'Back to the "futur"': mobility and immobility through English in Algeria

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Abstract

Based on year-long ethnographic fieldwork, this paper examines how global discourses of English as the "international language" are read, reproduced and appropriated in non-Anglophone postcolonial settings, taking Algeria as a case study. English is heralded as the "language of the future", equated with "moving on" from the colonial past towards new connections, new horizons, and new articulations of a global-national identity. It is both a movement forward, and an attempt at reaching back to a more "authentic" (non-Francophone) past. However, those narratives are also firmly embedded within existing power hierarchies and prevailing language ideologies. Discourses and practices around English reinforce rather than challenge socio-economic stratification by rewarding elite mobilities and reproducing representations of how language indexes authenticity and belonging.

1. Introduction

English has historically been "absent" from many former French colonies, but policy-makers and academics have suggested that there is an exponential growth in interest in the language, from increased demand for English tuition (e.g. Algeria) to changes in the education system (e.g. Cameroon, Madagascar) and a linguistic shift from French to English in the public sphere (e.g. Rwanda) (Benrabah, 2014, 2013; Dyers and Abongdia, 2010; Lefevre, 2015; Pearson, 2014; Ranaivoson, 2013; Rosendal, 2009; Samuelson and Freedman, 2010). The upsurge in interest for English has been explained as part of the global process of the so-called "spread of English" (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006; Kachru, 1992; Schneider, 2011), but also as a movement away from the language of the former coloniser towards one that has been deterritorialised (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 89) and, especially in countries which were not part of the former British empire, appears 'de-colonised' and 'de-ethnicised' (Benrabah, 2009). Decades of questioning the ownership of the English language and the subsequent theorisation of the World Englishes approach by Braj Kachru in the 1980s allowed for the legitimation of Englishes in use in former British colonies beyond the British or American 'standard' (Kachru, 1996, 1992). More recently, the fact that this parity of esteem is restricted to the practices of wealthy, intellectual elites has led to a more critical focus on practices within unequal Englishes (Tupas 2015). A similar wave of critical and reflexive studies emerged in Francophone sociolinguistics (see for example Philippe Blanchet's work), but most research has focused on a more inclusive notion of "French" rather than of separate "Frenches" (Bavoux et al., 2008; Pöll, 2001; Robillard and Beniamino, 2010). The absence of widespread theorisation of endogenous norms of French in Algeria (Chachou, 2013, p. 114) and the comparatively fewer socio-historical connotations of the English language in parts of the former French empire (Benrabah 2013) mean that while French can appear re-localised, English is instead constructed as de-localised and "international". Although research into language dynamics involving English outside its former colonial realm has focused primarily on specific domains such as business, higher education, schools and tourism (Jenkins et al., 2011), complementary studies have also considered the interaction between Standard Englishes (in the multiple ways they are defined and imagined) and local language practices (Rubdy and Alsagoff, 2013; Seargeant, 2009; Tupas, 2015, amongst others). Rather than a straightforward "spread" of English, evolving practices and narratives around English in specific settings reflect how local practices are relocated in English (Pennycook, 2010), and a growing 'semiotic repertoire of global communities' which is drawn on locally to express particular identities and concerns (Seargeant, 2012, p. 22). In particular, English is used as both signifier and enabler of mobility, whether spatial or social. In order to understand how narratives about transnational flows of ideas and people are understood, used and reproduced, it is therefore crucial to consider 'what language users do with English, how they understand its relationship to their own condition, and what new meanings are generated by its use' (Pennycook, 2010, p. 72). Algeria provides a valuable case study to examine the re-creation and impact of narratives of English as the language of movement and opportunities in a context where day-to-day uses of English are almost non-existent, and therefore its symbolic uses are all the more salient. This paper explores how global

discourses of English as the "international language" are reproduced, read and reconstructed in a dynamic multilingual linguistic context often defined as 'conflictual' (Benrabah, 2014; Chachou, 2013; Dourari, 2006), and where languages more than any other social marker are used to index identity and authenticity. I examine how mobility and conceptualisations of belonging are re-interpreted and narrated through English, but also how these imaginings act to maintain socio-political stratification in postcolonial settings. After briefly discussing how academic research on English in Algeria is shaped by wider debates about the linguistic context, I consider how English is used to index mobility and belonging, including acting as signifier and gatekeeper of new migration opportunities, new destinations, new connections, and new modes of performing Algerian-ness. In a context where concerns of "authenticity" are prevalent in the political and academic discourse, I highlight how different discursive strands about English coalesce to symbolise movement both backwards and forwards, reaching back to a more "authentic" past before colonisation and forward to a future free of neo-imperialist interference. I then analyse how these mobilities are inscribed within wider processes of immobility, amplifying existing power hierarchies, and reproducing representations which equate certain language practices with "authenticity" and "belonging".

The concept of authenticity, as 'the moral foundations upon which self-identity is reflexively constructed' (Seargeant, 2009, p. 89, paraphrasing Giddens 1991), is frequently cited in discussions of the Algerian linguistic situation, underlining the symbolic equivalence between Arabic and 'Islamic authenticity' (Grandguillaume, 1991, p. 49), and between Arabic and Algerian culture: 'celle [la culture] de l'authenticité et de tout ce qui est en rapport au terroir s'exprimant en arabe'[1] (Amrane, 2010, p. 43). What "authenticity" means is never explicited, and serves instead to couch social and political debates in cultural terms (McDougall, 2017). Similarly, global discourses of English emphasise its "authenticity" (English does not threaten local cultures as it has been relocalised) and "anonimity" (it is neutral and universal), both aspects reinforcing the uncritical use of those concepts (Seargeant, 2012, pp. 147-148). As Shulist points out, constructions of authenticity through language mediate access to social capital by acknowledging only certain individuals' identity claims as valid, and forcing others to prove their belonging by demonstrating their authenticity (2016). Belonging in this paper is defined as participants' own understanding of their social identity, and how other social characteristics such as age or education shape how their Algerian-ness relates to their linguistic practices (Benazzouz, 2013).

2. Setting
2.1 Background

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[1] The authentic culture and everything related to the "terroir" being expressed in Arabic (author's own translation).

Algeria is a multilingual country with two national and official languages: Arabic[2] and (since 2016) Tamazight, in addition to the vernacular Arabic and Berber languages. French, despite its status as a foreign language and the Arabisation policies in place since the late 1960s, is still widespread in administration, the media, higher education and businesses (Taleb Ibrahimi, 2016), and closely associated with both social mobility and elite closure (Benazzouz, 2014; Cheriguen, 2007). Beyond expressing identity and belonging through linguistic choices, named languages become proxies in a context where 'discussions about authentic personality and culture' are the main spaces available for political debate (Benkhaled and Vince, 2017), with the main opposition being between "francophones" and "arabophones", problematically envisaged in popular imaginings as two discrete categories of belonging defined by their linguistic identity (Taleb Ibrahimi, 1995). Standard Arabic comes to symbolise both a return to an 'authentic' Arabo-Muslim identity and an archaic idiom, and French both colonisation and modernity, while Berber languages index in turns the origins (a 'true' Algerian identity) and separatism (see for instance Benrabah, 2007; Berger, 1998; Mostari, 2004; Temim, 2007).

Most studies on the Algerian linguistic context focus on the notions of rivalry, hierarchy and what counts as "authentic", with each language considered as a separate entity imbued with heavy symbolism. English is therefore described as an external and "neutral" language, or seen as being used as a proxy battleground by proponents of Standard Arabic to reduce the importance of French, as it is 'a language without connotations of domination, without a political past and […] a convenient way of getting the job done' (Ager, 2001, p. 21, quoted in Benrabah, 2013, p. 87). In addition, the promotion of English over French is also expressed as symbol and catalyst of the dismantling of monolithic, authoritarian, closed systems, not only linguistically but also by extension politically and economically (Benrabah, 2009; EF Education First, 2015; Euromonitor International, 2012; Miliani, 2001). In Algeria as elsewhere, the "international language" is thus heralded as breaking down socio-economic barriers and helping to create new categories of belonging and participation, with a very similar rhetoric being used both in academic analysis, and by policymakers and cultural organisations. As Bruthiaux already noted in his 2002 article, 'throughout the 1990s and increasingly today, development efforts have become inextricably linked in governmental and academic circles as well as in the media with English language education' (2002: 289). English is routinely and uncritically equated to a global language, the language of opportunity, of technology, human rights and participation in the world economy, despite research pointing to the complex dynamics between dominant-language learning and social mobility (Seargeant and Erling, 2011; Erling and Seargeant, 2013; Piller, 2016, pp. 165-188). These discourses of commodification elevate English as the only form of universally-convertible linguistic capital, facilitated by its "neutrality" within a neoliberal context (Park and Wee, 2012, p. 143). English is used as a shorthand to index social and personal mobility, symbolising 'changing one's life' and connecting with your true self, especially by going abroad (Piller and Takahashi, 2006, p. 64-66). This paper analyses how these global discourses are read and reconstructed within a

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[2]   In official texts, 'Arabic' refers to Standard Arabic (or fuṣḥá). The distinction between different types of Arabic is not always explicitly made and contributes to shifting notions of authenticity and belonging (see Saraceni and Jacob, 2018).

context where English was never the colonial language, and where other dominant languages also fulfill these symbolic functions.

Discourses around language are intermeshed with hopes and concerns around perceived changing patterns of emigration (to Anglophone countries rather than Francophone) and immigration (from China and sub-Saharan Africa), and the interactions between these and existing language ideologies are examined in more detail in the following sections.

2.2 Methodology

This article is part of a wider investigation on English and social worlds in contemporary Algeria. It is based on data collected over ten months of ethnographic research conducted between November 2015 and December 2017, which included participant observations, informal conversations as well as open-ended interviews. Newspapers' websites and social media platforms such as Facebook were also used to gather contextual information, although a comprehensive survey of digital media remains outside of the scope of this paper. The majority of the research has taken place in Algiers, complemented by shorter visits to cities in the West, South and East of Algeria in order to place the data obtained in the capital into perspective.

I first focused on "contact zones" where I knew English would be used, such as universities and private language schools, iteratively building contact networks outside this core. Over the course of my fieldwork, this has included weekly lesson observations and support, occasional delivery of workshops and lectures on various topics linked to my research or my previous experience as a languages teacher, and attendance at events and meetings organised by student societies and language schools, as well as career fairs, policy meetings and professional training. I chose students as my initial focus as they are part of a demographic group who are regular internet and social media users, two domains which have been linked to the changing usage of English (Euromonitor International, 2012; Gonzalez-Quijano, 2012; Miller et al., 2015). In addition, I conducted forty-six open-ended individual interviews and twenty-five open-ended group interviews with a variety of participants, including translators, recruiters, career counsellors, and employees working in national and multinational companies as well as international organisations. Interviews lasted between thirty and a hundred and fifty minutes. Respondents could choose the language(s) they answered in, although this was restricted to mostly English and French as my Arabic was not strong enough to sustain entire conversations. As I was often introduced to them in an English-speaking context, and always as researching the place of English in Algeria, approximatively 85% of participants chose to answer the questions in English, with occasional phrases or clarifications in French. I used reflective interviews as much as possible to avoid simply (re)producing data about language ideologies and alleviate the "one-sidedness of textual interpretation resulting from the researcher's own reading of his or her data" (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2011, p. 15). Although participants were only ever formally interviewed once, I met over 90% of participants several times in different settings (sometimes

regularly over the course of several months) and was hence able to gather data from their direct responses to me in interviews and informal conversations as well as from their interactions with others. In this paper, key examples selected from fieldnotes, photographs, and transcripts of interviews and conversations are brought into dialogue with existing academic research into languages in Algeria in order to question the extent to which existing power hierarchies and language ideologies are transformed through discourses of English as indexing mobility and categories of belonging articulating the global and the local.

3. Mobility

3.1 New horizons and new modes of belonging

Learning and using English is seen in Algeria as a way of opening new horizons and allowing for connections beyond state boundaries and past colonial links, thereby re-imagining national belonging away from its Arabophone / Francophone binary. Where French had previously been used to signify access to knowledge, teachers in private schools across the country explained that their adult students now mostly viewed English as the "language of science" and therefore sought to improve their linguistic competence in order to be able to access a wide range of information. One of the wards in a prestigious public hospital organised English lessons for staff, so that they would be able to read the latest publications (field notes Jacob 2017b). All the professionals following courses in private language schools mentioned the importance of this linguistically-mediated access to knowledge, whereas only a minority referred to communicative needs in their jobs or personal life. English as the key to learning and 'being up-to-date' was a common theme across sectors, from computing to marketing. Here Djallil[3], an English graduate who now works in management, explicitly links his language skills to 'having an edge' in the professional world because he can be ahead of the competition through his connections with current global trends:

'And I think that...it has given me a serious edge, in terms of competencies and the ability to innovate and to find relevant information and you know, to go into the world to get, to be up to date with what's happening in the world. I mean for someone who's doing research in French for example, it'd be really difficult. If you take marketing for example, the content you can find in English, the books, the videos, the seminars, the trainings...are very different from what you'll find in French. There's much less interesting content. Maybe interesting is not the word for it. Much less...on a different level. Top level, would be in English. (…) You're always one step behind if you don't speak the language well'.

Similarly, Meriem, Head of Professional Development at a state-owned company, describes her interest for the language as a tool to open new horizons and to develop herself: "avec l'anglais, voilà, parce que je

[3]   All names are pseudonyms.

voulais évidemment connaître d'autres horizons, me développer, et tout"[4]. Even for staff working at multinationals or large state companies in Algiers, communicative competence per se was secondary to the opportunities which this afforded in terms of international training, professional development or participation in conferences, as mentioned in interviews by Meriem, Nacer, Lilia and Nour, who work for multinationals and international organisations, and Zainab, a recruiter from Southern Algeria. Karim, a postgraduate pharmacy student, explained this in detail:

'The most important things are in English. The most important papers are in English, because French is only for France but for English you get research from universities in the US, the UK, Canada… And I watch a lot of YouTube videos from youtubers who talk about microbiology, biochemistry, pharmacology… And that's only in English. Many students are watching it and trying to understand and so they start wanting to learn English'.

English becomes the medium through which it is possible to connect to transnational flows of knowledge and ideas, whether these are in terms of widening research horizons to beyond "just France" or in terms of actively engaging with international learning on social media.

This imagined mobility enables users to re-think conceptualisations of national and personal belonging within a global framework, feeding into discourses of a "new generation", connected to the world thanks to social media and therefore developing new forms of social and political connections. One manifestation of this process is the use of Facebook to make "friends" from all over the globe, whereby practising English in this way is seen as both a means and an end. Facebook groups can also be used to connect with other Algerians who speak English and still live in Algeria or have moved to different parts of the world, as shown by the examples below:

PICTURE SENT AS AN E-MAIL ATTACHMENT – TO BE INSERTED HERE
[**Fig. 1** Example of Facebook groups related to English used by young Algerians]

Beyond accessing music, series and films (both Bollywood and Hollywood productions are popular with students) which are watched all over the world and form part of the global semiotic repertoire, my fieldwork repeatedly illustrated how the internet also allowed students and young people to contribute to transnational knowledge platforms through organising TEDx and WikiStage events, which are subsequently made available online. TED and WikiStages refer to sets of conferences held across the world under each label, to the short talks delivered as part of these events and made available online, and to the 'global community' which sustains them. Both platforms claim to offer 'short, powerful talks' and a space for learning and ideas. More are organised every year since the first Algerian TEDx in 2010, and the overwhelming majority are organised by students, either through their university or through student organisations such as AIESEC or English-language clubs (TED, n.d.; WikiStage, n.d.). Even though the

[4] With English, you know, because I obviously wanted to know other horizons, develop myself, all that… (All translations are the author's own.)

talks and engagement on social media are multilingual, English is the idiom through which their organisation, slogans and raison-d'être are expressed, as the aim of these events is to 'spark conversations and connection', 'empower and inspire young people' and share the 'power of ideas to change the world' (TED, n.d.). Language is key to these goals, and on social media this means Algerian students of other world languages such as Spanish 'feel the need to learn a universal language, a lingua franca' (Ayoub, postgraduate English student in a university in Western Algeria and active events organiser), hinting at the role English plays in the unsaid rules of linguistic practices in those spaces as well as questions of prestige. Feryel (a languages teacher and community organiser in Southern Algeria) also interpreted the growing use of English in the media not only as a way of connecting with the rest of the world – whereas Arabic or French would be the languages used for speaking to Algerians – but also as a sign of prestige:

'le but c'est faire passer le message en Algérie et outside Algeria. Pour nous, en Algérie, l'anglais c'est pour transmettre le message au monde, c'est utiliser l'anglais. Parce que le français, c'est pour les Algériens. Mais l'anglais c'est tout le monde qui l'utilise.'[5]

'Parce que nous on considère l'anglais c'est high level. Donc si on trouve un article en anglais, wow, ils ont fait des efforts. (...) C'est un niveau supérieur quand tu parles en anglais…'[6]

Using English enables young people to re-imagine how they articulate their conceptions of belonging to the national and transnational space. English also mediates norms of belonging to one's own society in the shape of "civic engagement," as well as dreams of start-ups rather than the "Facebook revolutions" which had been lauded in the aftermaths of the 2011 Arab Springs. Being an active and responsible member of society was an important aspect of young people's narrative of self-development (field notes Jacob 2016, 2017a, 2017c, 2017d). Social engagement took the shape of short-term environmental and social projects, often through existing English-language networks such as AIESEC or through meetings in some of the English-language spaces and clubs. For instance, Algerian Black Pearl is an online radio (currently 4,500 followers on Facebook, where live and recorded content can be found) created by students to encourage discussions of difficult subjects such as domestic abuse and mental health, which they thought could be more easily broached through English (field notes Jacob 2017g). In this particular form of staged performance (Bell and Gibson, 2011), what is significant is not so much the particulars of speech as the fact that the audience is not only other Algerians but also 'others' who, according to the founders, need to be shown that Algerians speak English. English is a medium of discussion as well as a way of indexing novelty and international links. An integrated "global" identity that is proudly Algerian and fully connected to the world[7] is therefore mediated through the use of English.

3.2 Emigration and opportunities

English becomes the main signifier, promoter and gatekeeper of increased opportunities through international mobility. Through discourses of "the international language", it is equated to spatial and social mobility, seen as encouraging migration but also restricting opportunities to those deemed to have "mastered" the language, in any case hoping to bypass existing language hierarchies which privilege French. When asked about their aspirations, many university students explain that they hope to be able to study or undertake work experience in English-speaking countries. This is a marked shift from earlier patterns of mobility, which were predominantly linked to French-speaking European countries and Québec. Whatever the intended destination, learning English is seen as a non-negotiable condition of mobility: 'Everybody wants to leave. Or at least, everybody wants to study abroad, and you need English to do that, even to go to France' commented Chaima, a first-year science student in Algiers. Mobility to Turkey, South-East Asia and the Gulf is also mediated through English, and demands for equivalencies and references to undertake postgraduate studies in universities in Asia and the Middle East which use English as a medium of instruction are increasing (conversation with Ministry of Higher Education officials, field notes Jacob 2016). Spatial mobility is also linked to 'bigger dreams' and opportunities, with language skills as the gatekeeper to more lucrative posts or more rewarding projects:

'I have a lot of friends, I told them "don't wait until you finish your studies to learn English because you're going to regret it" And they said "no no I'm cool with that, I'm ok" and when they finished their studies, they realised they have bigger dreams, for example I had a friend who wanted to go to the Emirates, he's an architect, and he couldn't go there because he can't speak English.' (Karim)

Here, exposure to the dominant language is conceived as inherently positive because it enables mobilities which are transformative, with personal and professional development closely entwined, as moving is seen as both an opportunity to grow and a goal/reward in and of itself:

'J'aime les voyages... donc avec les autres langues, je pense que ça existe, mais l'anglais, leadership programme, plusieurs programmes. Donc je me suis dit, voilà, je dois améliorer mon niveau pour pouvoir faire des aventures. C'est pour échanger, c'est pour aller à USA... pour comment dirais-je, pour aider, in order to share my experience with you! To share my experience in volunteering, in leadership... Je pense que l'anglais c'est le centre qui nous relie avec le monde entier. Exchange programmes... c'est parce qu'on a beaucoup d'opportunités d'aller à l'étranger...'[8] (Feryel)

Beyond specific opportunities, mobility through English is also conceived as an escape from daily life, with Ilyes, a language teacher at a university in Western Algeria, remarking that his students 'all want to leave, get a scholarship. They think it's better elsewhere'. This was perhaps best put into words by Halima, an English student and trainee teacher in Algiers, who described her motivation to learn English as

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[8]   I like travelling… so with other languages, I think it exists, but with English, *leadership programme*, several programmes. So I told myself, here you go, I need to improve my level to be able to go on some adventures. It's to exchange, to go to *USA*… to, how can I say, to help, *in order to share my experience with you! To share my experience in volunteering, in leadership*… I think that English is like the centre which links you up to the whole world. *Exchange programmes*… It's because we have many opportunities to go abroad...

'because if you're sad, it's better to cry in Miami'. Language is used to index "abroad" and inherently positive mobility, even to the point of escape.

3.3 Moving backwards and forwards

English is seen as "new" within the Algerian context, and therefore unfettered by the political connotations which characterise other languages such as French or Arabic. Constructions of English as neutral are used to avoid the well-trodden 'prescriptions and proscriptions of national cultural politics' which have been used to 'turn culture into a war zone' (McDougall, 2017, p. 248) and instead create new meanings. Algerian researchers outside English departments often expressed their surprise (or even incredulity) at my research topic, exemplified by one lecturer from Algiers exclaiming 'But there's no English here!'. The lack of visibility of English outside the classroom and the perceived absence of English speakers in Algerian society were consistently highlighted during a focus group with teachers based in the Algiers area, and in informal conversations with secondary school teachers and inspectors during a teacher conference and a series of continuous professional development workshops, which both drew attendees from all over the country. Both Nacer and Aymen, who work for international organisations in Algiers, stressed that even though the number of speakers was on the rise, English was absent from official spheres outside the diplomatic service. Several translators who work with ministries and national companies also confirmed that English was mostly unused at the upper echelons of decision-making. As Suleiman notes in the case of Lebanon, English (in contrast to French and Arabic) 'was not promoted as a language of culture and identity, but as a pragmatic option for use in the world of business, science and technology' (2006, p. 128). This perpetuates representations of English as neutral, because it is outside existing political discussions, and untethered to prevailing language ideologies regarding nationhood.

However, the very notion of a language as a neutral medium is used as a symbol of moving away from the prominent role of French towards re-definitions of more authentic identities. Representations of French, which used to be tied to social mobility and modernity (Benmayouf, 2009, pp. 12–13; Chachou, 2013; Cheriguen, 2007, p. 30) are now shifting to that of the "language of the past". 'French has expired', explained Zainab, a recruiter, blogger and coach working in a Southern city, referring to the idea of a date d'expiration, a "Best Before" date, which this language had now reached. English was therefore seen as taking its place as the "language of the future", partly through mechanisms of association with mobility and new norms of belonging as detailed above, but also through representations of its imperial past as less destructive. In discussions of language learning, English users regularly emphasised the deleterious effects of French colonisation on the education system, and the French government was deemed responsible for the lack of English-language infrastructures in the country. Abderrahmane, a language teacher from Eastern Algeria, in a conversation with other teachers from different parts of the country, expressed the links between cultural politics, fears of neocolonial interference and linguistic competition in the following terms:

'Because the French government interferes. I explained this to you yesterday, because the Minister of Education, the former one, he explained how the French government gave the Algerian government money to stop English language, because it represents a threat to the presence of French here. Now we have this...English is struggling against the Francophones. But I believe, I am sure 100%, that this language is going to win.'

In contrast, the supposed "benevolence" of British compared to French colonial rule was emphasised, with the success stories of some English-speaking countries offered as proof of the language's ability to propel states to a prosperous modernity. In student discussions especially, imperial comparisons thus served to highlight perceptions of English as a less damaging mediator of the colonial past and an enabler of a more flourishing future, continuing political and media debates over the search for a "true" Algerian identity. Discussing English is thus a way of going 'back to the futur', as this graffiti in a relatively well-to-do area of Algiers calls to by enmeshing (whether voluntarily or not) languages and cultural references. English embodies both a movement backwards, a re-imagining of an "authentic" Algeria without the influence of the former coloniser, and forwards, to new conceptions of the future.

PICTURES SENT AS E-MAIL ATTACHMENT – TO BE INSERTED HERE
[**Fig. 2a and 2b** 'Back to the futur' graffiti in Algiers in context and close-up]

It is significant that this narrative is very much a group discourse, emerging repeatedly in social discussions and focus groups, but relatively absent from one-to-one interviews. Although this discourse seems to structure participants' understanding of national dynamics of language change, concepts of authenticity and colonisation are not foregrounded as a frame of reference for their personal motivations and practices. Discourses of English and authenticity relate to national identity and its performances, whereas day-to-day practices hinge on conceptions of belonging as both local and transnational, and prospective spatial and social mobility.

4. Immobility
4.1 Reproduction of existing socio-economic hierarchies
Beyond celebratory discourses of English as transformative and enabling users to move both literally and figuratively, it is crucial to consider who is learning and who is mobile. Learners and users of English tend to already speak French and come from privileged backgrounds in terms of social, economic or cultural capital. Not all mobilities are celebrated, and new categories of belonging afforded by transnational flows of ideas and people are firmly embedded within existing socio-economic stratification. Far from enabling social mobility, the emerging norms of belonging and mobility reproduce rather than challenge existing power hierarchies.

For instance, private language school owners and teachers observe that learners of English tend to already speak French, and that parents tend to register their children for English lessons 'as an investment' only if they consider them to already have a solid grounding in French (often equated with speaking French in the home). Southern Algeria[9] is often singled out as the area of the country where fewer people speak French and 'everybody speaks English', or at least would like to. Nonetheless, Lounès, who lives and works in a Saharan city, confided that, even though he had originally set up his school to only teach English, there was not enough demand as parents wanted support in French and science for their children, while English was considered 'additional'. He hoped to be able to focus on English one day, but said that for now, most his learners were multilingual professionals who worked for multinationals in the oil and gas sector. Rather than allowing people who might have felt marginalised by the continued use of French in the political and professional sphere to circumvent these requirements, English becomes equated to something to pursue once you already have a solid grasp of other dominant languages. With learning English a prerogative of those who are already linguistically privileged, power hierarchies are reinforced rather than subverted.

It is important to recognise that the majority of learners are not turning to language schools in order to improve their English, but rely on films, music, gaming and social media (including YouTube and Facebook) instead. This is partly due to general disenchantment with formal education settings, with content seen as out-of-date and unusable, but also to the high costs associated with lessons. Nevertheless, employers and higher education institutions still request certificates as proof of skills and experience, which leaves autodidacts with nothing to prove their competencies. With diplomas from schools linked to international organisations (such as the British Council's Teaching Centre or Berlitz) more highly considered, the possibility of being recognised and rewarded for learning English intersects with the ability to pay a premium for these courses as well as the ability to access them, as they are mostly located in the wealthy neighborhoods of a handful of Northern cities.

Similar processes come into play when considering who is in fact mobile – and praised for being so. Not all mobilities are encouraged as positive experiences, as is clear from the ambivalent media discourses around the plight of Algerian harraga[10] as opposed to the dangers of sub-Saharan "illegal migrants" (Chena, 2016). In addition, it is unclear how the new categories of simultaneously global and local belonging indexed by English are questioning popular representations of young working class males as 'equated with social problems and violence' (Hecking, 2017, p. 184). Comments about young people who learnt English as part of their trabendo[11] activities were always negative, and always thrown in as asides, as

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[9] This term is ill defined and often equated to "the Sahara", but roughly corresponds to the Southern Territories which were under French military rule during the colonial period, representing today over 80% of Algeria's territory and less than 15% of its population

[10] The term harraga is used to denote young male Algerians who seek to cross the Mediterranean without official documentation, and therefore "burn" (ḥ erq) their passports. The spelling commonly found on social and print media is used here.

[11] Informal economy, from the Spanish *contrabando* (contraband). In this particular context it refers to the buying and re-selling of goods from abroad evading customs duties.

if to make clear that this mode of learning, moving and taking part in transnational flows was not the "real" one, that of students taking part in exchanges and doctors going to conferences. Many teachers and youth workers who praised the opportunities afforded by learning English in terms of social and spatial mobility also branded their students' desire to leave Algeria as illegitimate unless it was to go to a prestigious university, on a competitive professional development scheme or to work for a big company, if they had been recruited while still in Algeria. Discourses of English as facilitating new conceptions of belonging as transnational only extend to the connections and mobility of the elite. The complex relationship between national and transnational categories of belonging was most marked in group discussions, when many working-class and lower middle-class students discussing their dreamed mobilities and interest in exploring the world would pause, look around, and re-affirm their national pride before continuing (or sometimes even shy away from further questions on the subject). It was not uncommon to hear trainee teachers reproach each other for not being "true" Algerians because of the way they expressed their evolving sense of identity and desire for mobility in front of me, which did not happen with students from more privileged institutions. Interactions between emerging and existing norms of belonging are firmly rooted in local inequalities of who is entitled to mobility and fluid identities.

These new (both real and imagined) mobilities and identities therefore intersect with and sometimes amplify existing socio-economic and socio-cultural stratification, rather than simply bypassing them. Within the student body, teachers and staff involved in English-language activities noted a sharp difference in level of interest and language competencies between students of the Humanities and students of the Sciences. Graduates of scientific disciplines have higher employment rates, but also higher baccalaureate averages requirements upon entry, and as students are taught in French after having been taught in Arabic for their entire school career, drop-out rates are high and only retain the more motivated or more linguistically privileged (Haddab, 2014). On the other hand, baccalaureate average requirements are low for the Humanities, as Ayoub commented upon: 'because you only need 10 to get into Arabic, so students are not really motivated and not interested because they know there will be no jobs afterwards'. Science students are also offered more opportunities to engage in English-speaking activities, from pharmacy workshops at the American Cultural Centre in Algiers and World Learning's STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Maths) Centre to international cooperation on employability and more active presence by English-language student clubs. While, as hinted at in the previous section, not all students are particularly interested in learning English as part of their studies, the virtuous circle of increased opportunities and increased interest solidifies the differences between scientific subjects considered as elite and key to employment, and representation of the humanities as the path to becoming a 'diplomé chômeur' (as also analysed by Boutieri, 2016 in the case of Morocco).

4.2 Reproduction of existing language ideologies

Those new norms and categories of belonging also reproduce existing language ideologies regarding language purity and authenticity, including reverence for a perceived standard and racialisation of native speakers. Pennycook contends that understanding the place of Englishes in the world is not so much a question of a centre vs. periphery dichotomy, but rather a 'constant tension between the global flow of an ideology and the local fixity of what authenticity means and how it should be realised' (2007, p. 112). In the Algerian context, notions of language mastery and correctness are interpreted and reproduced through English, even though participants highlighted its supposed fluid and forgiving nature in comparison to French or Arabic's strict rules (and correlated social hierarchy). Karen, senior manager for an oil company and originally from the UK, recounted an anecdote about the process of judging essays written in English as part of a national competition. As she was discussing their evaluations with her Algerian colleague, the latter expressed her surprise at Karen's focus on content over form, wondering 'aren't you bothered that someone is using your language incorrectly?'. Although English can be used to encode new norms of belonging as global citizens, the language very clearly does not "belong" to Algerians, as the quote above hints at. Despite a wider discourse of English being "international" or "universal", only certain performances of Standard British English and Standard American English are considered "correct".

This is particularly noticeable in the education system, where the same professors who expressed their enthusiasm for English's fluid norms and global reach also commented harshly on students' pronunciation and choice of lexis when those did not conform to their definitions of Standard English (field notes Jacob 2017f, 2017g, 2017j). Therefore, young people who taught themselves through films, music or gaming often face derogatory comments over their linguistic competence, sometimes to the extent that even American English was considered 'slang', 'not academically rigorous' and 'not appropriate for formal situations'. During interviews, participants nearly systematically switched to speaking monolingually (either in French or English) as soon as I started recording, even though previous and subsequent conversations were translingual, as if to signify the transition between informal and formal speech. Even postgraduate students specialising in World Englishes tended to refer to Algerian Arabic as "broken Arabic" and African languages as "dialects", extending parity of esteem only to national (and mostly literary) varieties of English they had encountered in class: "Indian English" referred to Salman Rushdie or Arundathi Roy's work, while "Nigerian English" was embodied by Chinua Achebe's (field notes Jacob 2017c, 2017j; interview with Ayoub).

Even though concerns over teachers needing to be "native speakers" appear less than in other regions of the world, who is labelled (or not) as a "native speaker" is highly racialised. Participants all explicitly categorised me as a "native speaker", even after I had explained that I did not grow up in an English-speaking environment. In fact, participants systematically reformulated their definitions to include me, a white European who lives in the UK. Amina, the manager of a private school in Algiers, explained how definitions of native speakers were often stretched to include any white Europeans who speak English:

'Les éleves ne font même pas la différence entre... c'est comme la CELTA Manager, many people here say the same, "we like your native speaker accent", in fact she's Dutch and has a different accent, which has nothing to do with a native speaker's accent'.[12]

On the other hand, the language competences of students from English-speaking sub-Saharan countries were routinely ignored (field notes Jacob 2017i, 2017j). American teachers of colour were similarly defined as having learnt English as a foreign language and because their family came from countries which 'used to be a British colony' (interview with Zaki; field notes Jacob 2017d, 2017e). The equation of native speakers of English with white skin goes as far as some students suggesting that 'all black Americans speak bad English, they only speak slang' (field notes Jacob 2017c, 2017h and 2017i). Narratives of social mobility and new norms of belonging through English are firmly enmeshed within existing representations of language ownership, purity and authenticity.

5. Conclusion

Global discourses of the "spread" of English because of its status as the "international language" are appropriated within an Algerian context to index mobility, both geographical and temporal. Within a linguistic context where daily use of the language is minimal compared to French or Arabic, the symbolic aspects of talking about and talking in English are made more salient. In this article, I showed how English becomes equated to a "language of the future" through its discursive association with the internet, self-improvement, popular science and academic publishing, and emigration. These discourses are being read and appropriated in the light of existing language ideologies and associations between language, social mobility and belonging, where Arabic and French already play contested roles in defining an "authentic" Algerian identity and marking social status. English therefore becomes both tool and symbol of the creation of new categories of belonging, new opportunities for migration (and thereby socioeconomic mobility) and attempts to negotiate future authenticity through reaching for the past, in part through constructions of its neutrality as synonymous to moving away from French. However, if English comes to symbolise "moving on", it is also static, deeply rooted in existing ideologies of authenticity and identity, thereby contributing to the reproduction rather than questioning of socioeconomic hierarchies. Not all mobilities or expressions of belonging are equal, with the mobilities and linguistic repertoires of black (especially African) English-speaking students erased and the practices of the non-privileged young viewed with suspicion. For my participants, discourses of movement operate within existing networks of power and social capital, and although the very real dynamics of language change enabled re-imaginings of mobility and belonging seemingly for all, it was mostly privileged social groups who were participating in and benefitting from these new practices.

 I argue that taking into account processes of mobility and immobility is crucial in order to explain the place of English in Algeria and elsewhere. Ethnographic methods enable a more complex understanding

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[12]   Students don't even make the difference between…

of the language dynamics in this country, beyond prevailing representations of English as a neutral tool within an otherwise conflictual linguistic context, or simply as the "universal language". While surface-level discourses about English remain relatively similar across the globe, ethnographic work is crucial in understanding both the discourses and how they are deployed: which practices are explained how and by whom – and how much is really changing? This paper also provides further insights into intersections between global processes of English as a Lingua Franca and local power hierarchies and language ideologies in non-Anglophone countries, by examining how group-level and individual-level narratives of language change challenge and reinforce each other despite the seeming contradictions of simultaneously reaching back to the future.

Declaration of interest

None.

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