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### *How English Transforms the Linguistic Landscape in Algeria*

#### **Introduction**

The arrival of the English language in Algeria is linked to the landing of American parachutists in Algiers during WW2, yet its presence has been constantly reinforced to become a serious threat to both the native and the foreign languages occupying the area. A study by Euromonitor conducted in 2012 confirms that “Over the years, English has expanded despite the modest number of its actual speakers ‘7% according to the British Council, compared to the 60% for French, yet 57% consider English as important.’ A number of studies by Algerian scholars (Benrabah, 2014; Fodil, 2014, 2016; Belmihoub, 2017; Ouahmiche et al, 2017) and by graduate and post-graduate students in the department of English at Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-ouzou (Sidhoum, 2016; Kasdi, 2017; Boulahia, 2018; Hocine, 2019) have all emphasized the change presently taking place in the Algerian linguistic landscape where English is slowly, but steadily imposing itself.

Therefore, starting from Shohamy’s contention that ‘the display of language transmits symbolic messages as to the legitimacy, relevance, priority, and standards of languages and the people and groups they represent’ the aim of the present research is to make an endeavour at providing a further explanation for this new linguistic deal in present Algeria. The paper considers that one of the best illustrations of this expansion of English can be shown in a change of the linguistic landscape in a city of medium size, taken as an example, and located at one hundred Km east of Algiers, the capital of Algeria. One of the major signs of this expansion lies in the increasing number of neon shops written in English where more than two hundred signs have been identified and photographed, while none of them existed thirty years ago. Another indicator of this change relates to the ever growing number of students registering in the Department of English, at the University.

#### **Theoretical considerations**

An appreciable amount of literature can be found about the Algerian linguistic landscape involving Berber, Arabic and French, but little is known about the linguistic situation involving English. This lack can be largely explained by the rather marginal official status of English in the country, despite the fact that a careful observation of Algerian’s actual linguistic practices shows that English has performed a notable breakthrough in public space, at least insofar as the newly acquired freedom to opt for a particular language to name private shops is concerned. Indeed, less than a century after its introduction to Algeria, people have started using English to name their shop. This recent linguistic phenomenon both diversifies the linguistic practices and the linguistic landscape of the country.

Therefore, borrowing from Landry and Bourhis (1997), the idea that LL has been closely associated with two functions, one being informative and intended ultimately to sell a product, the other bearing a symbolic dimension and more concerned with the value and status of the languages attributed to them by the community, this study will consider both perspectives. Accordingly, two distinct research areas will frame the theoretical dimension of the research: one relates to the sociolinguistic trend known as linguistic landscapes which will help provide the theoretical underpinnings to object of study. In this respect, the research draws inspiration from former studies undertaken by various authors whose works have demarcated this particular field of study for the last twenty years: Landry and Bourhis (1997), Scollon (2003), Gorter (2006), Shohamy (2006, 2007), Backhaus (2007), Seargeant (2009), Spolsky (2009), etc. These studies have helped define the ‘territory’ and the means to investigate this rather new field of study. The other research area concerns Peirce’s triadic theory of the sign which will offer a refreshed analytical grid to better apprehend the semiotic dimension of the research.

## **Methodology**

The research involves both a qualitative and a quantitative method and it makes use of two types of data. A corpus consisting in a collection of over 70 initial pictures of shops displaying advertising signs in English in Tizi-ouzou. The pictures were taken mostly at week-ends, with a Sony automatic camera between September and December 2013. More recently, as I observed that the number of shops labelled in English had increased, I took 75 other pictures in autumn 2016 which I added to the initial corpus. I thus noted an increase of more than 100% in 3 years. Since then, many other signs in English have been noticed and will be involved in the corpus next autumn to keep a record of the progression every three years. This is why they are not included in the present study.

The data are supplemented with the results of the interview with the shop keepers who agreed to answer my questions. My questions were translated into Berber for the merchants who could not understand them in English. Clients exiting from shops bearing names in English have been interviewed to check the effects of signs on clients, and their answers were compared with the shop owners' assumptions to add validation to the results of the study. However, as not many informants agreed to answer the questions, only a qualitative approach featuring both a linguistic and semiotic analyses of the corpus is considered, thus limiting the scope of the research. The shop names have been classified in relation to their thematic field and discussed according to their linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions.

An additional data collection obtained from the local Chamber of Commerce indicates that the number of companies named in English in Algeria amounts to **13167**. The purpose was to discover whether there is a correlation between the two types of commercial activities (private shops and private companies). Both the corpus and a sample of the interviews are appended at the end of the paper together with a number of pictures that have received a particular attention.

The second part of the corpus concerns the number of students registering to learn English in the Department of English at the University. In 2016, in the Department of English at the University, all first year students have received a questionnaire but only 178 have cared responding.

The quantitative data is analysed using SPSS software. This tool is particularly adapted for this type of data which combines several variables for optimum visibility of the different examined situations. It also helps turning salient data into graphic representations which facilitate comprehension. The quantitative data is examined through the theoretical lenses provided by the triadic semiotic theory. The current study therefore adopts both a qualitative and a quantitative approach.

The recourse to Peirce's theory is motivated by the consideration of language in general, and therefore also of English as a system of signs that serves as mediation between a sign (here the different data under study) and the object to which the sign refers thanks to socially and/or intellectually established habits. Therefore, to conduct this investigation, and cross-examine the data, it will be resorted to Peirce's triadic theory to lay the theoretical foundations liable to account for the dynamic process known as semiosis. Semiosis, here, is intended as a process which illustrates the ways in which a sign is given meaning by a community under specific conditions by means of an interpretant which mediates between the sign and its different objects. In other words, English in Algeria, serves as mediator between the people who learn it or use it outside of school, and the values attributed to it, whether they are objective or not.

## **The linguistic situation in Algeria**

Historically, the first language to occupy the territory which is known today as Algeria is Berber, or Tamazight, the language of its original Inhabitants. The immense distance that separates the Berber speakers, has resulted in a great number of varieties among which Kabyle, the variety spoken in Tizi-ouzou. Other varieties like Chaoui, Mozabite, Targui, and Chnaoui are still spoken by local populations in Algeria. Throughout history, the Berbers have encountered a great number of peoples and languages. In the area now called Algeria, they were in linguistic contact with Phoenician and Hebrew. The arrival of the Romans who engaged in wars against Carthage also involving the Berbers, paved the way for Latin to become a lingua franca for more than five

centuries. The next language to occupy the area, remaining entrenched to the present day is Arabic which followed the diffusion of the new religion, Islam. Some Berbers, mainly in the western part of the country, also speak Spanish, others in the eastern border use Italian, and very few people still speak Turkish. The French settled in Algeria in 1830, and their physical presence lasted for 132 years, yet French is still widely used in the media, administration and universities.

After Independence in 1962, the Algerian authorities sought to promote the education of young Algerians through Arabic by building a great number of schools and later, of universities. French remained the language of scholarly education, of the administration, and of print. It was the dominant and most prestigious language, though it was paradoxically perceived as the language of the colonizers. The objective of the new authorities was to promote the learning of Arabic with the view to supplanting the French language in every field of life, mainly in the administration, a residue of French dominance, and, by the same token, ideologically hook Algeria to the Arabo-Islamic sphere.

Nevertheless, Algerians have continued using both Berber and Popular Arabic at home, and the French language inside and outside of school, while Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) was strictly limited to school, the administration, and the press. A visible effect of this policy is the exclusion of MSA from the linguistic market in the street. As concerns the Berber area known as Kabylia, the locus for this research, it should be acknowledged that after several demonstrations taking place since April 1980 and a whole year school boycott, used as protest means to claim the recognition of their language, the Berbers have managed to obtain for their language, Tamazight, the status of a National language, and more recently, with the proclamation of the new constitution in January 2016, Tamazight has been elevated to the status of an official language.

### **The Emergence of English**

Indeed, one of the linguistic effects of the social and political power relations at world level is illustrated by the uneven distribution of languages around the planet, as the result of the political and economic statuses attached to them. Differences in social status also entail differences in the interest people have towards languages and the higher the status of a language, the higher its prestige, and therefore, the higher the desire for people to acquire this language. Historically, several languages like Greek, Sanskrit, Latin, or Arabic enjoyed this status. Today, it is the English language which enjoys this prestige at the widest level, and this explains why more and more people want to learn this language which offers them the greatest opportunities to communicate with the greatest number of people around the world.

In Algeria, the appearance of English is linked to the Second World War, after the landing of American parachutists in Algiers in November, 1942. The American soldiers used Algiers as a beachhead for their military operations against the German forces, and during their stay in the town they made contacts with the local population. Because most of the American soldiers spoke only English, and because they were soon perceived by the indigenous population as heroes defending a just cause (some Algerians fought against Hitler under the French flag), the locals started learning enough English to start a rudimentary business consisting essentially of buying and selling some practical items to each other.

Despite the scarcity of contacts between the Algerois (Algerians living in the metropolis) and the American soldiers, a number of words like *business*, *chewing-gum*, *whisky*, *dollar*, and *cigarettes* made their way into the Algerian street. Some other loan-words and expressions also entered the local linguistic repertoire. Since the independence of Algeria, millions of Algerians have started learning English at school, and some people working with foreign companies especially in the south, even use it as the main language. Besides, as an immediate offshoot of the globalization of exchanges, many words of English stock which have been naturalized in Berber and Arabic are now used in daily exchanges. Examples of these are: *bus* – *bye-bye* - *coca cola* - *cow boy* - *hello* – *sandwich* – *stop* – *cool*, etc... Aside these, we find more recent loans like *CD* – *chips* - *DVD* – *fast food* - *Internet* - *hamburger*, etc. which are so well integrated that people, generally consider them as part and parcel of their own language.

## Corpus 1

English simple words	Addict – Coffee - DISTINCT - Fashion - Flowers - GIANTS - JACKETS - Ketchup - Travel –
Compounds and inflected words	Baby Boom – Businessmen – ISTAMBUL GROUP - JET PUB - MEDIASPHERE - Shopping – TeChnOlogy - WORLDLIGHT-
Blends and Clipped forms	City Alu - Compu Center - Cyberclub – ElectroSell – INVENTEAM - MASTER VET - Optic Medic - Universal Cyber -
Acronyms	ALMOCO (Algerian MOtors Company) – COMIRA Building – IHD's (International Human Development School) - M Tex (Master Textile) – M2Y Computer Center (My 2 thousand Computer Center) - SMATEC
Phrases	All Filters - Baby Toys - Best FASHION - Big Bazar - Black & White - Body Sculpture - Business Center - Chicken Club - DENTAL MEDICAL SERVICES - Eden Park - Dual Computer – Fast Mail - Fashion Men – FIMKA New Woman – First Class Travel - Forum Language Center – Good Lunch – Graphic Press Service – Ideal Cuisine - It's Different - Hot Video Club – JUST FOR YOU - JUST ME - Kid Mania - Kid's Rooms - Kingdom of Deco – Ideal Shoes – Just Married – Magic Lunch – MEGAWEB Studio – My Sandwich – New Furniture – New Graphic - New Toys - Orbis Stationery - Pizzeria New Moon - PLAY ME - Playstation 2 - RESTAURANT Living - SAY Silver - Scarpa Store - Simply MARKET -Stream System - STREET WEAR - The English Way - Top Mode – TOP- NET- UNDER WEAR - Universal school - Well done – WHY NOT - World Music - World Net – Works and Services - Your Computer.net –
Macaronic forms	Baby Confort - Bébé King – Bébé Shopping — Best of System Informatique - Galaxy Linge – Labo Photo NEW VISION - Master Meuble – Master textile – Media Top Informatique - Meuble Center –Mobi Home Deco - Mondial Shopping - Pressing du Boulevard - Rapide Laundry – Star Meuble –M2Y Location - Patisserie Crust – Top Habillement - TOP MOD OF SPAIN
Proper Names and brands	Austin's - Ben Restaurant – Bellaza Shop – Beverly Hills Fashion - Billy.com - Brooklyn Food - BURTON British Fashion Boutique - Cabella Colors- Castel Beer - Damas - Dubai City - FeddalStore – Géant Shop Center - Kad School – Lea School – LONDON- - LONDON Fashion – LONDON KIDS - LONDON TIZA - Mc Cheese - Mike Chicken - Milano Food - Miss Capelle – Mourine Food - Samy Clean - TITAN STORE - Tizi Game - Tizi Lunch – Tizi Music – WEBSAB -
Incorrect forms	Eden's Woman - Free Prix - Jet 7

## Corpus 2

### Descriptive Analysis\_1

Type		Effectifs	Pourcentage %	Valeur manquante
<b>Language Loyalty</b>	Berber	10	5,6	2
	English	58	32,6	
	French	5	2,8	
	German	3	1,7	
	Spanish	1	,6	
	Turkish	1	,6	
	French and English	49	27,5	
	English and Berber	19	10,7	
	English and Arabic	4	2,2	
	English and German	6	3,4	

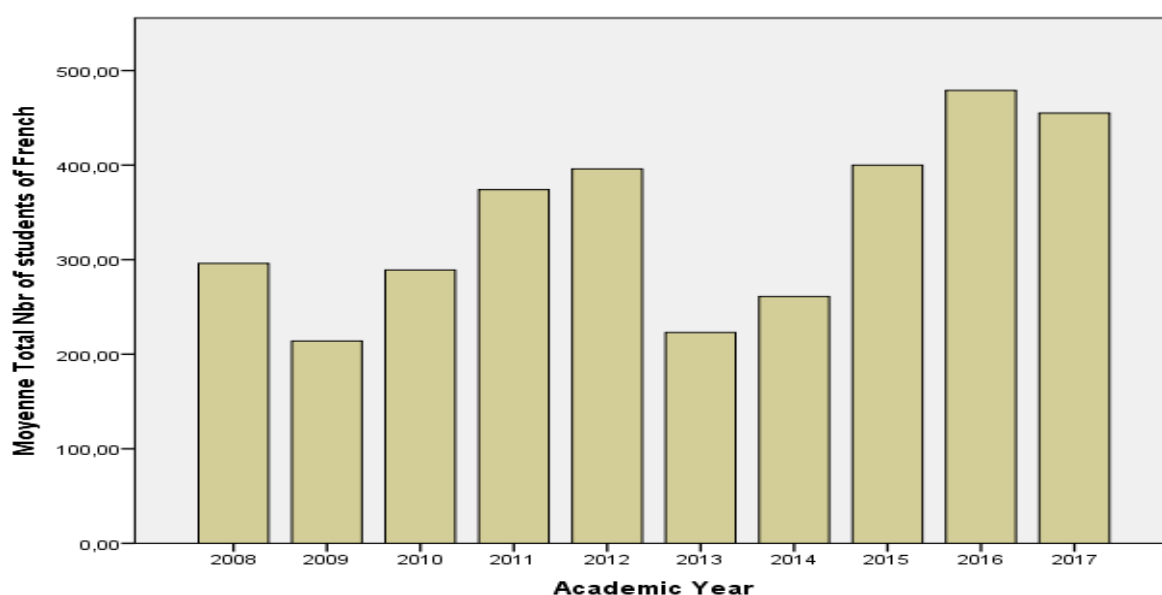
	French and Turkish	1	,6	
	Other	19	10,7	
<b>Arguments</b>	Wider communication	63	35,4	0
	Immigration	6	3,4	
	Opportunities	23	12,9	
	Fav Love Interest	41	23,0	
	Loyalty Identity	12	6,7	
	No Answer	33	18,5	

### Students' answers to the questionnaire

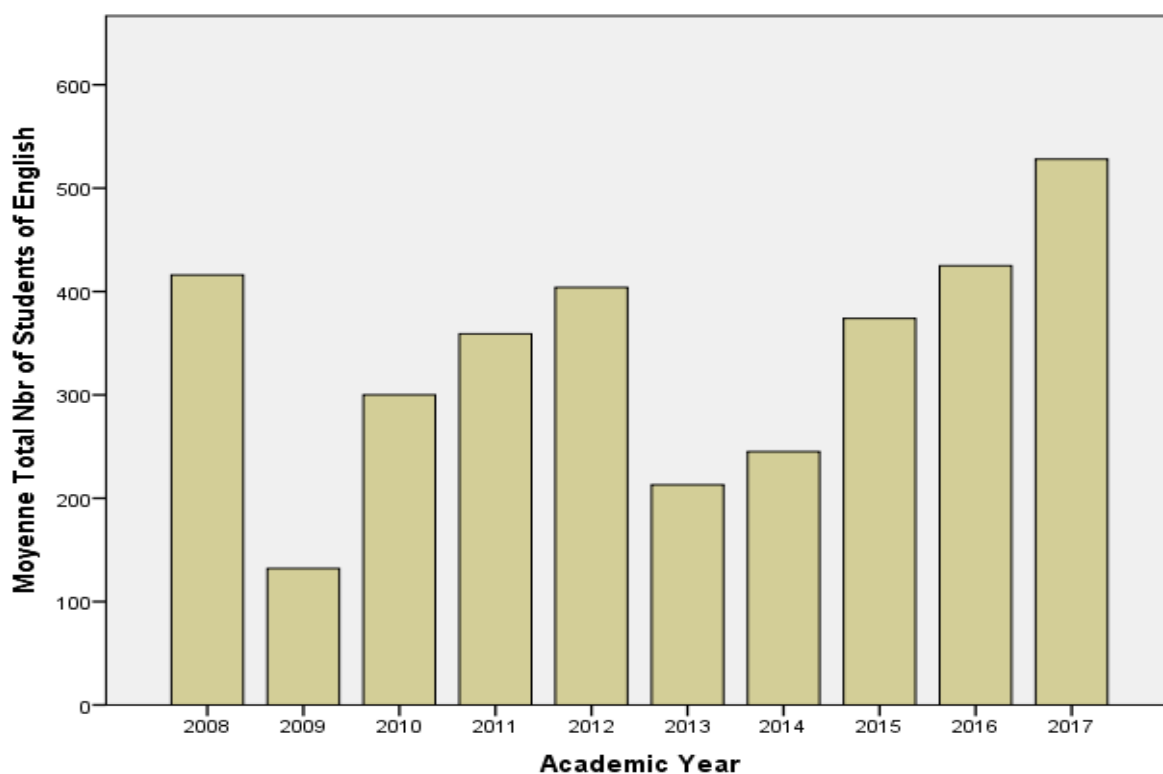
The results display the following information:

- 1- The overwhelming majority of students, 74.7% are girls.
- 2- 85.4% of students speak four or five languages.
- 3- 86.5% of students come from the Letters and Foreign Languages stream.
- 4- 98.3% have studied English for at least seven years.
- 5- Most of them 52.8% have never registered in English before.
- 6- Most students 80.3%, want to study English as the realization of a dream or because they love the language 44.9%, 21.9% because they consider it as a global language and, therefore, they will have to learn it someday, 13.5% believe that learning English will offer them more opportunities to get a job.
- 7- A considerable number of the students, 87.6% intend to immigrate someday.
- 8- The greatest majority of the students, 70.8% intend to teach English to their children
- 9- The recurring argument is that they consider English as an international language of wider communication, 35.4%, another argument relates to their love of the language, 23% which they wish to transmit to their children.

### 10- Descriptive Analysis 2



### 11- Number of students who have registered in the department of French since 2008



#### **Number of students who have registered in the department of English since 2008**

The most significant result obtained relates to the superiority for the first time in history, of the number of students who registered in English in 2017 as compared to those who registered in French. During the last academic year, 412 students registered in French with a minimum average of 10.42/20, while 429 students registered in English with a minimum average of 10.80/20 which shows the steady trend mentioned above.

#### **Corpus 1: Discussion**

The results of the investigation concerning shops labelled in English show that the option for this language by the owners is not casual but carefully thought out. The shop keepers dub English with qualities such as novelty, fashion, high class, reliability, etc., and seek to establish a direct link between these supposed qualities and the items sold in their shop. The coloration of English with positive qualities testifies to the immense prestige English enjoys in the business field.

Among the 145 shops, 38 display items for sale related to Clothing or Fashion. 27 are related to NICTs and other associated services. 18 trade in food. 9 sell Baby Care items. 8 shops display Modern Furniture, and the same number of shops (8) offer Business Services. 7 Private Schools bear English names. 5 shops sell items related to Films, Sports and Music, and there are 25 other shops which sell diverse items which are too varied to be grouped into a unique category. It should be mentioned though, that no shop whose neon sign is in English trades in “cheap or unclear” items such as groceries, hardware stores, or creameries.

It appears at first sight that the shops which trade in three types of goods, namely, clothing, NICTs and food, make up more than half of the total shops which bear a name in English. The reason is that the external appearance of a person matters, and that people, especially young ones who wear trendy expensive clothes associated with quality, and imported from foreign countries, are more likely to be perceived as belonging to a higher social class.

The same goes with the shops that display items linked to the NICTs. People who like keeping up to date concerning technological innovation, whether in terms of software or hardware, and even in both, seem to be in tune with the rest of the world, and as most technology is driven by English from the standpoint of language, then it appears natural that the shops bearing names in English are more likely to be associated with the notion of novelty and trendiness. The rest of shops display goods related to several other items people need for their daily or casual comfort or personal enterprise. Yet, they all have some sort of relationship with the notion of novelty, modernity, or quality which the name in English is supposed to arouse in the clients' minds.

From the semiotic standpoint, it seems also interesting to observe that most signs relating to food, dressing, furniture and other equipment are indexical, while only signs relating to services are symbolic. This distinction may be an indication that the shop owners displaying indexical signs which add information to the shop names have some assumptions about the educational level of their potential customers. In effect, in shops where mundane items targeting ordinary customers are sold, both iconic and indexical signs comprising more than one medium are displayed. Here, the shop owners suppose that some type of index and/or icon is necessary to orient their customers. Such examples are *Baby Boom*, *Bébé Shopping*, *Big Bazar*, *Bébé King*, *Burton*, *Kingdom of Deco*, *Mobi Home Deco*, *New Toys*, *Tizi Music*, *Tizi Music*, etc. These shop signs include photographs, pictures, or drawings as additional heuristics for clients to learn about the merchandise supplied in the shops. Symbolic signs, mostly acronyms, are those used for professional services. Examples are: *EURL Dual Computer*, *IHD'S*, *International Human*, *M2Y Computer Center*, *Fashion* etc. The reason behind this option is the shop keepers' preconceived assumption that their clients know what kind of service is offered and therefore, do not require additional indexical information to learn about the services they provide. When asked why they didn't add further indexical information, the shop keepers said the signs were clear enough for their customers.

Another point to be mentioned relates to the association of English with transnational companies trading in recent technologies, with updated knowledge, and with the feeling that English, which is spoken in most countries in the world, may help English speaking travellers. The use of English is deemed to convey up-to-date matters, and appeals to young people, and therefore constitutes a valuable incentive to the shop keepers. A point already mentioned by Ross when he writes that 'An English name lends an aura of chic prestige to a business, suggesting that it is part of the international scene, following the latest trends, up-to-date with the newest ideas.' (1997, p. 4)

From another standpoint, it has become commonplace to link the expansion of English to the globalization of exchanges, and to the political and cultural influence of the USA and Great Britain on the rest of the world. Algeria is no exception, and as is the case elsewhere, the economic incentives constitute a major motivation for the learning of languages as the following conclusion by Euromonitor confirms: 'English is growing in popularity among younger Algerians, driven by a perception that it improves career prospects as well as the establishment of personal relationships with foreigners as evidenced by the increasing exposure of young Algerians to social media like Facebook and Twitter which predominantly use English as an international medium' (Euromonitor 2012). Therefore it is no surprise that a rapid glance at some statistics obtained from the official site of local Chamber of Commerce (Centre National du Registre de Commerce), [sidjilcom.cnrc.dz](http://sidjilcom.cnrc.dz), show that Algerian businessmen have a strong inclination to using English for the naming of their business especially in the Import/Export sphere. As an illustration, the following key words yield a considerable number of inscriptions by companies employing them in their denomination

## **Corpus 2: Discussion**

A comparison between the number of students registering in the departments of English and French shows that for the first time, the students of English outpass those who have registered in French. This result ought to be correlated with the fact that in accordance with the university regulations, students' registration in some streams is subordinated to the mark obtained in the official Baccalaureate exam. In this respect, the higher the students' mark at the BAC exam, the greater the choice for them to materialize their dream. Registration to study English requires a high mark (which consists in fact in the average obtained by the combination of the overall mark obtained in the BAC exam and the average between the marks obtained in languages), and therefore, only the

best students are sure to register in English. As an illustration the average required to register in English in 2013 was 13.02/20, while it was 12.49/20 for French. This selective device alone increases the prestige of English to the detriment of other national languages like Berber or Arabic which do not require high marks at the BAC exam.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the two corpora has clearly shown that the Algerian linguistic landscape today has to count with the increasing presence of English both inside and outside of school as it has imposed itself notably among the youth. English has become the symbol of success in business and in communication, and the present study only confirms similar results obtained from several other studies mentioned above.

Therefore, considering the colonial history of Algeria and the fact that French totally dominated the Algerian linguistic landscape for a century and a half, while English which entered the scene less than 80 years ago has conquered so much ground in the meantime, one can safely affirm that future is rather on the English side.

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