

A journey into the last thirty years of English language teaching in Morocco

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INTRODUCTION

In 1985 at MATE's annual conference in Meknes, the late Professor AbuTalib took us eloquently on a fascinating journey into the history of the presence of English in Morocco, a history which spans over three centuries. In that very well documented talk, we learn about, among other things, the English presence in Morocco during Moulay Ismael's reign, and the American presence since the Second World war, though contacts with the new world go back to the eighteenth century. At the same time, we learn about Moroccans in Manchester as well as about the opening by the London Jewish Society of the first English school in Essaouira. The present paper, without claiming originality or exhaustiveness, is largely inspired by that talk. It is simply a personal account of the history of English language teaching in Morocco during the last thirty years, with a particular focus on approaches, methods, materials, teacher training and human resources development. The last section will be devoted to the general orientations of the reform as well as the measures suggested for implementing the new ELT provisions. Any account of EFL in Morocco would be incomplete without a few words about the Moroccan Association of Teachers of English (MATE) which has played -directly or indirectly- an important role in the development of ELT in Morocco during the last two decades. The ultimate aim of this paper is to highlight the various stages English language teaching and learning went through. At the end of the paper, and in the light of the current reform, a number of general suggestions will be put forward as future prospects for English language teaching in our country.

As in many other developing countries, ELT in Morocco went through a number of phases, each one corresponding to an era marked by a certain

influence and a certain fashion. As a matter of fact, the various changes observed on the Moroccan ELT scene are not totally different from what has been observed on the international scene, though the Moroccan one has been particularly dynamic in an attempt at establishing its specific characteristics while at the same time affirming its own identity. In what follows, each historical period will be dealt with separately and the major events marking that period will be highlighted.

1. THE SIXTIES AND EARLY SEVENTIES.

After independence and during most of the sixties, ELT in Morocco was dominated by a French tradition characterised by a view of language learning mostly dominated by a focus on knowledge of grammar rules (*prescriptive in a traditional sense*) and exposure to selected texts illustrating works of Anglo-Saxon literature. In practical terms, most teaching and learning was centred around on the one hand, the study of grammatical rules and their applications in sentence construction and translation into French, and on the other hand, the study of texts and their translation, either partially or wholly, into French. In other words, the teaching of English was mostly undertaken via French. It must be pointed out that in the sixties; English was introduced early in the third year of the "college" and continuing in the three years of the Lycée.

Much of what was current in ELT in Morocco in the late sixties and during the early seventies is a continuation of the heritage of what was prevailing in France at that time. One of the reasons for this state of affairs relates to the fact that the inspectorate of English was run by French nationals and the majority of teachers of English were French. The approach adopted involved a mixture of Audio-visual and Situational Teaching, with few remnants of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The books used included such series as *L'Anglais vivant*, *L'Anglais par l'image*, *L'Anglais par les textes*, and *L'Anglais par l'illustration*. During the same period, *Passport to English*, relying heavily on audio-visual techniques, was introduced, but because of the lack of equipment, its use was not as efficient as it was originally designed to be. In general, the standard policy was to leave teachers with the freedom to use other teaching materials, texts, audio materials, etc.

What characterises this period is the slow introduction of some timid changes in the English curriculum through the presence of native speakers of English, both American and British. In fact, the first Peace Corps teachers of English as well as some British volunteers (in limited numbers) started arriving by the mid-sixties. Although they had to conform to the established method and materials, the first group brought with it such series as *"Let's learn English"*, and the second group various teaching

materials such as "*First things first*". Most importantly, they brought with them different views and attitudes towards language, language learning, teaching, use of language, and especially American and British culture. The impact of these two groups was so important that even French nationals began adopting Anglo-Saxon materials at the expense of French ones. In fact, this trend was also observed in France. In terms of method, there was a slow shift from the GTM and audio visual techniques to a mixture of situational teaching and audiolingualism characterised by a focus on habit formation and pattern practice. Underlying these methods is a behaviouristic view of language and language learning. This period might be rightly labelled - in Professor Abu Talib's words- the period of anglo-saxonisation of ELT in Morocco.

2. THE SEVENTIES AND EARLY EIGHTIE

The major ELT change occurring in the seventies concerns the elimination of English from the "college". In addition, the process of anglo-saxonisation took a further step. With the appearance of the first official instructions in 1971 and the introduction of Broughton's *Success with English*, audiolingualism became embodied through habit formation and pattern practice. Some of us still remember those stereotyped and somewhat boring dialogues between Martin and Jillian. The same period witnessed the introduction of Alexander's *New Concept English* including *First things First* and *Practice and Progress*. While these books were used with the fifth and sixth forms, *seventh*, along with other materials, was used with the form.

Since the mid-seventies, important changes occurred in ELT in Morocco, at the level of textbooks, teaching methods, staffing, supervision and teacher training (see below and for further details for example Tamer 1975, Boualame, 1978). An important event occurred in 1975 when for the first time, a seminar on ELT in Morocco was organised by the ministry of education. This seminar was an opportunity to discuss and assess the state of ELT in our country. In addition, following a number of studies carried out on EFL in Morocco (e.g. Tamer, Boualame), others were undertaken with the help of the inspectorate (see Guebbel's work). Their results, coupled with the Moroccanisation of staff including inspectors, constituted an impetus for reviewing practices, methods and materials. The dissatisfaction with the approach adopted as well as with the textbooks used was an incentive for a new ELT policy in Morocco. Thus, a textbook commission was set up at the end of the seventies with the aim of producing materials which would reflect the Moroccan learners' needs and meet their interests. At the same time new ideas about aims and objectives were creeping into the ELT scene. As a result, a locally produced national textbook came out in 1982, with the title : *Steps to English*.

The textbook is audio lingual in orientation, but characterised by a mixture of Anglo-Saxon culture with the Moroccan one. Other existing textbooks from the series *New Concept English* continued to be used with the sixth form, while other materials and texts were used with the seventh form (e.g. *English texts, Have a go*, etc...). With the coming into the profession of large numbers of Moroccan teachers of English, as well as Moroccan inspectors and trainers, the late seventies were marked by an enthusiastic involvement in all issues related to ELT. This paved the way for the changes to come. During this frantic period, the Moroccan Association of Teachers of English was created and deserves a few words here.

2.1. THE MOROCCAN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Since its creation in 1979-80, the association went through various phases. Like all new creations in their beginnings, it was met with scepticism and enthusiasm, among the profession as well as by officials, but thanks to the dedication and efforts of a small group of teachers (from the university and the secondary school), MATE took up the challenge. MATE has never failed to bring its contribution to the professional development of teachers. Through a number of regular activities (MATE days, annual conferences, summer institute, newsletter, proceedings, etc.), it has constituted a forum for debating all matters pertaining to EFL in Morocco. Some of the changes in the curriculum were largely initiated by MATE. Now, it has become an institution, often cited as an example of a dynamic association. Again, thanks to the dedication of its members, it will certainly continue to play its dynamic role in the future.

3. FROM THE MID-EIGHTIES TO THE NINETIES

With the advent of communicative language teaching, a new approach was slowly making its way into the Moroccan ELT scene. Focussing on the learner's, communicative activities and tasks and developing skills became the motto of the ELT professionals. No wonder these new ideas were introduced, albeit timidly, in *Further Steps* (1986, 1988), and later in the *English in Life* series. Research on ELT became abundant and diverse, though it did not reach all teachers and other professionals. The implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Morocco through a focus on skills and group work took a new orientation in the nineties. New guidelines were regularly produced with the aim, not only to help teachers deal with the textbooks and the syllabus, but also to achieve certain uniformity nationwide.

With the coming of *Bridges* a few years ago, ELT took a new direction towards meeting present and future needs of science students while those of arts' students were largely covered by *English in Life 2* and 3. Two years ago, a new stream (filière) was created in a number of schools to train

students in English through the teaching of some specific content, including among other things, history, culture, etc... The creation of academies also marked a new and important event in ELT in Morocco, particularly in the area of testing which was to have a determining impact on teaching (for the better or for the worse). With the setting up in each academy of regional testing commissions, ELT took on a new dimension which would have a profound effect on syllabus design. Furthermore, the project on Item Banking was initiated not only to systematise and standardise exams while reducing efforts and costs, but also to help improve the quality of the syllabus. All these changes were concomitant with and dependent upon the development of human resources, including teachers, inspectors, teacher trainers, and university researchers. Any account of ELT in Morocco- however brief it is- would be incomplete with a few words about the historical landmarks of teachers and teacher training.

4. TEACHERS AND TEACHER TRAINING

It was mentioned above that after independence and during the sixties, the majority of teachers of English were foreigners, mainly French. Moroccan teachers of English constituted a minority, as was the case for other subjects. Until the mid-seventies, the very few who were teaching at that time came from different backgrounds with little or no training at all. In fact, most were first cycle teachers with either a baccalaureate or with one to two years at the university, but with no formal training. Even those who finished the university and were appointed as second cycle teachers with a diploma delivered by the Ecole Normale Supérieure, received very little pre-service training in EFL. To be fully qualified, they had to sit for a professional exam (CAPES) administered by the inspectorate. This exam was also taken by those BA holders who were directly recruited by the ministry of education.

It must be mentioned that until the beginning of the seventies, there were only three Moroccan inspectors of English. Systematic pre-service training was instituted in 1974 with the scheme of a one year training programme at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (Mohamed V university), with one Moroccan trainer and a British one, and involving only six trainees in the first year and thirteen in the second year. With a growing demand for teachers of English and the beginning of the departure of foreigners, Centre Pédagogiques Régionaux (CPR) were created in Rabat and Casablanca with programmes specially designed to train, over a period of two years, baccalaureate holders to become first cycle teachers of English. At the beginning of the eighties, a number of Ecoles Normales Supérieures were created in Rabat, Fes, Casablanca and Marrakech, and later in Meknes and Tetouan.

These teacher training institutions which were directly attached to the ministry of education and run by the 'Direction de la Formation des Cadres', largely adopted the model previously developed at the old Ecole Normale Supérieure. Between 1977 and the mid-eighties, hundreds of EFL teachers were trained in these institutions as well as at the Faculty of Education. During that period, many trainers were sent abroad for further studies, namely in Britain, the US, Canada and Belgium. In addition, in 1985-86, a new formula for the training of supervisors (inspectors) was instituted at the National Centre for the Training of Inspectors and during the first years, many benefited from graduate studies in the United Kingdom. Another important step was taken to promote "first cycle" teachers into "second cycle" ones through a two-year programme at the ENS-Takaddoum.

The end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties saw a decline in the recruitment of both teachers and supervisors of English. In fact, over the last five years, only one institution (ENS-Takaddoum) has been, and still is, involved in the training of EFL teachers, though the overall number is limited. The efforts are now geared towards in-service training through numerous activities carried out by the ministry (e.g. summer institute, inspectors' seminar, regional study days, pedagogical days, etc...) with the collaboration of national and foreign institutions and especially MATE. These activities concern not only new ideas and techniques, but also new orientations in the syllabus, including exams and testing. Now, with a population of about 4000 teachers of English including around 700 first cycle teachers, 150 supervisors and about 40 trainers, EFL in Morocco has come of age. Moreover, interest in applied linguistics and language teaching at the university level, both in undergraduate and graduate programmes is growing fast. Over the last decade, a lot of research has been carried out in this area and it is still promising. At the same time, a new generation of teachers, teacher trainers is appearing on the scene, with new ideas, perspectives and new challenges.

Amidst all the changes occurring at the end of the nineties, the reform of the entire educational system, including the teaching of languages, may be considered as the most important event at the beginning of the new millennium. This reform is encompassed in what is known as the National Charter for Education and Training.

5. THE REFORM: GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The Charter for Education and Training (Chapter 9, Articles 110 –118) provides general principles for foreign language education. The most distinguishing ones can be summarised in the following (translation is mine):

- Mastery of foreign languages at an early age.
- Practical and functional mastery of languages.
- Linguistic competence is not an end in itself.
- The acquisition of (foreign) language skills will be coupled with the acquisition of a specific content: cultural, scientific, and technological.
- The acquisition of language skills will target the acquisition of a utilitarian (Communicative) competence in those skills.

5.1. Specific measures for foreign language education:

The above mentioned general principles have been translated in the following measures:

- The first and second foreign language will be introduced in the primary school: Oral and phonetic training.
- For each foreign language, specific cultural, technological and scientific modules will be designed and taught in that language taking into account the time allotted to that language.
- Universities and institutes of higher education will offer similar courses in order to upgrade students' linguistic competence in foreign languages and in Arabic.
- Teacher education and in-service training will be systematically planned and improved.
- Learning outcomes will systematically be assessed.

5.2. Aims of the English curriculum (The white paper)

The general principles for foreign language education including English have been translated in guidelines as well as in objectives. The White Paper prepared by the Ministry of Education spells out the following aims for ELT in the middle school and the secondary school:

- To develop the communication competencies necessary for a variety of real-life purposes.
- To develop knowledge and sub-skills necessary for a variety of real-life purposes.
- To develop study skills leading to learner autonomy.
- To develop the intellectual abilities of the learner.
- To develop cross-cultural communication competency.
- To enhance the learner's awareness of, and reflection upon, global issues.
- To enhance values pertaining to character, civic behaviour and citizenship.

A close look at the aims indicates that their scope has been extended beyond linguistic concerns to include not only skills and competencies, but also the personal development of the Moroccan learner. In addition, the

role of the foreign language in developing an open mind and tolerance is emphasised.

5.3. Features of the new English curriculum (The white paper)

From a pedagogical perspective, the new curriculum is characterised by the adoption of new perspectives and practices, including the assessment of competencies, i.e. what the learners can do with the language, and not simply assessing their knowledge of English. Indeed the new curriculum, as embodied in the new textbooks (e.g. *Focus*, *Horizons*), is characterised by the following features:

- Organised around learning tasks and activities :
 - Knowledge of English, skills, strategies and abilities;
 - Future uses of English in both further studies and jobs.
- Organised according to a modular approach.
- It is learner-centred.
- It is task-based.
- Assessment is competency-based.
- Teaching and assessment are not limited to content, but extended to what learners can do with the language.
- It takes into account entering behaviour and specifies terminal behaviour.

5. CONCLUSION / NEW PERSPECTIVES

From this brief overview, it can be concluded that ELT in Morocco has come of age and has always been at the front of innovation in language teaching in Morocco. However, while our knowledge of the field has expanded rapidly, our knowledge of our students, the context of teaching and our environment (local, international) are still in need of further investigation. Furthermore, to improve the quality of EFL in Morocco and to further the development of our profession, our current conceptions and practices need to be reconsidered in the light of the ongoing changes in our society as well as in the world at large.

Among the major hurdles or challenges facing ELT today are those issues pertaining to the bias created by the new testing conditions whereby learners tend to limit their learning efforts to what will serve them in exams rather than to what will be useful for them in their studies or careers. In fact, despite some openings offered in the official guidelines and introductions to teachers' books, teachers find themselves handcuffed by the syllabus, official guidelines and textbooks in addition to the learners' pressure to focus only on the programme. It takes numerous efforts and a lot of imagination to break off those chains and to innovate in the classroom. Very few teachers are willing to live up to this challenge and the

majority tends to fall back on the usual routine. The introduction of *Bridges* a few years ago and the creation of special classes in English, alongside the old "preformation" classes opened new avenues for ELT in Morocco. The attempt to meet specific needs of secondary students (e.g. scientific students, literary students, etc...) will undoubtedly produce an impetus for improving the quality of EFL in our country in addition to preparing students for a more productive use of English. The hope is that this trend will be generalised to other streams of students.

We can no longer afford to teach the type of English that is obsolete or which is not anchored in the reality of today, not only in terms of use, but also in terms of jobs. In an age marked by a fast flow of information through satellite channels or the Internet, our students are in need of being equipped with the type of language which will facilitate their contact with and understanding of this flow of information. In addition to a general syllabus English which will provide a solid background to English, there is a need for a more specific jargon currently used in information technology. Furthermore, and as a safeguard to our national culture and identity, some awareness raising is necessary as to what to process and what to discard. Thus, English language teaching will not only be considered as a means toward opening a window on the rest of the world, but also as an instrument which will contribute to the overall educational development of our learners, especially through the development of study skills, cognitive capacities and critical thinking. This will be possible if, on the one hand, teachers are prepared to reconsider their role as educators, and on the other hand, if there is an improvement in the quality of teaching conditions.

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