Lycée secondaire Sbikha 1979

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Standard Maghrebi Orthography

Imed Adel, Lycée secondaire Sbikha 1979

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1 INTRODUCTION

Maghrebi Arabic or Darja is a dialect continuum extending from Mauritania to Libya\(^1\) with more than 70 million native speakers.\(^2\) Maghrebi is usually spoken; [1] however, different writing systems are being used across the Maghreb for different purposes. [2] Nevertheless, there is no standard orthography.

The goal of this work is establishing a standard Maghrebi orthography that can be used to record and document the oral literature of the Maghreb.

1.1 COMMONLY USED ORTHOGRAPHIES

Today, we can identify three predominately orthographies in use for writing Maghrebi:

- **Arabizi orthography**: based on the French alphabet and used for written communication on social media websites. It was originally used in SMS since the Arabic alphabet was not yet supported, however, even after adding support for Arabic characters in mobile phones, most speakers kept using the chat alphabet. This orthography is very phonetic; however, emphatic consonants are usually indistinguishable. [3]

- **Melḥun orthography**: based on the Arabic alphabet, supplemented with an additional character for /g/ and written in Maghrebi script. This orthography is phonemic compared to Standard Arabic orthography. It is used for writing Melḥun poetry. [4]

- **Modern Standard Arabic orthography**: it is an etymological orthography, which depends on the speaker’s knowledge of the Arabic

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\(^1\) Although Libya and Mauritania are often mentioned here, this orthography is based on the major dialects of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

\(^2\) The total number of speakers of Tunisian [27], Algerian [29], and Moroccan [28] dialects, according to *Ethnologue*, is 71,448,000.
language to guess the pronunciation and the meaning of the word. Nevertheless, it is commonly used for writing articles and books.

1.2 SUGGESTED ORTHOGRAPHIES

Different orthographies were suggested by activists and linguists for the different varieties of Maghrebi; however, none of them was widely adopted by the users.

- Caubet’s orthography: it is used in the translation of *Le petit Nicolas* to Maghrebi. It is based on *Arabizi*, however, emphatic consonants are marked with a dot below diacritic, and long vowels are spelled phonemically. Due to its similarity to *Arabizi*, this orthography should be easy to read and to use; however, it does not distinguish long and short vowels. Furthermore, five short vowels are used, which makes the orthography inconsistent.

- García’s orthography: it is used in García’s *Diccionario español – árabe marroquí*. This orthography does not employ digits as in *Arabizi*, it distinguishes long vowels, and it marks emphatic consonants. However, one problem with this orthography is using five short vowels instead of two. In fact, these five short vowels are allophones of /ə/ and /û/. [11]

- KtbDarija’s orthography: it avoids the problem of schwa allophones by employing only one short vowel and three long ones. It was originally suggested for Moroccan Arabic; however, it can be used for any Maghrebi dialect. This orthography uses “O” instead of “U” for the vowel /u/ since the vowel [o] is an allophone of /u/ in most Maghrebi dialects. [12]

- Berber Latin alphabet: it is the Latin alphabet used to write Berber varieties. Due to the similarity between Berber and Maghrebi phonologies, this alphabet is usable for both, Berber and Maghrebi. It is not used in any major work yet. Since it is originally made to fit all Berber varieties, this alphabet helps in reducing regional variation in writing by using one short vowel and ignoring interdental consonants. [13][14]

- CODA (*conventional orthography for dialectal Arabic*): it is an Arabic-based orthography for Arabic varieties. It is an etymological
orthography and it does not properly represent phonemes of Arabic varieties, such as /g/. [15] [16] [17]

1.3 PRINCIPLES OF A MAGHREBI ORTHOGRAPHY

A proper Maghrebi orthography should allow the best and easiest representation of the spoken language. It should be easy to learn and to read. Nevertheless, easiness is not the only principle. Maghrebi is one of the two largest spoken languages of the Maghreb by the number of speakers, the other being the Berber language(s). [2] Hence, a proper Maghrebi orthography should integrate well with the Berber orthography, which might help in creating a linguistic unity in the region and it might accelerate the recognition of both languages in the Maghreb. Furthermore, a Maghrebi orthography should help to unify the different Maghrebi dialects, which are so diverse. [18] [19]

The variation between the Maghrebi dialects includes phonology, morphology, and vocabulary. [20] [18] Maghrebi dialects are often separated into three main dialectal groups: Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan. However, Tunisian dialects are as diverse as Algerian dialects: the pronunciation of certain consonants and vowels, the syllabification of words, morphology, and vocabulary. [21] [22] This diversity is often used as an argument against any

3 Berber (Tamazight) is already an official language in Algeria and Morocco.
4 Another classification is Pre-Hilali and Hilali dialects.
effort to prompt the use of Maghrebi. Due to this diversity, many speakers think that there are no grammar rules governing Maghrebi, compared to Arabic language or French, which lack such diversity. [23] Nevertheless, this diversity does not hinder the comprehension between different speakers. Furthermore, if a speaker feels that he might not be understood, he usually switches to a more common and understood dialect, such as that of Tunis, Algiers, or Rabat, depending on his nationality. [24]

Hence, a standard Maghrebi orthography should allow variation as long as comprehensibility is achievable. Furthermore, the orthography should help to reduce the phonological variation between the different dialects.

2 STANDARD MAGHREBI ORTHOGRAPHY

2.1 ALPHABET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aa</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ma</td>
<td>Pp</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>pist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>bher</td>
<td>Qq</td>
<td>q</td>
<td>qelb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cc</td>
<td>ā</td>
<td>cedd, cekcuka</td>
<td>Rr</td>
<td>r, rˤ</td>
<td>berrah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dd</td>
<td>d, dˤ</td>
<td>dezz, dib</td>
<td>ṢṢ</td>
<td>sˤ</td>
<td>ṣabun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḍḏ</td>
<td>ḍ, ḍˤ</td>
<td>ḍerba</td>
<td>Ss</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>suq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ee</td>
<td>ə</td>
<td>mefti, xemsa, rj</td>
<td>Šš</td>
<td>sˤ</td>
<td>ṣabun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ff</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>ficta</td>
<td>Tt</td>
<td>t, θ</td>
<td>teffah, teelеб</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gg</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>mcergi</td>
<td>Ṭṭ</td>
<td>ṭˤ</td>
<td>ṭar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hh</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>hreb</td>
<td>Uu</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>kura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥḥ</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ḥebb</td>
<td>Vv</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>vidyu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ii</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>kilu</td>
<td>Ww</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>wekkel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jj</td>
<td>ŋ, ṃ</td>
<td>fru</td>
<td>Xx</td>
<td>x~χ</td>
<td>xell</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 Rules

These set of rules should be followed when using this orthography.

2.2.1 Gemination

Geminate consonants are marked by doubling the consonant, e.g. hebb. This is similar to Arabic Shadda.

2.2.2 Emphatics

Emphatic consonants are marked by a dot below diacritic, e.g. sift. In Maghrebi, many consonants can have an emphatic counterpart; however, we only distinguish d, r, s, t, and z. “H” represents /h/, which is represented in the Arabic alphabet by “ح” and in the Arabizi alphabet by “7”.

Emphatic consonants make adjacent consonants emphaticized. In this orthography, only the original emphatic consonants are written. That is, we write dar and not dar “house”.

“R” is often an emphaticized consonant; therefore, it is only written in the absence of other emphatic consonants and the consonants x, y, q.

2.2.3 Interdentals

Since the pronunciation of interdental consonants is inconsistent among Maghrebi dialects [18] [19], these phonemes are not distinguished. For instance, tlata is pronounced as [tlata], [tlaθa] and [θlaθa]. The same principle applies for [ð] as in [ðib], which is also pronounced [dib], and [ðˤ], which is pronounced [dˤ].
2.2.4 Affricates

The affricate [tʃ] is a common pronunciation of /ʒ/ among Algerians; therefore, it is not distinguished from “J”. [19] The affricate [dʒ] is an allophone of /ʃ/ in many words; therefore, it is not distinguished from “C”. However, in some European loanwords, this sound is common in all dialects, e.g. [fatˤʃa], [matˤʃ]. In such cases, [ʃ] is written as “te”, e.g. faṭca, maṭc.

2.2.5 Long vowels

There are three phonemic long vowels or full vowels in most Maghrebi dialects. [18] [2] Each vowel can have at least two allophones depending on the adjacent consonants. [11]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel</th>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>[a:]</td>
<td>velars (ɣ, x) and pharyngeals (c, h)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ɑː]</td>
<td>q and emphatics (d, r, s, t, z)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[æː]</td>
<td>other consonants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>[ɪː] ~ [eː]</td>
<td>velars, pharyngeal and emphatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[iː]</td>
<td>other consonants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>[ʊː] ~ [oː]</td>
<td>velars, pharyngeal and emphatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ʊː]</td>
<td>other consonants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.6 Short vowels

Depending on the dialect, short vowels can vary from one to three vowels. [18] [2] In this orthography and following the Berber convention, [13] [14] we are using only one short vowel, schwa. This vowel can have very various pronunciations depending on the adjacent consonants.

Note that schwa is only written in closed syllables, that is, we write rjeb and not rejeb. Furthermore, in this orthography, schwa is never written at the beginning of words, unless when the words is composed of two consonants, such as esm or to indicate the imperative form, such as ekteb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allophone</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ə]</td>
<td>velars (ɣ, x), glottals and pharyngeals (c, h)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.7 Labio-velarization

Labio-velarization is marked using “⁄” following the labio-velarized consonant, e.g. q°ella, y°zal, k°bar. Labio-velarization helps distinguishing adjectives from verbs and clarifies the different meanings of the word. [25] However, it is usually a mere phonological variation common among older generations. [26] In this orthography, the labio-velarization mark is only used to clarify the meaning of words. Hence, we write y°zal (no difference from y°zal) and q°ella (different meaning from qella). [20]

In some cases, labio-velarization is the result of an assimilation, such as mm°exxer from mwexxer or ff°aḥat from fwaḥat. In this orthography, assimilation is not marked, hence, we write mwexxer and fwaḥat. [26]

2.2.8 Diphthongs

A diphthong is a combination of two adjacent vowel sound within the same syllable. Classical Arabic language had two diphthongs: /aj/ and /aw/, which developed into /i/ and /u/ in most Maghrebi dialects. [18] [20] However, in some dialects, these diphthongs either evolved to [e] and [o], which are not distinguished from /i/ and /u/ in this orthography, or to [ə] and [əw]. These diphthongs can be written as “ej” and “ew” respectively. Therefore, one could write xiṭ and hiṭ or xeyṭ and heyṭ.

2.2.9 The vowel “O”

The vowel “O” is the least used letter in this orthography, it is reserved for loanwords with a stressed O vowel in a non-emphatic context, such as gol from English “goal”. In other cases, unstressed “O” is pronounced and spelled as “U”. If the vowel “O” is stressed in the loanwords, however, it is adjacent to a consonant with an emphatic counterpart in Maghrebi, then it is spelled “U”, such as pitrul.
### 2.2.10 Assimilation

Assimilation is a phonological process by which a sound becomes more like a nearby sound. In this orthography, words are written unassimilated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>pronunciation</th>
<th>spelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rqed+t</td>
<td>rqett</td>
<td>reqedt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tzuru</td>
<td>dzuru</td>
<td>tzuru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nexrej-c</td>
<td>nexrecc</td>
<td>nexrej-c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yqul-Ina</td>
<td>yqulenna</td>
<td>yqul-Ina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jenb</td>
<td>jemb</td>
<td>jenb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dcica</td>
<td>tcica</td>
<td>dcica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yezzi</td>
<td>yezzi</td>
<td>yezzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nesf</td>
<td>neṣṣ</td>
<td>nesf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>west</td>
<td>weṣṣ</td>
<td>west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stenna</td>
<td>ssenna</td>
<td>stenna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šṭadu</td>
<td>šṣadu</td>
<td>šṭadu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ctra</td>
<td>ccka</td>
<td>ctra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dmuc+hem</td>
<td>dmuḥḥem</td>
<td>dmuc-hem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leven</td>
<td>neel</td>
<td>leven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delfin</td>
<td>denfil</td>
<td>delfin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>badenjan</td>
<td>badenjal</td>
<td>badenjan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fenjan</td>
<td>fenjal</td>
<td>fenajn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sferjel</td>
<td>šferjen</td>
<td>sferjel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A similar approach is also followed when conjugating verbs, if the first consonant is “w” or “y”, then it should be kept even when a schwa is preceding it. That is, the conjugation of the verb ṭṣel in the aorist is yewṣel and not yuṣel.

### 2.2.11 Hyphen

In order to reduce inconsistency and to make reading and comprehension easier, a hyphen is used between nouns/verb/prepositions and their affixes, e.g. ma ḍit-ha-lkem ci. Note that the negation suffix is written separated from the verb.

### 2.2.12 Capitalization

The first letter in a sentence and the first letter of a proper noun are capitalized. Last names should also be capitalized in order to avoid any ambiguity.

### 2.2.13 Punctuation

Punctuation rules in Maghrebi are the same as European languages.\(^5\)

### 2.3 Recommendations

These recommendations are not obligatory; you may or may not follow them, based on your preference.

#### 2.3.1 Syllabification

Maghrebi dialects have generally a similar syllabification, except for some special cases, which will be discussed here.

\(^5\) *The Punctuation Guide* (website) should be used as a reference, until a Maghrebi punctuation guide is made.
Trilateral nouns generally have the scheme $C_1C_2\tilde{v}C_3$, e.g. $byel$, $ynem$. This is how Arabic words with the scheme $C_1\tilde{a}C_2\tilde{a}C_3$ are usually adopted into Maghrebi. However, Arabic words with the scheme $C_1\tilde{v}C_2C_3$ might keep this form, and may use the usual $C_1C_2\tilde{v}C_3$ form, depending on the sonority of the second and the third consonants. 

The short vowel (schwa) precedes the most sonorous consonants. Hence, Arabic $najm\langle un\rangle$ becomes $njem$. However, this rule is not always followed for every word and by every dialect; some might actually say $nejm$.

My recommendation is to follow the sonority rule regardless of the local pronunciation of the word in your region.\(^6\)

Another case for variation is disyllabic and polysyllabic words, such as the verbs $tedreb+i$, $negtel+u$ or $ekteb+u$. This also occurs to nouns, such as $medres+a$, $mehkem+a$, $meslem+in$, or $rek\tilde{b}et+i$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Pronunciations</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$tedreb+i$</td>
<td>te\dj{r}bi</td>
<td>Libya, Tunisia, Algerian Bedouins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ta\dj{r}bi</td>
<td>Saharan Nomads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t\dj{r}bi</td>
<td>Jijel, Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>te\dj{d}erbi</td>
<td>Rest of Algeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\dj{r}bet+ek$</td>
<td>\dj{r}bet\tilde{e}k</td>
<td>Algerian Bedouins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>\dj{r}btek</td>
<td>Algerian sedentary dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>\dj{r}batek</td>
<td>Libya, Bedouin and rural Tunisian dialects, Constantine, Algerian Sahara, Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>\dj{r}bettek</td>
<td>Northern Tunisia, Constantine, Skikda, Jijel, Alger, Cherchell, Delys, Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$ekteb+u$</td>
<td>ekt\tilde{u}</td>
<td>Libya, Tunisia, Algerian Bedouins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^6\) The sonority scale is Glide $>$ Liquid $>$ Nasal $>$ Fricative $>$ Stop.
2.3.2 Arabic loanwords

The educated Maghrebi speech has many loanwords from different Arabic and French. An educated Maghrebi speaker might even switch to MSA while speaking his Maghrebi dialect. [1] These recent loanwords are not properly adapted to the Maghrebi language.

Less educated people usually *Maghrēbīzē* any loanwords from Arabic. This is also how Melḥun poets extended the Maghrebi vocabulary using the Classical Arabic language. [4]

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7 The Tunisian pronunciation is the most faithful to the etymology. The Moroccan pronunciation is the most faithful to the phonological rules of Maghrebi.
In this case, it is recommended to use Maghribized words rather than code-switching to MSA. The goal of writing in Maghrebi is to make knowledge accessible to all Maghrebi speakers, educated or not.

It should be mentioned here that standard written Maghrebi is based on the speech of the common people, and not that of the educated, or the politicians, or the religious.
3 Maghrebi Texts

3.1 Muni – ħmed Ben Sehla

Yaḥ ɛli-ya xyal muni
Ana lmeṣrum men hwa taj λeyzlan

 Ana lmeṣrum men hwa-ha
 Ḥal-i Yuri-k Ṣen s’al-i ya ṭeccaq

 Teḥt w ṭal-li jfa-ha
 Ėenn-i ḫad leyziλa keḥḥlet lermaq

 Alla ḥṣib men ywa-ha
 Ḥetta nefret w ṣar qelb-i ṣ f temzaq

 Heyhat lqelb ma nsa-ha
 Men feńqet-ḥa ṣar demc-i ṣ f tedfaq

 Nebki ḥetta cṭal jfe-i
 W ddimɛ men lecyun yesni ṣ ṭṭufan

 W nqebbɛl qedd-ha lyemni
 Nestenceq riq-ha lemretṭer ṣ’esn lban

3.2 Ddalya – Tṭhami Lemdeyṛi

A saqi lemdam ʂiy neḥki-lek ma bin-i w bin kas rḥiq lmesṭar

Qeṣṣa -bin nnas tendker b mɛnani rayqin w ᵻjub cṭara

Kent mesli ma drit kas wella nas wella ᵝnas f ṣraḍ b ṭib zhar

Ma nerref sekra wella xemr w la nedri qmasel wella xmarra

(...) Ḥetta jani waḥed nnṣiy nṣeh-ni b lfaḍ lemṛani ṭebru-h w ṣhar

W jleb-ni b ṭrqa yên cċeer w lfaḍ mrunqin w slis ᵻbara

Cehha-ni f kas qal-li ma rit asaḥi mdaṃ bin ᵝwaneṣ lebkar

B łyni w nyayem lewter w bnat ᵻheyy bin ebən w skara

3.3 Llibraliya Bnina Wella Mettweḥḥca? – Ljemḥiya Llebralinya Ddziriya

ecided SEMMAR w menṛ lechar f Google w Facebook.

ecided SEMMAR men jmaret “llibraliya lmettweḥḥca”. Huwa lamaḥala librali qeḥḥ f qḍayya lmjetmer, bᵉṣṣeḥ f leqṭṣad ṣeks hadak b lkell w ycuф bellı lḥerriya hiya ttkweḥḥec.
Qrit-lu lyum artikel yehki fi-h ela qrar mene lechar f Google w Facebook.
Lartikel tacé-u kan yehmel nebra jedd selbiya ela kbar ccerkat tar linternet, qal-lek yestyellu-na, lazem ddula tṭaksi-hem w teqsem ddrahem tar tṭaksuwat ela lmentjin tar lmeḥtwa ddziriyin.

W qṭrēḥ tani bezzaf jra’at pruteksyunist hdaf-ha, tecji lmeḥtwa lemḥelli, w had lejra’at telceeb fi-hem ddula dur ṭrebb, ṭrebb nas mlaḥ, yneḥḥi leflus men ēnd lbeṛḍ w yeṭṭi-hem l lbeṛd laxter.

Ɛebdu SEMMAR, kima kamel tbar lidyulujyat cemmawiya, yefrel ma la yaqul. Lartikel tar-u lli yentqed fi-h Google lesteylaliya ḥaṭṭ fi-h ela lqell ēbra charat Google. Fekker-ni f Fatma NNEJJAR, hadik leslamiya tar Lmerruk lli mexteṣṣa f mḥaḍrat zna lrin w lli ḥekmu-ha tbenyeṭ l waḥed mzewwej f ṭumubil.
4 References


[24] D. Caubet, "About the transmission of Maghrebi Arabic in France".


