

## Morocco: An Informal Passage to Literacy in *dārija* (Moroccan Arabic)

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In this contribution, I shall deal with a recent development in keyboard-to-screen communication in *dārija* (Moroccan Arabic). I postulate that qualitative change is taking place and that we are now reaching a stage where a further step is being crossed, from the passage to writing and deciphering that took place from the early 2000s, to literacy proper.

From the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, the new technologies have allowed a spontaneous passage to writing for a language variety that has not been codified. It was led by actors from civil society who, slowly but steadily, taught themselves to read and write in *dārija*, with a true D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself!) spirit. This writing is 'informal', in the sense of taking place in the 'informal sector', i.e. first, outside of state control or regulation, and second, with the 'coping' behaviour of individuals who take over when the institutions are absent (by 'coping' I mean taking responsibility and initiative at their level).

### The First Steps

In Morocco, it started within two different networks. One was the small circle of initiates who used *mIRC*,<sup>2</sup> an Internet Relay Chatting system for computers, from the end of the 1990s. The other started in 2001 with the use of SMS on mobile phones, and rapidly developed for a wider audience (see Caubet 2004). With *mIRC*, people learnt to chat in Latin script, the only option available on computers at the end of the 90s. It was later replaced by a more popular web-based instant messaging device, *msn* (*Windows Live Messenger*), through which people could chat for hours, connecting from cyber-café, since very few

1 D.I.Y., *Do It Yourself*, the attitude developed by the punk subculture in the 70's.

2 See <http://www.mirc.com> and for North Africa, see Berjaoui 2001 for Morocco and Babassi 2004 for Algeria.

could afford to buy a computer and have a connection at home; this went on from 2005 to 2010. Unlike Facebook, the early chat systems provided users with anonymity.

Mobile phones also gave people independence – especially girls, who could exchange text messages, whereas they were not allowed to go to cyber-café, which sounded like “café” in the eyes of their families. Even for those who were not fluent in reading French, mastering the Latin alphabet could be reinvested in writing short messages in *dārija* (see the case studied in Caubet 2004).

### *Dārija: A Change in Practices and Status in the Civil Society*

*Dārija* has undergone a drastic change in practices and status in the Moroccan emerging civil society, while the institutions completely failed to follow suit.

Practice first came in the form of a passage to writing on first-generation mobile phones in Latin script. This choice was not ideological, but practical, because the only available phones and computers at the time were equipped with French keyboards. In 2006, the same young people who wrote *dārija* in Latin script on keyboard-mediated exchanges, when given a pen, would instinctively write in Arabic script (see Caubet 2012). They would use a different script (Latin vs Arabic), whether they wrote on a piece of paper or on a keyboard. At the time, older people would either not be aware of – or despise – these practices.

Status came slightly later and was influenced by the development of these practices. Voices started to claim that *dārija* was a key element for the definition of a new Moroccan identity, being the language that unites all Moroccans. Such voices came from a social and cultural movement which emerged in the early 2000s and was compared to the Spanish *Movida*. *Nayda*<sup>3</sup> was the name given to a cultural effervescence that took place during the years 2005–2008.

However, the key year is 2003, when two dramatic episodes contributed to change the course of events: first, the arrest of 14 young heavy metal music lovers, their trial in February 2003, and the public mobilisation that followed; second, on May 16, seven simultaneous kamikaze fundamentalist bombings involving 14 youngsters from a neglected neighbourhood in Casablanca (Sidi

3 *Nayda* is the active participle of the verb *naḍ* “to rise”; it was an expression used in youth language “it’s moving, it’s rocking”, and it became the name of the Moroccan *Movida* (see Caubet 2010b).

Moumen), causing the death of 33 people (apart from themselves), and leading to massive public questioning in Moroccan society. As a consequence, the 'legal' fundamentalists (the present Prime Minister's party, the PJD) disappeared from the political life for a whole year and brought a breath of freedom. This is when the underground movement started to grow on the public scene until it became a socio-cultural movement, and was heavily mediatized from 2006 (see Caubet 2007, 2008, 2010a and the documentary *Casanayda!*).<sup>4</sup> *Dārija* played a central part in the artistic productions of this new music scene, and artists claimed that it was their language and that they were proud of it. *Dārija* was a means to convey things in a more Moroccan way, to try and speak the language of the people.

The status of *dārija* has changed radically in the last ten years: it had been associated with illiteracy, backwardness and was considered incompatible with education or progress. Now it has become trendy and modern, considered as *the* language capable of accompanying the *Nayda*. At the same time, fierce debates about the official use of *dārija* in the schooling system have been going on since October 2013. This is in itself significant: while institutions seem to have rejected *dārija* once again, the fact that the question has been raised and discussed at length is a sign of change.<sup>5</sup> One also should not underestimate the fact that the absence of an institution and official formatting may present an opportunity for boundless communicative freedom and creativity.

For writing in Latin script, techniques have been described (Benitez Fernández 2012, Caubet 2013, Moscoso 2009), noting variation in writing between 'scriptors' and even for the same writer. But over the years, people have taught themselves to write and to read (in that order), acquiring a high level of fluency that I wish to describe as a 'passage to writing'. The phenomenon is so important that it is mentioned in columns, like Zakaria Boualem in *Telquel* weekly by Reda Allali; on February 21, 2016, in a paper called "Zakaria Boualem et l'école en français,"<sup>6</sup> he writes:

Pendant que des commissions se penchent tous les jours, et que des théoriciens glosent, sur les choix stratégiques, des millions de Marocains, chaque minute, s'écrivent en *dārija* avec des chiffres et des lettres parce qu'on refuse de normaliser ce qui devrait être notre langue.

4 A film written by D. Caubet, directed by F. Benlyazid and A. Mettour, Sigma, Casablanca 2007, in six episodes on youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRrT1zRzmFQ>.

5 For this debate, see Miller 2014 and Caubet & Miller 2016.

6 [http://telquel.ma/2016/02/21/zakaria-boualem-lecole-en-francais\\_1483687](http://telquel.ma/2016/02/21/zakaria-boualem-lecole-en-francais_1483687).

While commissions address and theoreticians gloss daily on strategic choices, millions of Moroccans, exchange every minute in *dārija*, using numbers and letters because (the authorities) refuse to normalize what should be our language.

Although it was technically possible to write in Arabic script from 2009, with the Facebook Arabic interface, it takes time to change practices. But when people do switch to using Arabic, they also undergo what I will term a ‘passage to literacy’. Thus, in 2014–2016, I observed a passage from the stage of plain writing and deciphering *dārija* to that of an ability to comprehend and express longer, elaborate, and even literary, texts.

### The Arabic Script: Literacy on Smartphones and Computers

For the general public and internet users, the passage to the Arabic script is recent and slow, simply because people find it difficult to type in Arabic. Nowadays however one can download an application that provides an Arabic keyboard for smartphones, which makes it easier. By the end of 2009, out of a million users, 85 % used the French interface and only 6.5 %, the Arabic one (Tancrez 2009). In 2012, the French interface had gone down to 76 %<sup>7</sup> – and it remained at 75 % in 2014,<sup>8</sup> with 7.2 million profiles; more recently, the use of Arabic went up: from 17 % at the end of 2012 to 33 % in 2014. The figures – adding up to more than 100 % – show that a number of people use both French and Arabic interfaces.

By the end of 2009, 25 million mobile phone subscribers had sent 2.85 billion text messages.<sup>9</sup> The corresponding figures for 2011 were 36.5 million/over 5 billion SMS, and for 2013 42.4 million/over 11 billion SMS. Just a comparison and a reminder about the situation ten years previously, in 2003: the number of SMS was estimated at 550 million, for 7.3 million mobile phones (see Caubet 2004).

Internet penetration went up tremendously in one year, reaching 30 % at the end of 2014, up from 17 % in 2013.

7 For the 2012 figures, see <https://eplume.wordpress.com/2011/07/20/les-reseaux-sociaux-au-maroc-et-dans-le-monde-arabe-twitter-facebook-statistique-etude-du-printemps>.

8 The last available figures are for 2014: <http://www.usinenouvelle.com/article/les-marocains-toujours-accros-a-facebook-mais-retifs-a-twitter.N272945>.

9 All the following figures are taken from the annual reports of the ANRT, and can be found at [anrt.ma](http://anrt.ma).

TABLE 5.1 *Nb of SMS / Nb of mobile phones – D. Caubet from ANRT figures*

Year (end of)	Number of mobile phones subscribers	Number of SMS issued
2003	7.3 million	550 million (estim.)
2009	25 million	2.85 billion
2011	36.5 million	5 billion
2013	42.4 million	11 billion
2014	44.1 million	19.7 billion

With the development of Arabic keyboards on smartphones and computers, people started using the Arabic script, but less so than Middle Eastern countries; while Morocco had reached 33 % of the Arabic interface on Facebook at the end of 2014, Egypt already had 60 % in May 2012.<sup>10</sup>

Recent figures give 12 million Facebook subscribers in Morocco in June 2016, with a 35.5 % penetration rate for Facebook (See table 5.2 below).

To switch from a system of writing you master to another one, you need to have a strong motivation: either you find it easier to write in Arabic, or there are new technical possibilities (Arabic interface for Facebook and Arabic keyboards on smartphones), and your social network (your friends) is also switching to Arabic. But it may also be that you have made a political decision to write in *dārīja* in Arabic script, because this is how your message will be conveyed to a maximum of people who are not really at ease reading Standard Arabic or French. Another reason, more political, is the idea of access to the people, in a post-‘Arab spring’ climate. The writers I interviewed are convinced that if you want to reach the people, you must write *dārīja* in Arabic script, and this is what they have decided to do when posting on Facebook or when writing longer texts on a blog. They write in *dārīja* for the following reasons: in order to be understood; because it is rich and authentic (*hit ġanya u ašila*), because it is very powerful (*qwiya*); because you cannot lie to the people by using *lughat l-khashab* (< Fr. “langue de bois”, i.e. political cant).

10 See <http://www.spotonpr.com/facebook-arabic-triumphs>: this is the last data available on the question and it has probably grown in Morocco in 2016.

TABLE 5.2 *Facebook penetration. Established with 2016 figures from Internet World Stats.*<sup>11</sup>

Country	Population (2016 Est.)	Facebook subscribers 30-June-2016	Facebook penetration rate (%)
Algeria	40,263,711	15,000,000	37.2
Egypt	90,067,793	32,000,000	35.52
Iraq	37,547,686	14,000,000	37.28
Lebanon	5,988,153	3,100,000	52.7
<b>Morocco</b>	<b>33,655,786</b>	<b>12,000,000</b>	<b>35.65</b>
Saudi Arabia	32,157,974	14,000,000	43.53
United Arab Emirates	9,266,971	7,700,000	83
Tunisia	11,134,588	5,800,000	52.1

Some of the authors I have been following for over two years had a link with the 20th February movement (#Feb20); not with the more politicized students who would use Standard Arabic, the language of politics, but with the *oulad cha3b* of more popular origin. Some of them have been jailed on fallacious pretexts, like Mouad L'7aged who spent one year and eight months in jail over a period of three years,<sup>12</sup> or Mohamed Sokrate, a blogger who was sentenced to two years in June 2012,<sup>13</sup> a sign that shows how disturbing they were for the system. Others were members of the Feb20 *lejnāt el-ibda3* (Creative Committee).

### New Literacy: Examples of Elaborate Texts

The idea of writing and reading in *dārija* has become commonplace and does not constitute a problem any longer in civil society. The general attitude is 'informality' and 'tolerance', and the absence of an official norm gives total

11 Figures for Africa and the Middle East: see <http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ma> and <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>.

12 From Sept. 2011 to Sept. 2014; for more information, see <http://www.npr.org/2012/01/06/144798285/rappers-imprisonment-tests-moroccan-reforms> and <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/17/el-haqed-morocco-hip-hop-revolutionary>. In January 2016, he asked for political asylum in Belgium, which he was granted in February 2017.

13 For more information, see <http://www.freearabs.com/index.php/society/81-stories/1073-jb-span-profile-jb-span-the-arab-bukowski> and Caubet forthcoming 2017.

freedom to the writers, as to which script to choose. No one is being reproached for his choice or for his spelling; everyone naturally understands the others without raising any issue.

What I present here is new material that I have been collecting since 2014; I witnessed a qualitative change in the texts published on the internet: writing of long elaborate prose texts in *dārija*, passing from basic communication to literacy proper.

What is remarkable is the massive character of the process – which concerns millions of youths in Morocco, and in the Arab world – for languages without any official recognition, and whose status is given by the civil society and not by the state. I will present three authors: 1) rapper Mouad L7agd, 2) blogger Harabish and 3) slammer Mustapha Slameur (for a wider range of authors, see Caubet forthcoming 2017).

### *Mouad*

Mouad is a rapper, but in February 2015, he published two stories, “T7arbichat” number one and two,<sup>14</sup> where he writes about his memories of the first demonstration of February 20, 2011. The title comes from “*7arabich*”, i.e. the name the members of the *lejnat el-ibda3* (Creation Committee) of the Feb20 chose for themselves. We will also see texts by a close friend of his, who blogs under the name Harabish (see below).

In late 2015, Mouad decided to leave Morocco and come to Europe, because it was impossible for him to express himself there: well-known as he is, he had not been able to perform in a concert of his own; they were all banned. The only times he went on stage was when he was invited unannounced by fellow rappers, like L'Moutchou (Mobydick).<sup>15</sup> The general tendency is not towards solidarity with Mouad L7agd among rappers, and very often on the two-faced grounds that he is not a good rapper ...

In Belgium, he wrote more prose texts and on 13 February 2016, he announced the publication on his l7agd page: “Stay tuned for Mouad l7agd’s exclusive diary on goud.ma”:

ترقبوا مذكرات معاد الحاقه حصريا على كود

The series is published under the title “Men 3okacha l Molenbeek” (From Okacha to Molenbeek); the publication started on 18 February 2016 and came out regularly two or three times a week (parts 1 to 15).

14 Text 1 has 464 words, 2413 signs; *T7arbichat* means stories about *7arabich* guys.

15 See <https://www.facebook.com/lmoutchou/?fref=ts>.

من عكاشة الى مولنيك، مذكرات معاد الحاقاد

With the present text, we are witnessing his first steps in the domain of writing.

This extract is the second part of *T7arbichat* number 1 (in bold the terms whose spelling will be discussed below):

كنقول مع راسي ليوما غيسالي هاد شي، خاصها تشعل خاصنا نغوتو، صاف مشا وقت  
السكوت والخوف، واحد لحضة نقر واحد خونا سميتو لحسين غادي نتعرف عليه من بعد  
وقال لواحد خونا كان كصور حبس التصوير وبدا كغوت 'والخزن يا طلع برا' وناس كتعاود  
من وراه، خونا مول لكاميرا مشا بحالو و دخلات واحد ختنا حتا هي بدات كتهضر ...

kangol m3a rasi lyoma gha ysali had ši, ḥaṣṣ-ha tše3l, ḥaṣṣ-na nghowwto,  
ṣafi mša wegt s-sokut w-el-ḥof; wa7ed l-le7ḍa neggez wa7ed ḥona smiyt-  
o le7sin, ghadi netez3ref 3li-h men be3d, o gal l-wa7ed ḥona kan kiṣowwer  
'7bes et-teṣwir' o bda kighowwet 'O l-maḥzen ytle3 berra!' o n-nas  
kat3awed men oura-h, ḥona mol l-kamira mša b7alo o deḥlat wa7ed ḥetna  
7ta hiya bdat katehḍer?

I said to myself, all this is going to end, it must stay lit, we must shout;  
the time of silence and fear has ended. And in an instant, a guy named  
Lhocine – whom I would get to know later – jumped up and he told a guy  
who was filming 'Stop filming!' and he started to shout 'Let the Makhzen  
leave!' and people repeat it after him; the guy with the camera went home  
and a girl came in, and she too started to speak.

واحد اللضة كيبان لينا لبيشان ولميكروات كتبرونشاو وتجمع تقريبا كلشي فالفنت ليسر دبال  
ساحة الحمام، أبدا صوت كتسمع شي حد كهضر، مشينا أنا وعشراني نشوفواش واقع، لقينا  
مجموعة دبال الناس حطو بيشان ودارين سلوم طالع فوقو واحد كهضر وملصقين واحد شارة  
واقبلا مكتوب فيها عشرين فبراير، ودارين واحد الدائرة مانعين بنادم يدخل ليها إلا مكانتش  
ديك الشارة فكتفو ...

Wa7ed el-le7ḍa kayban li-na l-bigab (pick up) o l-mikruwat kitbranšaw (>  
*Fr. brancher*) o tejme3 tegriban kolši f-el-gent l-liser dyal sa7at l-7mam, o  
bda ṣot kattesme3 ši 7edd kiyhḍer; mšina ana o zešrani nšofo aš wa9e3,  
lgina mejmo3a dyal n-nas 7eṭto bigab o dayrin sellom ṭale3 fogo, wa7ed  
kihḍer o mleṣṣgin wa7ed šara wagila mektub fi-ha zo feb, o dayrin wa7ed  
d-dazira mân3in bnamem ydḥel liha ila ma kanetš dik šara f-ктаفو ...



After a while, we saw the van and mikes being plugged in, and nearly everyone gathered on the left corner of the Pigeon Plaza, and a voice could be heard, someone speaking; I went with my friends to see what was happening, we found a group of people who had brought the van and put a ladder to climb on top, and a guy talking; they all had stuck badges that said 20 Feb, and they had formed a circle, forbidding people to get in if they were not wearing that badge on their shoulder ...

أوااااه<sup>16</sup> أش هاد شي ... شكون هادو؟؟

أنا وعشراني بقا فينا لحال شكون هادو علاش يديرو بحال هكدا؟ شكون لي عطاهم الحق يهضرو بسميت شي حاجة؟ كيفاش نصبو راسهم قيادة علينا؟؟

Awwaaah, aš had ši ... škon hadu? Ana o zešrani bga fina l7al; škon hadu glaš idiro b7al hakka? Škon lli 3ṭahom l7e99 yhedro b-smiyt ši 7aja? kifaš naḍo ras-hom giyada 3lina?

Heyyy, what's this? Who are these guys? We didn't like it, my friends and me ... Who are they? Why are they doing this? Who gave them the right to speak in the name of a movement? How did they find themselves ruling over us?

بدينا كنغوتو أنا وعشراني، معجبناش ديكور ... بدينا مطلعينا عليهم بالشعارات، هو ييجي لعندنا واحد خونا كان حتا هو داير شارة ...  
نكل من بعد إلا رشقات ليا ...

Bdina kanghuwwto, ana o zešrani, ma 3jebnaš d-dikor ... bdina mṭell3ina 3lihom b š-šizarat, howa yji l-3end-na wa7ed ḥona, kan 7ta howa dayr šara ...  
nkemmel men bezd ila rešgat lina ...

We started shouting, my friends and me, we weren't pleased with the situation, we started provoking them with their slogans, so one guy wearing a badge came up to us

I shall go on later, if it pleases us ...

16 Expressivity is also marked by duplication of letters in Arabic script.

He actually published a series of 23 texts between February and May 2016 on goud.ma.

### Harabish

Harabish, the author of the blog *حربشات من البعد الآخر* *7arbichat men l-bozd l-aħer* ("7arbichates"<sup>17</sup> from another dimension), is a very close friend of Mouad and he has engaged with him in artistic projects. He is present on several clips and has recorded a number of tracks with him since his 2014 album, *Waloo والووا* "Nothing";<sup>18</sup> his voice is more on the reggae side.

Previously, he was trained as a blogger in Casablanca for a project entitled "Reinforcing the capacities of Arab bloggers and journalists for the promotion of Human Rights", in 2013 by the Arab Institute for Human Rights,<sup>19</sup> a regional NGO based in Tunisia. His blog won one of the three awards presented on 14 December 2013 in Tunis. His idea was to blog in his own language, as Harabish puts it:

هد المدونة ديال وحد مبتدأ، التدوينات بالدارجة المغربية القصحة، كتناقش مواضيع إجتماعية وسياسية و مواضيع خرى لا علاقة، تقدر تعجبكم تقدر متعجبكمش الموهيم هوا أنا عاجباني.

Had-el-mudawana dyal wa7ed mubtada2, t-tadwinat b-ed-dārija el-mağribiya el qaṣṣa, katna9ech mawaḍi3 ijtima3iya o siyasiya o mawaḍi3 ḥora la 3laga, tegder tezjbek tegder ma tezjbek ch, el-mohimm howa ana ajjbani.

This blog is the work of a novice; the entries are written in harsh Moroccan Arabic; it deals with social and political issues, and also with other subjects that have nothing to do with this. It may appeal to you and it may not appeal to you; anyways, what's important is that it appeals to me.

17 Stories by a 7arabich, i.e. a member of Feb20 Creation committee.

18 See the tracks on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGFprugyoso>.

19 168 bloggers were trained coming from nine Arab countries from February 2012 to January 2014 by the Arab Institute for Human Rights; Harabish created his blog during the training and went on writing. In the following report, this training is developed; see particularly p. 4:

[http://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/UDF-RAS-10-369\\_Evaluation\\_Arab%20states.pdf](http://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/UDF-RAS-10-369_Evaluation_Arab%20states.pdf).

The blog counts 29 texts (20,700 words). It has been running since 26 February 2013 and the last text was posted on 3 August 2015. When a new text is posted, it gets over a thousand readings, according to Harabish.

We'll present two extracts from a text called مشاهد (scenes),<sup>20</sup> where he makes abundant use of understatement, humorously stating in fous7a that nothing is true: “لا شيء حقيقي”

#### المشهد الأول:

دخل للكوميسارية، قصد البيرو ديال الشاف و كاليه (ملي الشاف شاف فيه بواحد الشوفة ديال شنو باغي؟)  
 - بغيت نديكلاري بالضيعة  
 الشاف: شنو ضاع ليك؟  
 - ضاعت شي حاجة سميتها وطن

El-mašhed l-uwwel:

Dħel le-l-komisariya, qšed l l-biro dyal š-šaf o gal lih (melli š-šaf šaf fih b wa7ed š-šofan dyal šno baği?)  
 – Bğit n-diklari (< Fr. déclarer) be-ḍ-ḍiy3a  
 Š-šaf: šno ḍa3 lik?  
 – ḍa3et ši 7aja smiytha “waṭan”

Scene one:

He went in the police station and went directly to the chief's office (when the chief gave him a look that meant: what does he want?)  
 – I want to declare a loss  
 The chief: What have you lost?  
 – What is lost is something named “homeland”

#### المشهد الثاني:

(مشهد: صامت، المكان: طوبيس عامر بزاف ولي واقفين كتر من اللي كالسين)  
 - طلعات للطوبيس و بقات كتشوف فيه.

20 Published on 21 April 2015. The complete text counts 546 words.

- حتى هو بقا كيشوف فيها حيث عرفها، هي البنت لي عندو فلائحة الأصدقاء فالفايسبوك،  
ولي ديمّا كتكتب حول موضوع المساوات بين الراجل والمرأة وبلي راهم بحال بحال لي يديرو  
الراجل ديرو تاهي.

- مازال كتشوف فيه تاهي وحسات بلي ركة معاها بزاف و هو كيشوف فيها.

- تلف بزاف و مابقاش عارف شنو يدير.

- حسات بيه متوتر بزاف و مابقاش مرتاح.

- ما لقي ما يدير جبد كتاب من شكارتو وبدى كيقرأ فيه باش ما يبقاش يشوف فيها وهي  
كدير فيه شوف المش الجيعان، باش ينوض ويخليها تكلّس فبلاصتو حيث كايّن الزحام، و  
حيث غتعي بزاف حيث هي غير بنت.

El-mešhed t-tani:

(Mešhed: Samt, Imakan: ʔobis 3amer bezzaf o lli wagfin kter men lli galsin)

– ʔel3at le-ʔ-ʔobis o b9at katšof fih.

– 7ta howa b9a kayšof fiha 7it 3refha, hiya l-bent lli 3endo fel-lazi7at  
al-2asdi9a fel-faycebook, o lli dima katkteb 7awl mawdu3 el-mosawat bin  
r-rajel o le-mra o belli rahom b7al b7al, lli idiro r-rajel, tdiro ta hiya.

– ma zal katšof fih ta hiya o 7essat belli rekkez ma3ha bezzaf o howa  
kayšof fiha.

– tlef bezzaf o ma b9aš 3aref chno ydir.

– 7essat bih metwutter bezzaf o ma b9aš merta7.

– Ma l9a ma idir, jbed ktab men škarto bda kay9ra fih baš ma yeb9aš  
yšof fiha o hiya katdir fiha šofat el-mešš le-j3an, baš ynoḍ o yḥalliha tegles  
f-blaṣto 7it kayn ez-z7am o 7it 9at3ani bezzaf 7it hiya 9ir bent.

Scene two:

(Scene: silence; place: a very full bus where more people are standing than seating)

– She climbed on the bus and she kept staring at him.

– He too, started looking at her, because he knew her; she is the girl  
he has on his list of friends on Facebook, who is always writing about the  
subject of equality between man and woman, and that they are the same:  
what man does, she can do it too.

– She goes on staring at him because she felt that he is thinking of her  
and that he is staring at her.

– He was lost and did not know what to do.

- She felt that he was very tense and he was not at ease anymore.
- He did not find what to do, so he picked up a book from his bag and began to read, in order not to look at her anymore; she was giving him a hungry cat's look for him to get up and let her sit in his place, because there was a crowd, and it would take care of her, because she is a girl ...

Harabish sometimes posts long texts or extracts from his blog texts on his Facebook profiles on which he has nearly 5000 “friends”. He is a student and it is not always simple for him to connect, with very little means to do so.

### *Slam Poetry*

Slam Poetry or ‘Spoken Word’ is poetry in performance; it started in the 1990s in the United States with African-Americans poets who were explicitly following what the Beat Generation and the “Négritude” poets had done previously when they declaimed their texts.<sup>21</sup>

El Mssati, when he organized *Café Slam* in February 2015, gave a good definition of Spoken Word for young Moroccans using youth language and comparing it to rap:<sup>22</sup>

hint slam ra machi howa lketba, slam ra howa dek stoon lli, fech katkoun tale3 *open mic* o kat7awel t3aber 3la dek text lli nta katbo, o fech katbghi tsejlo, tgder tsemih *Spoken word. Poetry ... (his original spelling)*

because slam is not just writing, slam is that stuff where, when you go on stage for an Open Mic, and you're trying to recite that text that you wrote and when you want to record it; you can call it Spoken word. Poetry ...

He organized a *Thé Slam* in 2016,<sup>23</sup> and this is how he addressed the potential poets (original writing), and what were the languages at stake (sic: their original spelling):

Vas-y Parle.. B'dārīja TKLM personne ne te stopera ! Le Micro est ouvert pour tous ceux qui souhaite déclamer, partager leur poésie, leur texte et leur état d'ame en toute liberté loin de toute censure; que ça soit en darija, français, anglais ou meme bien japonais venez nous faire part de

21 See <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/brief-guide-slam-poetry>.

22 For the complete text, see Caubet forthcoming 2017.

23 <https://www.facebook.com/events/1743195605924179>.

votre poésie. Nous vous donnons RDV le samedi 13 fevrier à l'Espace "Les Artistes" Rabat (Café-Restaurant).<sup>24</sup> (sic)

يلاه هدر ... تكلم تاحد ماغايحبسك! هادي هي الفرصة باش اي واحد باغي يعبر، يشعر و  
يشارك معنا الاحاسيس ديالو يديرها بكل حرية وبدون رقابة. بالدارجة، بفرونسي، بلوغي  
وحتا بالجابونية، الي ميكرو مفتوح ليكوم. اجيو نهار السبت 13 فبراير لكافي  
باش تشاركو معنا الشعر ديالكوم!

Poets compete with intense emotion during public Slam sessions. This genre is very new in Morocco and is found more in the form of videos posted on internet than performed live, due to the lack of events. The languages used can be MSA, French but mostly *dārija*, sometimes with some codeswitching.

**Mustapha Slameur** is a former rapper who started very young in the late 90's under the name Steph Raggaman. He began slamming around 2012 and he was the first to publicize this art on the social networks where is very active. He regularly posts videos of slam texts on his youtube channel, *Le Slam de Mustapha*. In 2015 he initiated slam workshops at the Institut Français of El Jadida, the town where he works as a teacher. On his Facebook profile, he regularly posts long texts or very short videos giving his point of view, or defending street arts in general, and a street artist from Algiers in particular (January 16, 2016). He has texts in French, and more recently in Standard Arabic (because he aims at Francophone and Arab audiences), but the language he uses most naturally is *dārija*, which he calls<sup>25</sup> "*al-Magharibiya*; en référence au Maghreb. A la base on n'est pas des Arabes, mais des *Maghariba*, Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc", referring to the Maghreb and not just Morocco. And he adds, defining the language: "Donc forcément il y a des mots en français; une super grande ouverture sur l'espagnol".

24 Come on! Speak up, in Dārija, TKLM (talk), no one will stop you! The mike will be open to all those who want to declaim, to share poetry, their text and their state of mind in complete freedom, far from any censorship; whethet in Dārija, French, English, or even in Japanese, come and share your poetry. We'll be happy to meet you ... Transcription of Dārija: *Yallah, hder, tkellem, ta 7ad ma gay7ebsek! Hadi hiya el-forSa baš ey wa7ed baḡi ye3bber, yešre3 o yšarek m3ana el-7asis dyalo ydirha b-koll 7oriya o bidon ragba. B-ed-dārija, b-fronsi, b-longli o 7ta b-el-jaboniya, ila micro mefto7 likom! Ajio biha ssebt 13 febrayer l Cafē les Artistes baš tšharko m3ana š-šezr dyalkom.*

25 All the quotations come from an exchange we had on facebook messenger, 18 January 2016, mostly in French. "Initially, we're not Arabs, but '*Maghariba*' (Maghribians)". "So inevitably there are French words; a great opening on Spanish".

*Slameur* claims the right to mix languages, because a) it is common in North Africa; and b) as an artist, who defines himself as a ‘rime hunter’: “Je suis un chasseur de rime. Entre arabe, *dārija*, espagnol ou français, Je me sers. La sonorité prime et les mots ont une charge *f* le sens spécial qui donne forcément un punch aux phrases.”<sup>26</sup> He also uses English (see below). When he reads out his texts, this mixing is extremely well-done and sounds perfectly natural, and very dramatic as is the habit with Slam. He does not publish his texts apart from the videos. The lyrics have to be found on internet and for the title chosen here, it was published by Don Badr.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, we will examine the way this person writes *dārija*.

Slam is by definition ‘spoken word’ and, unlike the previous texts, it is not meant to be read. I am including it as a form of elaborate text, composed by an author. Apart from Mustapha, young artists have emerged in 2014 or 2015, like Hamza El Mssati (whom we saw above) or girls, like Salma and Loubna, who post videos regularly.<sup>28</sup> I chose to give long extracts of a text.<sup>29</sup> It is the first of a series called ‘Taire-bouche’<sup>30</sup> (a word play with the Moroccan word *terbuš* “Fez, brimless cap”, and the French ‘Taire bouche’ [lit. hush up-mouth]) – a collaboration with three other authors who are rappers, L’Morphine, Mehdi Black Wind and Magma (published in September 2014, counting over 251.000 views in February 2016). Mustapha speaks against injustices, corruption, the lack of social equality, the lack of trust in politicians, etc.; all these themes are also present in some rap texts (see Caubet 2010b). His motto, printed on T-shirts, is self-explanatory: *kedbou ɣlina ... كذبوا علينا* “they lied to us”. This is an extract of Mustapha Slameur’s piece; I must thank Mustapha for the help he gave me for the translation:

26 “I am a rime hunter. I help myself to Arabic, Darija, French, Spanish. The sound has priority and gives words a load in a special sense, and it inevitably adds some punch to the sentences.”

27 The lyrics, as published by Don Badr, count 420 views: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4afbLTUIS2Q>.

28 For Salma Slameuse, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPDn\\_JSNnTs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPDn_JSNnTs); for Loubna La Slameuse, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKo\\_WSmJChU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKo_WSmJChU), where we get a glimpse of her note book, which shows that she writes *Dārija* by hand in Latin script; for Mssati, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whsj-LEX\\_jl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whsj-LEX_jl), *Slam f Dlam* “Slam in the Dark”, with the lyrics in Latin script.

29 For more extracts see Caubet forthcoming.

30 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlMzuCoUAQ4> and <http://qgprod.com/2014/09/mustapha-slameur-feat-lmorphine-magma-mehdi-black-wind-taire-bouche>. The text has 545 words in Arabic script and 62 lines.

تمنيت علام ما كايفيكسيك تا حد بعينه مكيتنخموش الناس فالزناقي.  
 كولشي مديها فسوق جواه مبلي بحابقو وليهم ساق.  
 فهاد البلاد مواتنا مكيجيهومش لـ baby blues  
 مكين غا ولد ولوح للشارع نفخ الباقل غير باللوز  
 فهاد البلاد بغاوك تشفر وتبيع زريعة القنب  
 واخا كلشي كايهضر بالدين دماغ راه مجنب  
 فهاد البلاد الشباب موزر فعالم اقراض  
 عايش Sharapova-string قالك قاضي عليك غراضي  
 كولشي خوتي باغي لـ Ferrari فل bleu ciel  
 That's what I need

I wish for a world where people do not stare angrily at each other, where  
 they do not spit aggressively at each other in the street,  
 A world, where everyone minds his own business and cultivates his  
 garden.  
 In this country, our mothers don't have time to experience the "baby  
 blues",  
 All you do is give birth and throw him on the street and (for men) swell  
 your balls by eating almonds.  
 In this country they want you to steal and to sell chips at the corner  
 Even if everyone talks about religion, the minds are filled with sins.  
 In this country, the youth is lost in a virtual world,  
 Living with "Sharapova's string", they don't care about the way she plays  
 (tennis)  
 Everyone, my friends, wants a sky "blue Ferrari"

Je m'en fous -phone ركبت فكاع الحديد.  
 نص حياتو دايزا نعاس ... النص لاخور Candy Crush  
 James Dean ولي علاء الدين لمن غايشبه (متصرطاش)  
 فهاد البلاد بنادم موزر وخا عندو GPS  
 صافي surfé على لـ vague د l'buzz وشري باين و TPS  
 مرحبا بيكم كاملين ف قلبان la fista social club كلشي لوش



حيث بنادم فمؤ خنز بالكذب وخصوصاً bain bouche  
 الفقيه ... الفقيه لي كنتسناو براكتو دخل للجامع بالحذاء  
 أش كنتسناو من chromosome مطورش غير في الإفتاء.  
 حيث حنا لي فينا العيب بقينا كنعطيو César كاع داكشي لي بغا César  
 ناض هز المانطا والخاف وجر علينا ليزار

“Need for speed” (a video game) on my “phone, I don’t care” I’ve driven  
 nearly every type of car.  
 Half his life was spent sleeping, the other half playing “Candy Crush”,  
 “James Dean” or Ala’ Eddine, who will he choose to be? (I can’t swallow  
 this!)

In this country people are lost even if they have a “GPS”  
 Just “surf on the wave of the buzz” and buy Bayn and “TPS”  
 Welcome to you all to the “turn around” your “Vista<sup>31</sup> social club”,  
 everything is weird (Fr. louche)  
 People’s mouths smell bad because of the lies, they need “a mouthwash”.  
 The fqih ... the fqih, whose benediction we are waiting for, entered the  
 mosque with his shoes  
 What can you expect from a “chromosome” who only educates by way of  
*fatwas*?  
 Because what is forbidden to us, we keep giving it a “César”,<sup>32</sup> everything  
 that needs a “César”  
 He (a politician) got up and took the election signs and posters, and he  
 stripped us of our sheets (and blankets)

L’arriviste عد العين كيف ديما مخرج اللوائح السارة.  
 L’cravate جاتوزازة والاه ... من البيصارة لـ carbonara  
 ساكن فواحد الدرب مكبوصلهش livreur د pizza  
 gitone فدار لا مان الصاكا الصفرة  
 حيث موالفين تانديرو hashtag بالجنتوي فالدلاح.

31 Word play between *gelleb el fista* “turn your jacket around”, i.e. “change your mind”, and  
 (Buena) Vista Social Club.

32 The “Césars” are the equivalent of the Oscars in France.

يعز المرء أو ييهان مع الثلاثة ديال الصباح فالملاح.  
كاين الرجال وكاين les chiens toute la vie ديريه خاتم بين يديك.

The “arrivist” (social climber) looks very nice, as usual, and the posters are well printed  
The “tie” suits him nicely, wow ... from “bisara” (“broad-pea soup”, the poor man’s meal) to “Carbonara”  
He lives in a street where the pizza “delivery guy” does not set foot  
He set up a “tent” in Dar El Amane, near the yellow kiosk<sup>33</sup>  
Because we are used to publish a “hashtag” when we set a knife in the watermelon  
He is a tough guy, but it is impossible to visit the Mellah<sup>34</sup> at three in the morning.  
There are men, and there are “dogs for life” wearing a ring in their hands  
...

Although spoken word is meant to be performed orally, it goes through a phase where it is written down, either on paper or on a keyboard by its author before it is read aloud. Its poetic texts are considered elaborate and pertain to literature.

### Remarks on the Spelling of *dārija*

The spelling of *dārija* differs from one author to the other, but they are many more points in common than there are differences. Mouad l7a9d, for example, has a much more phonetic approach than Harabish and Don Bader, who wrote down Mustapha Slameur’s text.

### *Regularities*

the texts are not vocalized and bear no diacritics: short vowels, germinations and assimilations are not written down

*prepositions* *f* and *b*, are attached to the following nominal group: “فهاد البلاد in this country”.

33 In the popular neighbourhood of Hay Mohammadi in Casablanca; meaning that this the only way he can spend his holiday.

34 In the old medina of Casablanca.

### *The spelling of /g/*

The *g* is written گ, as is normally the case in Morocco whether it is etymologically a qaf: كَالِيه (gal lih “he told him”), or a jim: يَكْسِين (galsin, yegles “sitting, he sits”) (Caubet 1993 1:12).

### *The future particle*

The future particle in *dārija* is غادي *gadi*.<sup>35</sup> It is often reduced to *ga*, leading to the same question as for the preverb *ka-* (see below); *ga-* can be spelled غ or گا. The most common spelling is the short form:

- Mouad uses the full form: غادي نتعرف عليه *gadi netzerref 3lih* “I will get to know him”; and the reduced one: غيسالي *ga-ysali* “it will end”.
- Harabish uses the reduced form: غاتعي *ga-tezya* “she will get tired”.
- Mustapha Slameur’s text has it written it with an *alif*: لمن غايشبه *le-men ga yšbeh* “who will he look like?”

### *Variation*

There is variation in some points of phonology or morphosyntax where there is hesitation, and often the same scriptor is inconsistent in his choices, but never to the point of incomprehension or ambiguity.

### *Assimilation*

- The article

When the first consonant of the noun is “solar”, it is assimilated to the “l” of the preceding article, and is perceived as a gemination. the article can be elided: واحد الحضة *wa7ed-l-le7da* > *wa7ed le7da*; but in the next paragraph, it is written: واحد اللحضة (Mouad “a badge”)

Harabish also writes both ways; elided: واحد مبتدأ, and present: بوأحد الشوفة

In Mustapha’s text, the article is nearly always written الشباب, الناس *en-nas*, *eš-šabab*, with the exception of دماغ (*d*)-*dmag*

ل

35 The active participle of an unused verb *\*gda* “to go”.

- The verb *gal* and its complement *li-h* are written as one word: *ݣاليه* (*galih* < *gal lih* Harabish); the final *l* of the verb and the *l*-preposition are assimilated, producing a gemination, thus written as one letter. This is extremely frequent on the web, in Latin script too: *galihom galik*

Mustapha's text has a similar case (see negation below): *ماكيو صليش* *ma-k(a)-y-wşel-li-h-ş* where the final "l" of verb *wşel* is assimilated to the preposition "l-".

### *Treatment of interdentalals*

Etymological interdentalals realized in *dārija* as stops, are written phonetically, especially in the demonstratives: *هـادو*, *هـاد شي*, *هـاد هـكدا*, *بـحال هـكدا*.

In Harabish's texts as well: *هـد*, *هـيت*, *التاني* "هد"

In the slam text, the demonstratives are written as stops, but for the rest, there are some interdentalals (that are realized as stops): *فـهاد البلاد*; in the following nominal group we have both: *هـادي الثقافة*

There are other interdentalals, like: *الثلاثـة* and Mustapha Slameur's motto, which is even printed on T-shirts and gives an idea of his position, is: "they lied to us": *كـذبوا علينا*

### *The relative lli*

The relative *lli/elli*, is written in slightly different manners.

- Harabish writes it regularly in a simple form: *لي*; but curiously he writes the conjunction *melli* (> *men elli*), in an etymological (and complicated) way: *من اللي*, when *ملي* would be a much simpler solution ...
- Mouad writes is like Harabish: *لي*.
- In Mustapha's texts, it is regularly written with two "l": *للي*.

Both spellings are common in *dārija*.

The variation probably reflects a difference in style or in level of speech, Mouad's first texts being close to oral speech,<sup>36</sup> whereas the others are more elaborate, even in their writing, with literary ambitions; but, they are all constructed texts. All three of them are used to posting fairly long texts on their

36 As we saw earlier he is presently working on more elaborate texts in view of publication.

Facebook profile, where they express a point of view or comment an event. Mouad and Mustapha have smartphones from which they can write directly. When asked to read one of his texts, Mouad read it directly from his phone. Harabish writes on a computer.

They all have a long habit of reading and writing in *dārija*, and so have their numerous followers. On Facebook, the page *L7agd* has 52,000 followers, *Le Slam de Mustapha*, 16,000 followers. On Youtube, in February 2016, Mustapha has up to 785,000 views for *Chri Chri*, 255,000 for *Taire-Bouche* and over 125,000 for other slams. *L7agd* has nearly 2,000,000 views (11 February 2016), for the clip *Waloo*, on which Harabish sings with him.<sup>37</sup> Tracks from the *Waloo* 2014 album have from 125,000 to 792,000 views on youtube.

### A New Literacy or Just a Step Forward?

Whether it be in Slam or in elaborate prose texts, *dārija* is being used and accepted more widely and openly than ever in today's Morocco. The conservative government tried to impose an Arabization of TV programmes, launching a debate on the new Media "Book of technical Specifications" (Fr. "Cahier des charges"), among which the disappearance of French and the massive extension of the use of Arabic from 2012.<sup>38</sup> The TV channels (mostly 2M) cunningly translated "Arabic" into the massive introduction of "Moroccan Arabic", and developed what they had already started doing from 2009: the dubbing of Turkish and South American series in *dārija* (see Miller 2012b and Ziamari & Baron-tini 2013). They also used *darija* in magazines and programmes and in political debates.

### Conclusion

As early as June 2014, the journalist Reda Zaireg (2014) wrote a paper in the weekly *Telquel*, called "Tendance: *dārija*, langue littéraire" (A new trend: *dārija*, a literary language. A prison Journal, poverty and exploitation chronicles, memories of a prostitute ... texts written in *dārija* and posted on social networks are becoming a real literary phenomenon):

37 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dT4yOKnT52I>. See the tracks from the album *Waloo* by Okacha Family, Mouad's band: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkaZdJwJxhXqHoRtPLsqdtA>.

38 Initially it imposed 80 % of Arabic (and Hassaniya!) and 20 % of Amazigh for Al Aoula.

For a few months, writing in *dārija* has had the wind in its sails. With the help of the social networks, it has bypassed the traditional publishers who are reluctant to welcome *dārija*, managing to reach its audience directly.

Slam is meant to be performed and heard, whereas blogs and posts are meant to be read on screens. Long texts have to present enough interest – whether through their content or their form (aesthetic, literary) – to foster a desire to read. This reading goes beyond the stage of basic communication and has to be dealt with as *a novel passage to literacy*.

If “reading is the motivated and fluent coordination of word recognition and comprehension,”<sup>39</sup> how does one cope with rapid word recognition when there is variation in the spelling of lexemes and grammatical morphemes for a language – *dārija* – that has undergone an informal pragmatic D.I.Y. language-planning with no institution to standardize it? How does one acquire *fluency* when there hasn’t been any school-type learning and when you had to teach yourself to read? In the Moroccan case, this can only be done through practice and experimentation. Gunvor Mejdell (personal communication) suggests the use of the sociological concept of ‘*conventionalisation*’, through collective behaviour and repeated usage; youth read and copy from each other, so that separate actions have an impact on the community.

Together with its new visibility in the civil society, intense practice has lead *dārija* to being written more and more naturally and profusely on Internet, resulting in the first strands of literacy. People are gaining security, fluidity and fluency in their handling of written *dārija*. For the kind of elaborate texts that I have examined here,<sup>40</sup> it would be interesting to confirm this hypothesis by the organisation of reading tests in order to study the speed of comprehension for completely unknown *dārija* long prose texts. Over the years, most connected Moroccans have reached a decisive stage where written expression and creation is at work and the exchanges have acquired a deeper dimension. The wave is moving fast with new authors trying out *dārija*; and among them, Ahlem B., who has been publishing short stories in French on her blog<sup>41</sup> and on Facebook since 2012. On 28 February 2016, she published the translation of the first story of character Sam Lgaouri in *dārija* written in Arabic script.

Another kind of elaborate text has appeared under the form of what the authors call “educative” videos that use *dārija* for extremely technical and legal

39 See <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/what-reading>.

40 Also see Caubet forthcoming 2017.

41 “Ahlem B. vous raconte de folles histoires” on <http://www.ahlemb.com>.

explications on societal problems. A site like *Aji Tfham* (An educative Site)<sup>42</sup> tackles a question – like the banning of VoIP communication:<sup>43</sup> their video is a scientific demonstration in *dārija*, with fast and precise diction; drawings, words or expressions in Arabic script in *dārija* (MSA or French when necessary for technical reasons), and long extracts of legal texts in MSA can come to illustrate. In an eight minutes' video, the issue is dealt with and made clear to every citizen: a performance ... in *dārija*!

But is there, or should there be, an ambition to move into the publishing world? Can literacy on keyboards and screens be exported to printed paper and books? These texts are only published on the internet for the time being. Some authors dream of a printed version, a book, which would give a different social status to their writings; but is the world of publishing ready to cross the (language) barrier? And anyway, Internet offers a much wider audience than could ever be given to a book in Morocco.

Is this kind of practice the gateway in the process of promoting a standard variety, even when the language has no recognition? It is felt as a necessary passage by the authors in their wish to express themselves and share their feelings on screens; they produce long writings in *dārija* without thinking about their status or their potential role, but as a natural but decisive step in the promotion of their language, *dārija*.

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42 "Try and understand, Educative internet site": <https://www.facebook.com/AjiTfham/?fref=ts>, Mustapha Swinga.

43 VoIP communication was blocked the Moroccan National Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ANRT) in February 2016. *Aji Tfham* video has over 250,000 views (accessed 18 Oct. 2016): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL3-8epu8USDASNYWS3VwS6RII\\_Ddg6Ar&v=Qt-VSgaebHg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL3-8epu8USDASNYWS3VwS6RII_Ddg6Ar&v=Qt-VSgaebHg). VoIP was finally restored in November 2016 on the occasion of Cop 22 in Marrakech.

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