term successes, underlining the positive impact their teaching methods, including the promotion of mother tongues in their programs, have on the learning process and on the individual development of their students.

Noureddine Ayouch, a controversial public figure belonging to the Moroccan economic elite, has always played a leading role in the promotion of mother tongues, and of Darija in particular, especially through the academic side of Zakoura Foundation. He organized several international conferences giving scientific legitimation to the Zakoura pro-Darija projects, including the Zakoura Dictionary. In this respect, three academic events deserve to be mentioned in order to underline Noureddine Ayouch’s role as one of the actors in the promotion of Darija development. In 2010 he organized an international conference, Language, Languages (Zakoura Education 2010) – with the participation of experts and international scholars, such as Ahmed Boukous, Claude Hagège, Zakia Iraqui Sinaceur, Chérif El Shoubashy, Djamel Eddin Kouloughli, Abderrahim Youssi, Francisco García Moscoso, Ahmed Benchemsi – to underline the importance of language planning policies. This conference highlighted common linguistic issues in several multilingual contexts, where national language policies led to language reforms, as the case for example of Turkey and Greece (Miller 2017, 107). The second conference, Le chemin de la réussite (Zakoura Education 2013) pointed out weaknesses affecting the educational system in Morocco. Its goal was to submit legislative proposals to the Parliament, underlining the importance of the institutionalized introduction of mother tongues in the educational system. This conference was attended by leading personalities in the

6 https://www.fondationzakoura.org.
7 Projects and annual reports on their activities can be found on their website: for the annual report of 2018 see https://www.fondationzakoura.org/assets/publications/c2294-rapport-annuel-2018-web.pdf.
economic and political fields, including ministers of education of the Moroccan government as well as royal advisers (Miller 2017, 107-8). The conference had an impressive impact in the media and echoed through the public opinion from 2013 to 2015. In this media storm, Ayouch was hailed as the destroyer of the Arabic language. Despite having presented the promotion of Darija as a scientific tool to improve Arabic literacy creating a bridge between Darija and standard Arabic, Ayouch’s commitment was interpreted as “a Trojan horse that will reinforce the prestige of the foreign languages” (Miller 2017, 108), a serious accusation, the more so, on reason of Ayouch’s belonging to the economic (and francophone) elite.

Despite the aforementioned criticisms, in 2014, the Zakoura Centre for the Promotion of Darija organized a workshop on Arabic lexicography, Journée d’étude sur la lexicographie arabe (Casablanca, 12th April 2014), the third scientific event attended by international scholars, including Zakia Iraqui Sinaceur, Jordi Aguadé, Peter Behnstedt, Mohamed El Madlaoui, Khalil Mgharfaoui, Abdellah Chekayri, Abdelouhad Mabrour. The workshop focused on the creation of a theoretical and methodological support to produce the first Darija monolingual dictionary, finally published in 2017.

The Dictionary project was coordinated by Prof. Khalil Mgharfaoui (University of Chouaib Dukkali in El Jadida), Prof. Abdelouhad Mabrour (Chouaib Dukkali University), and Prof. Abdellah Chekayri (Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane). They presented the language of Zakoura Dictionary as the “modern Moroccan Arabic language”; as Mgharfaoui himself states:

De langue basse, unique expression des analphabètes, l’arabe marocain est aujourd’hui une revendication portée par des intellectuels, artistes, écrivains, linguistes, qui le considèrent comme la langue de l’identité et de la créativité. La langue qui pourrait réconcilier le Marocain avec lui-même et avec la modernité. […] C’est dans la dynamique entre ces deux forces, le conservatisme d’un côté et l’évolution de l’autre, que se trouve un espace pour bâtir une langue arabe marocaine moderne. (Mgharfaoui 2018)

The importance of al-luġa al-wustā, ‘middle language’, i.e. the middle Arabic language emerging from actual linguistic practices, is under-

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8 As pointed out by Miller (2017, 107-8) the public debate/duel between Noureddine Ayouch and the Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui, aired on the TV channel 2M, reached a very high share, but despite the wide resonance the criticisms did not seriously discussed the kind of Darija proposed, neither any insights about their methodological approaches.

9 See the detailed program in http://www.zakoura-education.org/uploads/article/e768b6bd1d668c1954b35f95b31caef6fe8f1c4.pdf.
lined in the Dictionary’s introduction. According to the authors, the literacy of this middle language will implement a deeper mastery of Arabic Fuṣḥā, and in general will improve language skills in all domains (Mgharfaoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 19). For this reason, they clearly and repeatedly specify that the language in the Dictionary represents a bridge linking Darija and Arabic Fuṣḥā and that the Zakoura Dictionary is not an ideological tool to destroy the Arabic language.

Furthermore, as Mgharfaoui clarifies, the Zakoura Dictionary was conceived as a pedagogical tool for all Moroccans to learn Moroccan Arabic. Therefore, they “elaborated” (Haugen 1966) a set of orthographic norms to write (‘proper’) Darija:

En effet, le dictionnaire décrit la langue et délimite en même temps les contours de ce qui relève de l’usage acceptable, pour ne pas dire “le bon usage”. Nous sommes là devant une des premières spécificités de ce dictionnaire. Il ne s’agit pas d’un dictionnaire qui consigne les occurrences telles qu’elles sont attestées. C’est plutôt un outil pédagogique aidant à l’apprentissage de la langue arabe marocaine. Il fallait donc faire des choix pour rester dans un parler marocain médian largement partagé et compréhensible de tous. (Mgharfaoui 2018)

Therefore, the first challenge they had to face in order to “elaborate” (Haugen 1966) a Darija orthographic norm, was the problem of the “selection” (Haugen 1966) of the variety to be introduced in the Dictionary. In order to define “un parler marocain médian” widely shared and mutually understandable, they relied on the results of the Fafo Report (Kebede, Kindt 2016) which showed that Darija is the first written language in the region of Rabat, followed by French, Arabic Fuṣḥā and Amazigh (Mgharfaoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 8). Thus, the major problem they encountered concerned the wide regional linguistic variation of Darija. For this reason, they decided to only include in the Dictionary the variety of the central regions of the country (Rabat-Salé-Kenitra and Casablanca-Settat). These areas are, in fact, the regions which gather about a third of the Moroccan inhabitants whose Darija is understood by most Moroccans (Mgharfoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 10).

Moreover, a second challenge they had to face concerned, on the one hand, the ‘selection’ of lexical entries, and, on the other, their

10 For contributions on Moroccan dialectology see Colin 1938; Marçais 1961; Durand 1994; Aguadé 2003.

11 According to the Higher Planning Commission’s survey (2014), Darija is the most used language in urban areas (96.3%) as well as in rural areas (82.7%); on the other hand, the three varieties of Amazigh are used by the 20.4% of the population in urban areas and by the 34.8% in rural areas; Hassaniyya keeps a very low frequency of use (1.2% in urban areas and 0.3% in rural areas); see Higher Planning Commission 2014.
orthographical reproduction. The entries were based on the list of about 8,000 words of the *Diccionario español-árabe marroquí* (Spanish-Arabic Moroccan Dictionary) by Prof. Francisco García Moscoso (2005). The team adapted and updated this list by deleting the words they considered too regional and adding the neologisms currently circulating and attested in the press and in audio recordings\(^{12}\) (Mgharfoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 8). When choosing the orthographic norm, they decided to adapt the Darija spelling to the orthography of Arabic Fuṣḥā. Mgharfoui explains that they compared the different occurrences attested in their sources and then they chose to include in the *Dictionary* the occurrences orthographically closest to Arabic Fuṣḥā. For instance, between أرط ‘art (variant 1) and أرض ‘ard (variant 2) ‘earth’, they chose the second variant (Mgharfoui 2018).

Further orthographic choices, exemplified in the paragraph الإملاء في قاموس زكورة, *‘Spelling in Zakoura Dictionary’* (Mgharfoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 11), follow the principle of adaptation of Darija to Fuṣḥā, as outlined below.

The orthographic choices adopted in the *Dictionary* concern phonetics and morphosyntax issues related to Arabic Fuṣḥā and Darija language. In terms of phonetics the choices include:

1. The addition of three consonants corresponding to specific Darija phonemes that do not exist in Arabic Fuṣḥā, i.e., /g/, /v/, /p/ (Mgharfoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 12). However, words which present phonetic variations, such as قال /qāla/ ‘to say’, pronounced in Darija both /qāla/ or /gāla/, follow the Arabic Fuṣḥā norms (Mgharfoui 2018).

2. The retention of interdental letters such as /ṯ/ and /ḏ/ despite being respectively pronounced in Darija as /t/ and /d/ (Mgharfoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 13).

3. The addition of vowel signs to disambiguate words that have the same spelling, but different pronunciations (Mgharfoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 11).

Whereas on morphosyntax the choices include:

1. Prepositions: simple prepositions, as → bi- ‘in’, pronounced /ba/ in Darija, are directly affixed on the lemma, as it is in Arabic Fuṣḥā. However, the preposition في ‘in’, whose Darija pronunciation is /fat/, is orthographically spelled in the *Dictionary* as it is in Fuṣḥā, (في) in order to adapt its pronunciation to the morphological coherence of the Arabic language system when adding suffix pronouns (Mgharfoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 12).

\(^{12}\) They do not specify the data they used (which newspapers, magazines, or other written production) neither which audio recordings they refer to.
2. Suffix pronouns: the third-person masculine singular suffix pronoun which in Darija has a greater phonetic variation (i.e. ـو/و, or not pronounced), is orthographically spelled in the Dictionary as it is in Arabic Fuṣḥā, i.e. ـه/ه. As previously mentioned, this choice reflects the principle of coherence with the Arabic language, since in Arabic Fuṣḥā both the masculine and the feminine suffix pronouns are realized with the same letter, i.e. ـه/ه (masculine) and ـها/ها (feminine), and consequently, their choice reflects the adaptation and coherence to the Arabic Fuṣḥā system (Mgharfaoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 13).

3. Morphemes: the authors decided to separate single lemmas from Darija verbal morphemes, for example the separation of the preverbal morpheme ـه of prefixal conjugations from its conjugated verb as in “كما يمشي بجنب البحر” kā yatamši biğanǝb al-baḥr ‘you are walking near the sea’ (Mgharfaoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 12), as well as the separation of negative morphemes. For instance, double negative verbal morphemes ـه mā and ـها šī are orthographically separated from the verb, as in this sample “ما فأرا شيء” mā qǝrā š, ‘He did not study’ (Mgharfaoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 12). Negative nominal morphemes follow the same orthographic choice, as in this sample “ما شيء شيء جيدة كبير” mā šī šī ḥağa kǝbira, ‘it’s not a big thing’ (Mgharfaoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 12). Despite the different pronunciation of the morpheme šī according to the nominal or verbal negation, they decided to retain only the orthographical ـها realization.13

It becomes clear from these points that the authors aimed at the codification of Darija orthography, and especially focused on exemplifying the characteristics of al-luġa al-wustā, a ‘middle language’ in the Moroccan language community. In other words, to them this ‘middle language’ is a sort of Middle Moroccan (educated) Arabic, whose characteristics, according to the authors, are the wide use of Fuṣḥā lexicon, adapted to Darija pronunciations and morphosyntactic structures, as well as the elimination of regional/local peculiarities, thus remaining accessible to anyone from different geographical areas (Mgharfaoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 15).

However, at the end of the introduction of the Zakoura Dictionary, the authors state:

13 This last choice is probably due to the need to disambiguate the tens digits from negative morphemes. They underline that for example the number ‘thirteen’ can be written in Darija as “شتّثاث” šǝlāṯāš, i.e. with the tens digit abbreviation š (where š means ‘ašra, ‘ten’) suffixed to the units (Mgharfaoui, Mabrour, Chekayri 2017, 12-13).
Darija is a language that is being shaped and it is necessary to establish standards for its writing and codification. Zakoura Dictionary has established accurate spelling standards. It is a step in the right direction in order to group a part of our oral heritage and to preserve this inherited treasure.  

Hence, their aim to standardize Darija becomes evident. Bearing in mind the prescriptive dimension of the standardization process, i.e. the enforcement of categories of “correctness” and “incorrectness”, and the consequent elaborated standard norm, the Zakoura Dictionary would become the only prescriptive ‘authority’ in matters concerning the appropriateness of Darija orthography.

In brief, the Dictionary represents the tension between formal/informal standardization, standardization from above/below, formal standardization versus conventionalization. The following analysis of media reaction to the Zakoura Dictionary project will try to illustrate this tension in order to observe to what extent the ‘Zakoura authority’ earned the ‘acceptance’ of the Moroccan language community.

3 Corpus and Methodology

In order to observe actual linguistic written practices and language ideologies concerning Darija conventionalization, a corpus of articles and readers’ comments has been selected. The corpus includes 6 articles from Goud, and 4 articles from Hespress. They are quoted as follows, according to author, column, and date of publication:

Goud:
G1, Anonymous, āš wāq̱, ‘What is happening’, 2016-12-07;
G2, Zaid Hamid, ārā’, ‘Opinions’, 2016-12-08;
G3, Elbaroudi Siham, ārā’, ‘Opinions’, 2016-12-09;
G4, Socrate Mohamed, ārā’, ‘Opinions’, 2016-12-16;
G5, Ouchoun Omar, ārā’, ‘Opinions’, 2016-12-17;
G6, Akannouch Abdellatif, ārā’, ‘Opinions’ 2016-12-18.

14 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are made by the Author.
15 See for example the aforementioned description of Auer (2011) for a standard variety.
16 Goud website www.goud.ma.
17 Hespress website www.hespress.com.
Hespress:
H1, Chabil Abdellah, مجتمع, muğtama’, ‘Society’, 2016-12-07;
H2 Allali Ismail, مدير هسبريس, minbar hespress, ‘Hespress Tribune’,
2016-12-20;
H3 Abdellaoui Naima, كتاب وآراء, kuttāb wa-ārā’, ‘Writers and Opinions’, 2016-12-23;
H4 Charqaoui Abderrahim, مدارسات, mudārāt, ‘Orbits’, 2016-12-29.

All articles were published in December 2016, after the press conference organized by the Zakoura Foundation on 6 December 2016 for the promotion of its Dictionary. Although the Zakoura Dictionary official date of publication was 2017, it is possible that it was already available in late December 2016.

Goud is a digital newspaper created by Ahmed Najim, its current editorial director. In 2011, after the definitive closure of the weekly Nichane, Ahmed Najim decided to start with Goud his new editorial project. Both Goud and Nichane mean ‘direct’ in Darija. Goud’s editorial line is in fact in favor to the use of Darija; it is an independent and generalist newspaper targeting all genre of audiences, and it pays great attention to the news which most interest Moroccan society.

Hespress was created in 2006 by Hassan and Amine Guennouni, chief and editor directors. It is a generalist newspaper and it collects a heterogeneous range of contents, international and national news, focusing on the Moroccan youth and on contemporary society. The newspaper leaves abundant space to readers, not only through comments on articles, but also on a column dedicated to the readers’ opinions.

In total, 301 readers’ comments were collected from the above-mentioned newspapers (respectively, 27 from Goud and 274 from Hespress).
The articles were selected by searching for news on the Zakoura Dictionary in the online archives of the two newspapers.

From a quantitative point of view, ‘for’ and ‘against’ opinions were initially identified, both in articles and comments; results were organized into three categories: ‘for’, ‘against’ and ‘other’. Then, the categories ‘Fuṣḥā’ (F), ‘Darija’ (D), and ‘Mixed’ (M) were created to assess the general distribution of the different language varieties in the data. It should be noted that, due to the phenomenon of bivalence, data were interpreted in their whole syntactical context as it is not always possible to clearly define whether a single word belongs to the Fuṣḥā or to the Darija variety.

The overview on the distribution of varieties allowed to qualitatively compare which language variety was used when expressing ‘for’ or ‘against’ opinions on using Darija expressions or other varieties.

4 Analysis and Interpretations

4.1 Articles and Comments. ‘For’ and ‘Against’ Opinions

The 4 Hespress articles express mostly negative opinions: 2 ‘against’ (H2 and H3), 1 ‘for’ (H4), and 1 ‘other’ (H1) – an expository article. Instead, across the 6 Goud articles, the opinions are evenly distributed: 2 ‘for’ (G1, G3), 2 ‘against’ (G4, G6), and 2 ‘other’ (G2, G5).

Arguments in favor of Zakoura Dictionary in Hespress articles concern the aims of the initiative, as Professor Mgharfaoui claimed in the following example from H4 article:

(1) عليها، الخشية وليس اللغة تنمية منطلق ومن الительнات، وليست هي، هي هوبرنتنا؛

We must build bridges, not fortresses, and work to develop the language, instead of being afraid of it before he stressed that our language is our identity.

Similarly, the Goud ‘for’ articles underline the importance of this initiative since it helps to reconsider Darija as the language belonging to all Moroccans (example 2); likewise, article G3 considers that the Zakoura Dictionary is an important initiative to promote Darija (example 3), nevertheless it asks for more information about its fund-

paper’s webpage.

25 The category “other” includes off-topic and ambiguous opinions.

26 All quotations are henceforth translated by the Author.
ing and clarification on any “secondary” goal behind this project, as stated in the examples below:

A big and important step in the context of promoting Moroccan Darija which is the mother tongue of a big portion of Moroccans. [...] Nevertheless, more has to be done, since a lot of ideologized people consider Darija a street language and they despise it! Many people consider it a war on Arabic language. [...] Darija belongs to all Moroccans! Isn’t it our right to take an interest in it and to keep it in the right consideration?27

This step cannot be considered other than a positive step!

Mr. [Ayouch] comes from an economic field and he knows that when we present some projects to people we always speak about cash!28

‘Against’ opinions in the Hespress criticize the contradiction of using extensively Arabic Fuṣḥā rather than (only) Darija, as claimed in the following example from H2 article:

The Ayouch’s assertion, on the difficulty of the Arabic language, is refutable / falls at first glance to the Moroccan Darija Dictionary, in which the authors of the Dictionary explain the terms of Darija on the basis of the Arabic Fuṣḥā, which means – logically – that the Arabic Fuṣḥā is simpler than the Darija.

27 Emphasis added here and henceforth: bold items highlight Darija variety.
28 The word l-garmūma ‘money’ belongs to informal/slang lexicon.
H2 does not seem to consider the definition of ‘middle language’, repeatedly evoked in the introduction to the Zakoura Dictionary, however H3 expresses a more interesting criticism concerning the ‘standardization from above’, when she claims:

I feel, and I think I am not the only one, that a Darija is imposed on us, I understand it like any other Darija, but I don’t adopt it!

Contrarily, the ‘against’ opinions in Goud openly accuse Ayouch and his legitimation as ‘authoritative’ actor of Darija promotion. Specifically, G4 emphasizes that money should be invested in initiatives which already acknowledge cultural productions in Darija, rather than initiatives such as the Zakoura Dictionary which, indeed, did not really use Darija, as stated in (6) below:

As an extension of Nichane’s experience, Goud website has continued to enrich the Moroccan web with content in Darija, not only with news and headlines in Darija, but also because it was chosen by the young people who did not have any other place to write and publish in Darija, it helped in spreading their creations without any censorship, in complete freedom, unlike any other platform. [...] While Goud enriches the scene of writing in Darija through masterpieces until now considered the best written Darija productions [...].
A nice idea, yes, the Darija Dictionary, but how they did it and why they did it, this is the problem, since through what Ayouch does, it comes to mind that his interest is other than Darija; because, if he really wanted it, he would have invested in websites and web pages where Moroccans speak in Darija and whose contents are nice, or he should have taken into consideration the publications of Moroccans who write in Darija in order to write his dictionary.

Socrate is G4 author, as well as one of the young pioneers in promoting written Darija through his literary production as a blogger. In 2014, having just spent a year and a half in prison for drug trafficking – an accusation for which many other young people and militants in the 20 February Movement, such as Socrate, were convicted (Caubet 2018) – Socrate was invited by Hamid Zaid, Goud's satirical journalist, to write his memories. In 2014 his collaboration with Goud began with the publication of a serial novel in Darija, titled مذكرات محمد سقراط from Prison. He has been writing in the Opinions' column of Goud using Darija since 2014, and undoubtedly his opinions reflect the point of view of a pro-Darija activist, who certainly enriched the written production in Darija. Thus, the open accusations he moves to Ayouch, addressing the commercial interest of his projects, could be read quite clearly.

Similarly, G6 article's criticism of the Zakoura Dictionary initiative derives from the impression that Ayouch imposed himself, ideologically and politically, as a national language planner of a hypothetical Darija standardization process (that should be instead a state responsibility) as shown in (7) below:

عبوس: دار من راسو الشخص الوحيد اللي يمكن ليه "يمأسس" الدارجة، ويرجعها //عبيوش لغة رسمية" يغا للي يغا، وكره لللي كره... لأنه ملي كاتوصل لدرجة تدير "ديكسيونير" للغة ما، كيف ما كاكات، معناء أنك رجعتها "رسمية"، والقموس اللي وضعته ليه، صبح المرجع "الإجباري" للحديث بها ولكتابة بها... (G6, 2016-12-18).

[Ayouch] considered himself the only person who could “institutionalize” Darija, making it an “official language”, like it or

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29 Information that Mohammed Socrates gave to the Author in an e-mail interview on 27 May 2018. In the same interview, he underlined the value and the importance of the free space that Goud offered him by allowing him to express himself freely, when he said: "الحرية... لأني كنت محتاجاً إلى فضاء يتيح لي أن أكون آزاداً، أن أكتب ما أريد، أن أعبر عن آرائي آلياً، وليكون هذا الحرية..." (Socrates, 2018).
not...because when you decide to create a dictionary of any kind of language, it means that it is you who make the language official, and the dictionary in which you place it becomes the forced reference for anyone who wants to speak it and write it...

These examples show that in Hespress and Goud different kinds of criticism are expressed towards the Zakoura Dictionary initiative, and this divergence reflects the peculiarities and the editorial lines of the two newspapers. Where Hespress has a more expository approach, even in the Opinions’ column articles, Goud reacts more directly. Goud represents one of the various public spaces in which the Darija ‘standardization from below’ has developed and expanded. Hence, the tension between formal and informal standardization becomes evident.

The comments, on the other hand, present more varied arguments although, in most cases were found to be off topic. Readers’ comments clearly show ‘against’ opinions on the Zakoura Dictionary in both newspapers. In the small sample of comments in Goud, most appear to be off topic and no ‘for’ comments were found. The arguments against the Dictionary clearly reject the project and perceive it as a tool that would favor the legitimation of Darija as an official language. Differently, in the Hespress readers’ comments focus on several arguments: the negative impact that Darija can have on the educational system, the impossibility to choose a Darija (standard) variety, as well as direct and satirical criticisms against Ayouch. The examples below show the above-mentioned views:

**Rosa Pennisi**

Written Dārija: “māšī ma’qūl təktəb-ha bi-ḥurūf al-luğa al-’arabiyya!”

The problem isn’t the Dictionary but which Darija will this gentleman introduce? The one of the West, of the East, of the North or of the South? This is the first issue, and secondly, he should elaborate its letters, it is not logical to write it with the Arabic letters!
Rosa Pennisi

Written Darija: “māšī ma’qūl təktəb-ha bi-ḥurūf al-luḡa al-‘arabiyya!”

What are the limits of Darija? If we learn that it is a hybrid mixture of words from several languages and dialects and verbal innovations that are not subject to fixed rules: sacrifice/distress, [...] to pose, [...] coercion, trottoir, to behave as a whore, free...

In other words, according to which criteria do we accept or reject a word in this dictionary?

The son honored the [Moroccan] cinema, his father will take over with the Darija.

These comments show interesting issues concerning Darija and the ‘standardization from below’. Precisely, in (9) and (10) the problem of “selection” (Haugen 1966) of a variety, clearly emerges especially when questioning the criterion to use in order to accept or reject words in the Dictionary (10). Similarly, the problem of the orthographic norm emerges when the author of comment (9) paradoxically claims that writing in Darija with the Arabic script does not make sense, and yet, that is exactly what he does. Finally, the author of comment (11) ironically accuses Ayouch of vulgarity. In his comment, he refers to the film az-zīn llī fīk, ‘Much Loved’, by Nabil Ayouch, Noureddine Ayouch’s son, that was censored in Morocco because it was considered an offence to the moral values of the country. This explains the irony of the comment and the negative connotation attributed to Darija. In comment (11) Darija is stigmatized as a vulgar language, the same criticism addressed to the film directed by Ayouch’s son, and consequently the project of Mr. Ayouch (senior) is considered vulgar as well.

Unlike the articles, the comments show not only the rejection of the Zakoura Dictionary project, but also a greater wariness towards

30 The choice of scripts in writing Arabic dialects is a sensitive issue. For instance, when the Lebanese Said Aql in the 1970s proposed to codify spoken Lebanese Arabic using Latin script his proposition was rejected because it implied sensitive factors, such as the separation from his own culture (moral and religious values, for instance), and a convergence towards ‘other’ cultures (i.e. European culture, the culture of French colonizers, for instance). For more details on Lebanese linguistic issues see Bizri 2013.
Darija, since many common readers continue to stigmatize it by associating it with ignorance and vulgarity. However, as the comments reveal, those who stigmatize Darija still use it. Common linguistic features of the Darija, used both in articles and in readers’ comments, as well as divergences with Zakoura orthographic choices, will be outlined below.

4.2 Articles and Comments. Linguistic Choices

From the examples shown in the previous paragraph it is possible to claim that Fuṣḥā (F) is the most used variety in Hespress articles, unlike Goud, where it is possible to find many constructions in Darija (D) and in Mixed varieties (M). However, it is interesting to note that although many of the comments from Hespress are written in F, most ‘against’ opinions are expressed using D items, i.e. most people writing in/with D and M are against a Darija dictionary.

The main characteristics of written Darija, collected in the corpus, concern an extended use of morphosyntactic structures of Darija adapted to a lexical base in Fuṣḥā. Specifically, the characteristics of D in the data concern the use of the particle دیال dyāl, ‘of’ – see examples (2), (6), and (9) for the annexation; the invariable relative nouns لی lī, ‘which’ – see examples (2), (6), (7), and (11); the use of المَسَّ māšī for the nominal negative constructions – see examples (2), (6), and (9); the preverbal morpheme گَا kā in prefixal conjugations – see examples (2), (3), (6), and (7); the affixation of the preposition ف f/ ‘in’, such as in فإطار f‘iṭār, ‘in the context’ (2), or فالويب f-l-wīb, ‘in the web’ (6), and فمعجم fǝ-mu’ğam ‘in the dictionary’ (9). However, the heterogeneity of Darija orthography is the most evident peculiarity, see for example the personal spelling choices of G6 author (7) regarding the repetition of letters when they are geminated, or the realization of the invariable relative noun یل lī spelled as الالي instead of اللي.

At the same time, these variable orthographic realizations show that actual writing practices diverge from the proposals in the Zakoura Dictionary, especially concerning the nominal negation, the use of كـ /o/ instead of كـ /h/ for the suffix pronoun – see in خصوب خسسو ‘he should’ – as well as the affixation of preverbal morphemes or prepositions. While in Zakoura Dictionary it has been chosen to separate the individual lexical base in Fuṣḥā from morphosyntactic Darija items, in common linguistic practices (or at least from the data analyzed in the present study) this principle is not taken into consideration, on the contrary it is noted that the same authors can re-

31 In Hespress, out of a total number of 60 comments with Darija items, 25 express an ‘against’ opinion, and 14 a ‘for’ opinion (21 comments are off topic).
produce the same elements in different ways in the same text – see for example in (9) the variation between 

had and 

daha ‘this’.

Another important feature of the use of written Darija concerns the stylistic variation emerging from the different lexical or morphosyntactic choices. See for example in (3) the lexical slang choice for ‘money’ al-garmūma, ‘cash’; or the use of belli, ‘that’, as complementizer introducing a declarative sentence. These linguistic choices mark the switch to a register closer to full colloquial Darija, in opposition to the “Arabe Moderne Marocain” (AMM) or “Modern Moroccan Arabic” according to Youssi (1992), who stated for instance that in AMM declarative clauses are introduced by the complementizer annu, whereas belli is used in Moroccan Arabic (Youssi 1992, 279).

Furthermore, stylistic variation also emerges according to the different choices of linguistic varieties and/or their combination producing mixed styles, using code switching. In particular, the code switching strategy is extensively used in order to emphasize specific topics. For instance, Socrate generally uses this strategy in his Opinions’ articles, where Fuṣḥā and Darija are functionally combined. Contrary to his literary production, where his language is characterized by “authentic Darija, with rare terms […] or a humoristic youth language expression” (Caubet 2018, 394), in Opinions’ articles he usually switches from Fuṣḥā to Darija as a device to catch the reader’s attention. See for example that in (6) the bold items highlighting the switch to Darija underline important passages of his message, such as “no other places” than Goud to freely write in Darija. Finally, the code switching strategy is also connotatively used. In (8) for instance, the writer uses Darija items when addressing and criticizing Ayouch directly, and switches to Fuṣḥā when expressing ‘serious’ ideas (i.e. about the school system). This kind of strategy shows that other users still consider Darija as a medium that is not ‘serious’ enough to express important issues, as well as a ‘vulgar’ language, as expressed in (11). This combination of Fuṣḥā and Darija offers examples of mixed styles; hence, this syntactical/lexical alternation produces different (more or less) formal registers.

Although Moroccans increasingly use Darija also in written production; the semi-institutionalized/private standardization of Darija promoted by the Zakoura Centre for the Promotion of Darija does not seemingly take into account the relevance of the ‘authoritativeness’ in the standardization process, and the concrete challenges that their attempt to a semi-formal standardization poses.

5 Conclusions

Despite the increasing written production in Darija, Fuṣḥā still remains the dominant variety in writing, both in articles and readers’
comments. However, expressions containing elements in Darija occur in articles (specifically in Goud, a newspaper that ideologically promotes the use of Darija, defining itself as a free public space dedicated to Darija production) as well as in comments.

In the analyzed corpus, the texts that present Darija elements show the characteristics of a ‘Modern Middle (educated) Moroccan Arabic’, i.e. the use of morphosyntactic elements typical of Moroccan Darija applied to a lexical base in Fuṣḥā.

Stylistic variations affect the syntactic structures and lexical choices, marking the switch to the strictly Moroccan variety (i.e. the “Arabe Marocain” (AM) according to Youssi (1992). This communication strategy, as well as code switching (Arabic>Darija and vice versa) is adopted by journalists (from Goud) when their communicative intention aims to openly criticize Ayouch and the Zakoura Dictionary project. Journalists who generally use Darija in Goud, like Socrate, still criticize the Zakoura Dictionary initiative, because they do not accept the imposition of rules that the Foundation has arbitrarily decided, as well as Ayouch’s role in the standardization process. Their orthographic norms make the “parler marocain median” (as defined in Mgharfaoui 2018) an abstract and artificial language, since it is already conventionalized in common users’ practices (standardization from below).

Furthermore, many readers still perceive Darija as vulgar, even if they use it in their written production. This stigmatization reflects the perception that (non-linguists) Arabs hold towards their language, based on Eisele’s theory of the four cultural tropes – unity, purity, continuity and competition (Eisele 2003). This means that, ideologically, the Arabic Fuṣḥā continues to be considered the only variety that guarantees the unity of the Arab-Muslim community.

Another factor related to the tension between formal/informal standardization concerns the process of informal conventionalization which, as stated by Caubet (2017a), allowed the development of the written production in Darija in a natural way. Consequently, as a result of this freedom, anyone who wishes to express oneself in Darija “naturally understands the others without raising any issue” (Caubet 2017a, 121-2).

The spread of (written) ‘educated Darija’ is certainly an interesting phenomenon that needs closer observation. The latest Zakoura publication, (emblematically) titled al-‘arabiyya ad-dārīğa (Darija Arabic, i.e. a Darija grammar manual), coordinated by El Medlaoui, and presented in Casablanca on 22 November 2019, may raise more complex questions about standardization.
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