

Historically, the Amazigh language has been autochthonous and is a member in the Hamito-Semitic or "Afro-Asiatic" family. On the linguistic side, the language is characterized by the proliferation of dialects due to historical, geographical and sociolinguistic factors. This language has its specific writing system, called tifinagh, but it was neglected except in the Saharian region where it was transmitted, mainly by women, without discontinuity, from antiquity up till now. In the other areas, Amazigh was exclusively spoken and reserved for familial and informal domains. The old tifinagh script is found engraved in stones and tombs in some historical sites attested from 40 centuries. Its writing form has continued to change from the traditional Tuareg writing to the neo-tifinagh in the end of the sixties.



Figure 2: Tinzouline Inscriptions (Zagora, Morocco)

In Morocco, one may distinguish three major dialects on the basis of their geographical situation: Tamazight of the North (known as Tarifit or Rifian variety by linguists); Tamazight of Central Morocco and South-East, and Tachelhiyt in the South-West and the High Atlas. According the last demolinguistic data (2004), the Amazigh language is spoken by some 30% of the Moroccan population (around 10 million inhabitants). Politically, the Amazigh language has enjoyed its status at different levels, depending on the country where this language exists. In Morocco, the status of Amazigh has achieved an advanced level since 2011: its officialization, alongside Arabic, in the new Constitution. But the outline of the Amazigh language preservation and promotion is mentioned since 2001 in the text creating and organizing the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (Dahir or Royal Decree of 17th October 2001³).

3. The Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture

This institution came as an answer to the civil society request since the very beginning of the 60 (after independence) which asked the recognition of the Amazigh language and culture by the State and its institutionalization in education, the media, culture and public administration. IRCAM is under royal tutelage and is dedicated to the promotion of the Amazigh language and culture.

It has the following missions:

- Advisory mission to the Royal Cabinet on measures meant to promote Amazigh.
- Partnership mission with the concerned institutions, in particular the Ministry of National Education,

Ministry of Information and Communication, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Public Service.

- Academic missions: collection and transcription of various Amazigh cultural expressions with an eye to safeguarding, protecting and disseminating these expressions; studies and research on Amazigh culture; promotion of artistic creation; codifying the Amazigh graphic system for teaching ends, production of didactic tools, elaboration of general and specialized lexicons, elaboration of pedagogical plans of action; cooperation with universities in organizing research and Amazigh language and culture development centers, training trainers; development of methods meant to strengthen and encourage the place of Amazigh in communication and information spaces; cooperation with cultural and scientific institutions at the national and international levels.

During these two last decades, changes occur in the sociolinguistic field and are specifically related to the Amazigh language. What are the observed changes? How was managed the Amazigh language planning process in Morocco? Which were the priorities and what principles guided the decision making? These questions, among others, had to be answered by IRCAM in order to contribute to the new language policy of the country.

Indeed, the motive 6 of the founding text of IRCAM explains that it has "to deepen the linguistic policy defined by the National Charter for Education and Training (CNEF), which stipulates the introduction of Amazigh in the educational system". Indeed, Amazigh, in the National Charter, was considered as an "opening", a language facilitating the learning of the Arabic language (COSEF, 2000: lever 9 paragraphs 115 and 116). With the creation of IRCAM, the ultimate goal is to introduce the Amazigh language, not as a facilitator but as a language taught and a "national heritage" of all Moroccan pupils and students. The "codification of the Amazigh script will facilitate its teaching, learning and diffusion, guarantee equal opportunities for all the children of our nation in acquiring knowledge, and consolidate national unity" (Dahir, 2001). Since then, the Amazigh has become, alongside Arabic, the official language included in the new Constitution.

As it can be observed, within a decade, the status of the Amazigh gradually has changed: from "opening" (CNEF, 1999) to official language (Constitution, 2011: Art. 5⁴) through a process of patrimonialization and language planning (Dahir, 2001).

IRCAM had to translate the general orientations stipulated in the Dahir into concrete action to enable the introduction of the Amazigh language and culture in the public sphere but primarily in the educational and training system. Therefore, issues related to which Amazigh to teach and with which script have arisen as an urgent and pressing priority. In other words, IRCAM had to deal with the "corpus" of the Amazigh language in Morocco.

³<https://www.ircam.ma/?q=fr/node/4668>

⁴http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Portals/0/constitution/constitution_2011_Fr.pdf

