

Multilingual Practices in the UK: Kabyles' Situational Language Choice in a Linguistically Diverse Setting

Authors : Souhila Belabbas

Abstract : This paper focuses on the Kabyles' multilingual practices in the UK, within the Kabyle/Amazigh Cultural Organisation in London, on online platforms and at home. The Kabyles have roots in northern Algeria and associate their language, Kabyle, with a pre-Arabized history of northern Africa. Drawing on ethnographic research with this community, this study brings together their post-migration language preservation activisms as well as their dynamic multilingual practices and situational language choice into a dialogue. This shows the enduring significance of the heritage language for social, cultural and historical identity. It also demonstrates that the current survival of the "mother tongue" hinges on multilingual and multi-sited language activisms, which bear the hallmarks of both new creativities and diminishing fluencies in multilingual spaces. These multilingual repertoires also included a range of ideological stances, expressed as cultural, moral, and political attitudes to the "mother tongue" and to other, potentially more dominant, languages in their lives, involving both inclusive and exclusive instances. The Kabyles in the UK practice everyday forms of multilingualism in the dynamic terms whilst making strong identity claims to an endangered heritage language. Crucially, their language contact experiences were not a post-migration novelty but part of their pre-migration lifeworlds. The participants involved in this study shared a commitment to Kabyle identity activism. They expressed this differently, varyingly foregrounding cultural, social or political issues. These differences were related to their North-African cultural background, live, gender, religious and/or political affiliation, as well as to their different migratory trajectories. Among these ethno-conscious individuals, the use of Kabyle was often particularly vibrant in informal domains of casual conversations and mixed in with French, English and often Arabic. During community events and festivals, though, many made special efforts to converse in Kabyle as if to make a point about their commitment to a shared identity.

Keywords : ethnography, language ideology, language choice, heritage language, migration trajectories, multilingual repertoires

Conference Title : ICM 2023 : International Conference on Multilingualism

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : October 30-31, 2023